

**Four-Color Creatures:
Japanese Monstrosity In American Comic Books, Manga, and
Popular Culture, 1938-1970**

By

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Brent A. Fujioka was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, on August 3, 1981. He graduated from the University of Hawaii at Manoa with his B.A., and received M.A.s in English from Washington State University and American Civilization from Brown University. While at Brown, he instructed two undergraduate seminars: “It’s the End of the World As We Know It: Zombie and Apocalypse Narratives In American Popular Culture” and “Four-Color Creatures: Race, Gender, and Monstrosity In American Comic Books and Popular Culture.” He also served as lead organizer for the colloquium series, “Raising the Undead: The Image of the Zombie in Transnational Popular Culture.”

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INTRODUCTION

At 2:46 p.m. on March 11, 2011, Japan was hit by a 9.03 magnitude earthquake, the fourth largest event in the world and the most powerful that had ever hit the country since records were first kept in 1900.¹ Centered off the northeastern coast of the island of Honshu, it triggered a massive tsunami, which sent waves inland as high as twenty-nine feet. Together, the two events killed more than fifteen thousand people and caused billions of dollars in damage and destruction. Today, the event is known by two designations: 3/11, or The Great Tohoku Earthquake. The disaster quickly escalated into a global nuclear crisis, as power outages and flooding caused reactors to meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Americans and others around the world saw these events play out in real time on live television, and many of them turned to the Internet and social media to learn more and express themselves.

Almost immediately, rumors circulated online that during a broadcast CNN International News anchor Rosemary Church compared the destruction caused by the earthquake to an attack by the Japanese movie monster, Godzilla. The online chatter alleged that she joked about the situation, giggling with a guest on the air. Understandably, this generated significant outrage, much of it directed toward the

¹ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. *Summary Report: March 11, 2011 Japan Earthquake and Tsunami*.

broadcaster herself, but in the end, media reports found that the story was false, the product of a “viral” rumor spread across the internet.² Still, “Godzilla” remained a trending term on Twitter for hours after the disaster.

Considerably more disturbing were the messages that ordinary Americans posted on the social networking site, Facebook. While many utilized the communicative potential of new media to convey their sympathies for the victims of the disaster, urging their friends to “Pray for Japan,” others invoked World War II and the attack on Pearl Harbor in their comments.³ In the casual, ungrammatical English that is characteristic of the Internet, one user wrote, “I’m not saying that I wish for a tsunami to strike a country because it’s terrible, but I wish Japan woulda got hit by tsunami on anniversary of Pearl Harbor.” Others were decidedly more cheerful in tone, posting, “Remember pearl harbor? Go tsunami go!” Another individual approached the events from a religious perspective, noting, “Apparently God is still upset about the events of Pearl Harbor.” Yet another wrote, “ya know Japan, this earthquake is just gods way of getting you back for that Pearl Harbor deal...’buy American.’”

These comments were not isolated to a specific segment of the population, but originated from individuals of all ages, races, genders, and classes. While these examples are certainly not representative of the multiplicity of viewpoints and statements that emerged after the Tohoku Earthquake, they do help to illustrate not only how the Japanese, for many Americans, constitute a foreign population that exists in fundamental opposition to the West—what Edward Said calls “The

² Coscarelli; Dumenco; Hall.

³ Asakawa; Grey; Yu.

Other”—but they also gesture toward issues that are at the heart of this dissertation, namely the association between Japanese identity, World War II, and monstrosity.

In part, these incidents generated two questions in my mind: First, how could Japan, a recognized ally of the United States, rapidly revert from a friend to an enemy within the minds of ordinary Americans, particularly in the aftermath of a natural disaster? Secondly, why is it that within American culture the Japanese are associated with a list of nouns, adjectives, and historical events that signify the antagonistic, the foreign, and the bizarre? If you ask an average American to name everything that comes to mind when they think of Japan, they are likely to provide you with a veritable laundry list of associations ranging from the weird to the outright monstrous. Such an activity almost certainly generates responses like: World War II, the atomic bombs, kamikaze pilots, Godzilla, samurai, ninja, geisha, sushi, bizarre sexual fetishes, animated pornography, crazy television shows, advanced technology, anime, giant robots, Hello Kitty, Pokémon, unconventional fashion, and foreign competition. The list goes on and on.

To address these questions, this project asserts that a discursive formation of monstrosity defines Japan and Japanese identity within the United States. The narrative frame underlying this specific understanding of Japan consists of a constellation of established historical and theoretical knowledge that is embedded into the foundation of American and European culture and society, which defines Asia and the region typically designated as “the East” as a land of monsters. In other words, I posit that the way we understand Japan today is grounded in an ancient template that has been built upon and modified for centuries, manifesting most

frequently and visibly within popular culture. Over time, these ideas have been reinforced, refined, and recrafted in a variety of ways, perhaps most obviously through racial representation, yet discourses about difference continue to emanate from this source.

It should be noted that this project is not concerned with biological or existential questions about the nature of monsters. That is tangential and beyond the scope of this study. Rather, this dissertation is concerned with how monstrosity functions as both a metaphor and a discourse, examining how it has been applied to certain individuals and segments of the population within American culture to vilify and establish them as less than human, often for the purpose of justifying violence or oppressive action. Whether monsters are real or fictive is irrelevant to the larger findings of this project, as we often find that belief drives action, regardless of truth or objective reality. In other words, just because something is not real does not mean that it has no power, influence, or real-life consequences.

To interrogate how this manifests within culture, I have chosen to examine the comic form, including American comic books and Japanese manga. There are a number of reasons for this. First, a key assumption of this project is that the comic book medium, particularly its earliest publications, reproduces existing narratives in new and easily accessible ways. Indeed, many stories deliberately work within the mythic and epic traditions, utilizing the recurring elements of these genres. As a result, many comic book narratives are essentially a reworking of historical and generic traditions, which are filtered and adapted for contemporary audiences. This

means that they are an ideal format for interrogating the long-held assumptions—especially influential ones—that have circulated throughout all forms of culture.

Further, the ephemeral nature of the medium—where comics were designed to have no lasting value beyond the immediate period following their publication—and the desire for accessibility, led to the production of materials containing basic narratives and representations, in stark contrast to what we find in modern comic books, where stories often contain layers of narrative complexity and embedded meaning. Many of the stories found in these early materials constitute the basest form of cultural transmission, devoid of obfuscation, implication, and subtlety. As a result, they give us a clear picture of how individuals from a diverse array of backgrounds understood important political issues and illustrate the dominant ideological assumptions that operated at the time. The meaning of these stories was not masked for the sake of complexity or sensitivity, but instead, bluntly presented, almost shockingly so. As a result, depictions of racism and sexism, for example, are highly visible because they are presented to the reader with radical simplicity.

Additionally, comic books function as a form of predominantly working class culture, and traditionally cater to the tastes of the masses. This is particularly true of American comic books in the past, where print runs frequently surpassed the hundred thousand and even one million mark, but also in Japan, where manga is still utilized as a form of mass entertainment by working professionals. As Fredrik Schodt notes, the medium largely functions as a portable television for an urbanized society and an “on-the-go” population.⁴ Indeed, the idea that comics are for children

⁴ Schodt, *Manga, Manga!* 25-26.

is a stereotype that emerged from specific historical conditions in the United States, and most comics were, and still are, aimed at much broader demographics. As a result, their success and positive reception can be taken as a respectable barometer of the opinion of a given population or public at a specific historical moment.

The time frame for this project spans from 1938 to 1970. Throughout this period, I focus on a number of key moments, events, and cultural products that have informed the image of Japan within the United States. I have specifically adopted this periodization for two primary reasons: First, it incorporates the rise of American comic books as a mass medium, beginning with the introduction of Superman in June of 1938. By examining the earliest years of the industry, we gain insight into the specific influences and antecedents that contributed to the kinds of stories that appear within the medium. Additionally, it enables us to see the various thematic transitions between the Great Depression, World War II, and Postwar eras that most directly affect the representation of the Japanese in comic books. Secondly, in terms of an endpoint, I have chosen 1970 because it is during the previous decade, specifically 1963 with the debut of the *Tetsuwan Atomu* anime, that manga production ceases to be solely about comics, and the industry adopts a media-mix economy, of which manga was only a single part. As a result, extending the discussion into the present would require a much broader focus that goes beyond the scope of manga itself, potentially transforming the project into a multimedia analysis. I have therefore chosen an endpoint that keeps this dissertation manageable while maintaining the focus on comics. That is also the reason why this project does not consider the influence of Japanese *kawaii* or “cute” culture, which

emerges toward the end of this period, as brands like Sanrio were focused primarily around merchandising rather than the production of manga.

Further, this study adopts a transnational perspective, examining not only American cultural production, but also how these publications affected the development and form of manga in Japan, showing how the Japanese have functioned as active agents by engaging with this discourse of monstrosity. By interrogating this process of cultural exchange over a given period of time, I demonstrate how the relationship between the United States and Japan and the cultural exchange between the two nations, has affected the production of narratives within comic books and manga. In essence, I argue that there is a transpacific network of multidirectional influences that has significantly shaped the output of these two mediums. While scholars have gestured toward this connection in the past, this is the first study that explicitly interrogates how this historically established constellation of influences and exchanges has directly shaped these industries and their cultural products.

Conceptually, this project is divided into two separate yet complimentary halves. The first provides background on the subject of monstrosity and its relationship to Japanese identity and the Asian body, examining the ancient and modern origins of this discourse. Further, it illustrates specifically how it applies throughout recent history, focusing on World War II, which serves as an inception point for the argument. The second half considers the operation of this discourse in relation to Japanese cultural agency. It examines how Japanese writers, artists, and filmmakers have not only utilized Western ideas of monstrosity but also *yokai*, to

interrogate social and cultural anxieties in the latter half of the twentieth-century. It shows how they have responded to this image cultivated within American culture, and analyzes how, in recent years, Japanese print and animated media have become symbolic of Japan itself, inadvertently reinforcing existing narratives about Japanese monstrosity.

This dissertation functions as a historically informed work of cultural studies interrogated through the use of an interdisciplinary methodology. It utilizes a combination of traditional archival sources, such as historical records, statistics, interviews, documents, and printed publications, while incorporating and analyzing these materials through the use of various theoretical paradigms in order to develop a reading and interpretation of the monstrous representations found in comic books and manga. This study also relies heavily on fan-based publications, including periodicals like Roy Thomas' *Alter-Ego*. Despite recent scholarship on comics in the academy, these materials continue to be the best source for inside information about the industry, interviews with creators, and previously undocumented historical knowledge. Much of the underlying schema of Comic Studies is predicated on the scholarship of fans, including the periodization of American comic book history itself.⁵

I would also like to comment on how this dissertation contributes to the field of Comic Studies. One of the larger disciplinary goals of this project is to reposition and reassert the centrality of the mainstream superhero comics to the field. While

⁵ Many of the most reliable databases on comic books today, including the *Who's Who of American Comic Books* and the *Grand Comic Book Database*, were started by academics, like the late Jerry Bails, who pursued their interest in comics as a hobby outside their scholarly work in the humanities and physical sciences.

there has been something of a renewed focus on these titles, due in no small part to the success of Hollywood films, for most of its history, Comic Studies has primarily focused on titles designed for “mature readers” and standalone graphic novels, particularly those produced since the 1980s, which introduced postmodern elements into the medium.⁶ Further, while there have been a number of worthwhile studies and canonical histories produced for popular audiences, like Jim Steranko’s *History of Comics*, Robert Harvey’s *Art of the Comic Book*, Bradford Wright’s *Comic Book Nation*, Jean-Paul Gabilliet’s *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*, and Twomorrows Publishing’s multivolume series *The American Comic Book Chronicles*, much of that work has been neglected in the mainstream of Comic Studies, because the field privileges theoretical and literary interpretations of works that have been arbitrarily deemed worthy of critical attention over the material that continues to dominate the industry.

As previously noted, comic books have traditionally carried the stigma of being children’s literature. As a result, Comic Studies has long been marginalized in academic circles with few exceptions. Thus, within the field—and by extension academia in general—the subject has been justified by interrogating select material deemed by cultural arbiters as more “prestigious” or “literary” than others. In many cases, the focus of these studies is highly contemporaneous, situated in the moment when comics “grew up” and began incorporating mature themes and a complex structure into their narratives. Many scholarly studies focus on the output of the prolific writers who spearheaded this change in the medium, like Marc Singer’s

⁶ Di Liddo 20-21, 62; Reynolds 117.

Grant Morrison: Combining the Worlds of Contemporary Comics and Annalisa Di Liddo's *Alan Moore: Comics As Performance, Fiction As Scalpel*. Others center around specific themes or aspects of these works, particularly race, gender, and sexuality in the modern autobiographical graphic novel, including Hillary Chute's *Graphic Women: Life, Narrative, and Contemporary Comics* and Joseph Witek's *Comic Books As History: The Narrative Art of Jack Johnson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar*. As a result, comic scholarship has been produced along traditional academic lines—privileging canonical works while ignoring others. While there is nothing wrong with examining important, groundbreaking texts that had a transformative impact on production within the industry, many of these studies ignore the bulk of the medium's output, and the scholarship produced does not adequately reflect the majority of the material consumed by readers.

There are also a number of logistical reasons for eschewing the mainstream. First, writing about superhero comic books requires an immense amount of knowledge about both the material one is analyzing and the history of the medium. In order to do the subject justice, one must understand nearly eighty years worth of what Richard Reynolds dubs “serial continuity,” the glue that binds these interconnected stories and their respective fictive universes together.⁷ Additionally, the sheer breadth of this material can result in numerous unintended errors and omissions within scholarship, provoking the ire of the fan community, which is familiar with every facet of these stories. Lastly, the vast majority of comic books are rare, out-of-print, and difficult to obtain. Despite the recent surge of interest in the

⁷ Reynolds 38.

subject, there are still relatively few publicly accessible archives of comic books within the United States and literally no comprehensive collections that are outside private hands. As a result, even if one is inclined to put forth the effort to read thousands of comic books, it remains very difficult to locate and access pre-1970s content without enduring significant financial burden.

These factors have created a significant gap within the existing scholarship that this project attempts to address. Due to this narrow focus on graphic novels and critically acclaimed works, many of the best analyses of comics have not appeared in peer-reviewed journals, but in fanzines and publications like *The Comics Journal*. Returning the focus to mainstream superhero comics is particularly important for those who engage in historically informed readings of this material, as such work relies heavily on information provided by creators who worked in the medium during the Golden and Silver Ages of American comic books. Works like Charles Hatfield's *Hand of Fire: The Comics Art of Jack Kirby*, Thomas Andrae's *Carl Barks and the Disney Comic Book: Unmasking the Myth of Modernity*, and Jeffrey Brown's *Black Superheroes, Milestone Comics, and Their Fans*, illustrate how scholarship of the mainstream can cater to both academic and popular audiences. Further, while gritty postmodern comic book series, like Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon's *Watchmen* or Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* may be favorite subjects of today's scholars, these books build and capitalize on a foundation of narratives and characterization that are nearly a century old. Repositioning the centrality of older texts to the medium illuminates neglected materials and produces new insights on the processes of adaptation, reinscription, and creative appropriation that we are seeing

in our contemporary culture. This is particularly important now, when Hollywood has had great success in placing longstanding characters and stories into the center of multimillion-dollar global entertainment franchises.

Again, each chapter of this dissertation focuses on a particular cultural moment or thematic that has shaped the American view of Japan, and much of it is presented in chronological order for the sake of readability. The project traces the understanding and evolution of monstrosity in Western society, illustrating how ancient concepts have shaped the construction of Asia, and by extension Japanese and Japanese American identity, throughout the modern era. Here, we are concerned with the prevalence of these associations in comics books and manga, and illustrate the centrality of the metaphor of the monster in our understanding of race, the vilification of difference, and the construction of the other within American society.

Chapter one establishes the theoretical and historical foundation for this study. Utilizing perspectives from literary theory and media studies, it articulates an approach to understanding the concept of monstrosity, addressing not only its metaphorical use within culture, but also exploring the meanings attached to it in the process of representation. It frames monstrosity as a central element in the genres that dominate the comic book medium, demonstrating how many of the narratives within these forms of popular fiction rely on difference. Lastly, it examines ancient connections in history and literature that establish the East as a land of marvelous creatures and monstrous races. It charts the development of this idea over time, and analyzes how it has circulated and evolved, shaped by religious

influences throughout the medieval era and later by science and medicalization in modernity.

Chapter two explores the construction of the Asian body in American culture, illustrating how it functions as a vessel for core ideas about monstrosity. It focuses on the elements of contradiction and liminality in Asian identity within the legal, political, and cultural spheres of the United States. Engaging in a historical examination of the American fascination with Asian monstrosity, it highlights the career of Chang and Eng Bunker, the famous Siamese Twins, and charts how biological diversity was interpreted as medical monstrosity in the nineteenth century, largely due to the influence of pseudo sciences like teratology, resulting in the promotion of a racialized logic of inferiority and bodily difference that is at the core of popular entertainment institutions like the freak show. Further, it discusses how these ideas, coupled with ancient notions about monsters and foreign peoples, fed into an understanding of Asian immigration and the presence of foreign bodies in America as being representative of the Yellow Peril. Finally, it discusses Japanese immigration to the United States, contextualizing the discussion of Asian monstrosity in the subsequent sections.

Chapter three interrogates representations of the Japanese in American comic books produced throughout the 1930s and 1940s, particularly during World War II. Here, we discuss the origins of the American comic book industry, detailing specifically how they functioned as one of the leading forms of visual culture throughout the period. We focus on the ubiquity of the Asian villain in Golden Age comic books (1938-1955), patterned primarily after the archetype of Fu Manchu,

and how, with the onset of World War II, the panethnic understanding of Asian populations in the United States undergoes a transformation, and villains shift from being Chinese to Japanese, aligning specifically with the goals of American foreign policy. We examine how the Japanese were vilified and dehumanized in the majority of comics from this period—introduced to readers as either animalistic, uncivilized, savages who had no respect for human life, or literal monsters, sporting claws and fangs, who threatened the sovereignty of the United States—regularly doing battle with heroes, like Superman, Captain America, and Wonder Woman. We also interrogate the role that the state and federal government played in influencing the content of these publications, and how the individuals producing these materials drew from their personal ethnic and political backgrounds to not only create some of the most iconic superheroes in American culture, but also some of the most spectacular wartime propaganda of the twentieth century.

Chapter four focuses on the postwar era and the early 1950s, analyzing the differing use of monstrosity in the visual culture of the United States and Japan. Here, we find that the popularization of crime and horror comics in America, following the decline of superheroes, results in the demonization of the medium, as cultural critics, specialists, and politicians attack comic books as a leading cause of juvenile delinquency. We examine the divergence of business interests and those of the state, and show how shifting tastes following the war resulted in the Senate Subcommittee Hearings headed by Estes Kefauver, and the eventual adoption of self-censorship by the industry through the Comics Code Authority, which labeled traditional monsters as agents of disorder, effectively banning them from the

medium for nearly two decades. Conversely, we explore an entirely different dynamic on the other side of the Pacific, where Japanese cultural producers, particularly filmmakers like Honda Ishiro, utilized the figure of the monster to interrogate the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in the film, *Gojira*. It is there that monstrosity, as a contemporary extension of folk belief, is deployed through the genre of science fiction as a vehicle for social and cultural critique, simultaneously leveling harsh criticism against the American government for its continued atomic testing in the Pacific, while allowing domestic audiences to cope with national trauma, resulting in the development of what Susan Napier dubs, the Japanese “apocalyptic imaginary.”⁸ Further, we explore the long-lasting association between Godzilla and Japan itself in the American consciousness, illustrating how processes of adaptation and localization, combined with historical memory, effectively transformed the movie monster into a signifier of Japanese identity.

Chapter five takes us into the late 1950s and 1960s at the dawn of the Silver Age of American comic books (1956-1970) and the emergence of manga as a mass medium in Japan. Here, we explore the monstrous origins of the contemporary superhero, a figure rooted in the genres of science fiction and giant monster movies, particularly at Marvel Comics, which resulted in the development of characters as relatable outsiders whose mere existence serves as a reminder about the perils of uncontrolled technological development, imperialism, and the tenuous border that separates the self from the other. Many of the most popular and iconic superheroes

⁸ Napier, *Anime: From Akira to Howl's Moving Castle* 251-253.

today, like Spider-Man, the Hulk, Iron Man, and the X-Men, evolved directly out of Marvel's "giant monster" line, which borrowed heavily from films like *Gojira* and *The Blob* in their constitution, laying the groundwork for stories that inherently challenged dominant ideas about race, gender, and American foreign policy throughout the decade.

Likewise, we find that in Japanese manga, while superheroes exist in different forms, like posthuman cyborgs and supernatural beings, for example, they effectively serve the same function as their Western counterparts, namely to interrogate various cultural anxieties through the use of monstrosity. Here, we focus on Tezuka Osamu's Tetsuwan Atomu, popularly known as Astro Boy in the United States, and Mizuki Shigeru's Kitaro, two of the most popular characters in early Japanese manga, and utilize them as vehicles to engage in a comparative analysis of transnational popular culture. Finally, we turn to a discussion of anime and the media-mix economy, exploring how the growth and development of the manga industry has helped to popularize these properties in the United States, but also how they have effectively facilitated in the labeling of these cultural products as exotic, foreign and fundamentally different from the visual media produced in the West, despite the constellation of influences and exchanges that exist between them.

Finally, I would like to end this introduction with a note on the presentation of names within this text. When referring to individuals of Japanese ancestry, this dissertation follows the established Japanese custom of listing them by surname first, then personal names. This pertains to the various writers, artists, and scholars whose work is cited within the study. Exceptions have been made for the formal

titles of court cases and other items that originate in English. All other names are presented in the standard Western order of given name, followed by surname.

CHAPTER ONE: MONSTERS AND MONSTROSITY IN THEORY, LITERATURE, AND HISTORY

“I believe legends and myths are largely made of truth” ~ J.R.R. Tolkien

“Ancient feudal Japan, a land shrouded in mystery, forbidden to foreigners. A group of magical islands home to witches and demons.” ~ Narrator, *47 Ronin* (2013)

I. Introduction

“Why monsters?”

That is a question that has come up time and time again in conversations with friends, family, and colleagues. I admit that it is an unusual subject, one that inspires an odd combination of skepticism and curiosity in both academics and those outside the university. While I am interested in interrogating the function of monstrosity within popular narratives and culture in order to discern a deeper social meaning behind these texts, there is more to it than that. My interest in the subject stems from a desire to understand and trace the complex relationship between the ancient and modern, specifically how monstrosity, manifesting through other forms, like racial difference, affects the way that we view the world and the production of representations that we routinely encounter within American popular culture. Here, my goal is to gesture toward a new way of understanding familiar

issues, utilizing the insights gained by analyzing the discursive formation of monstrosity.

Much of this research is situated in a constellation of niche specializations within the humanities, which have only recently attracted significant scholarly attention. Most people are not aware that fields like Monster Studies and Comic Studies exist, let alone have any familiarity with the core concepts and approaches that are utilized in such scholarly endeavors. This is further complicated by the interdisciplinary nature of the research, which employs theoretical paradigms from multiple disciplines, requiring me to justify the importance of this subject and explain the basic methodology that I employ throughout the course of this research.

This chapter, then, has three objectives. First, it presents the theoretical framework for this study by forwarding a working theory of monstrosity. Building off the work of scholars in a variety of fields, it hybridizes and integrates psychoanalytic, poststructural, and filmic approaches to engage the subject and better understand the function that it serves within American society and culture. It treats monstrosity as a discursive formation, much in the Foucauldian sense, as a body of information, knowledge, and practices that informs and regulates subject formation.

Second, it critiques the archetypal structure of what Joseph Campbell calls the Heroic Monomyth, illustrating not only its essential association with monsters, whose antagonistic function is necessary within the narrative structure, but also how stories in this genre mark the different, abnormal, and deviant as figures that must be subdued or obstacles to be overcome. The ubiquity of this formula, which is

particularly prominent in the adventure or quest narrative, links such tales directly to the comic book medium. Further, it illustrates how these materials are part of the broader literary tradition, and how they not only reproduce but also transform familiar tales, deploying them in newer, easily accessible forms.

Finally, it briefly surveys the historical association between monsters and the imaginative construct of the Orient in the Western consciousness.⁹ Here, my intent is to show that contemporary representations of Asia as foreign, exotic, dangerous, static, and fundamentally different did not simply emerge spontaneously at some random point in history, but instead are central to the way that the West has always understood the East. It positions Asia in the middle of this discourse and suggests that, above all else, monstrosity is at the core of these longstanding associations. Here, I summarize the attitudes and beliefs that have been transmitted throughout the centuries, linking them with the idea that the East is a land of riches guarded by monsters. By charting the intellectual rationale for this notion and surveying the texts in which it is found, this section presents the foundation for the representations of the Japanese found within the comic book medium.

II. A Working Theory of Monstrosity

⁹ I recognize that this section is far from exhaustive in its treatment of this subject. However, I felt that it was incumbent on me to provide a brief historical overview of this characterization of Asia as a land of monsters, particularly as it relates to Ancient Greece and the Middle East, because it has rarely been considered in scholarly works. Within Asian American Studies, the most extensive coverage of this topic can be found in the opening chapter of Gary Okihiro's *Margins and Mainstreams*. Other than that singular work, the vast majority of writing on this subject is situated in the fields of Medieval Literature and Art, Paleontology, Religious Studies, and the Classics.

The practice of theorizing monstrosity dates back to ancient times. Here, I utilize it as an analytic with which to critique representations within contemporary American visual culture. My approach is both literary and historical in nature, for it considers the social and cultural conditions in which monstrosity has been utilized and deployed, but also recognizes the deeper theoretical meanings and interpretations surrounding the subject. Further, I consider traditional understandings of monsters alongside contemporary scholarship to highlight the evolution of their construction, from creatures of flesh and blood to modern metaphor, exploring why these changes occur and how they have affected our collective understanding of monstrosity.

Before we begin, it is important to explain the relationship between monsters and the broader, more amorphous concept of monstrosity. As I am using it here, the latter term refers to a wide-ranging social discourse, defined in part by characteristics, traits, or visual signifiers that represent deviance, abnormality, excess, and difference. Further, the monstrous is a socially constructed idea, defined in comparison or opposition to a normative standard, and as a result, is subject to change and variation according to shifting norms at any given place or time. By its very definition, monstrosity is very rarely stable, for its legibility is wholly dependent on an established understanding of normality.

As such, we can view monsters as monstrosity embodied and given life. These are figures that stand in for and represent the meanings attached to this complex and evolving discourse. They can either exist as entities of “real” flesh and blood, or in the metaphorical sense as imaginary beings, whose existence is

unsubstantiated, but whose influence has real and lasting effects in the world. When it comes to monsters, belief is often more potent than reality, for, depending on existing social definitions, they can manifest in almost any form and be used to justify almost any action, no matter how abhorrent. Monstrosity is frequently made legible through either visual manifestations of bodily difference, often in the form of extreme excess or lack, or as behavioral characteristics that signify deviance.

The existence of monsters has primarily been understood in two ways: first through religion, then more recently, through science. Beginning with the spread of Christianity and throughout much of the Middle Ages, monsters were interpreted through a religious paradigm. It is important to note that early on, they were not always seen as being inherently evil, but rather functioned as curiosities and marvels of nature. In his fifth century text, *City of God*, Saint Augustine wrote that monsters were “sons of Noah,” and like men, were creations of a higher power, thus representative of a divine will.¹⁰ In short, they were agents who embodied the diversity and splendor of nature. His argument effectively associated the monstrous with the miraculous, housing them both under the umbrella of the Christian tradition.¹¹ In this worldview, monsters were a constituent part of God’s plan, and their presence was to be celebrated, not demonized.¹² Ironically, this attitude was partly reflected centuries later in the visage of Saint Christopher, a figure of

¹⁰ Reed Kline 27; Bovey 10; Austin, 47.

¹¹ Friedman, *Monstrous Races* 120.

¹² Gilmore 55.

fascination who was often depicted as a cynocephali, and an emblem of the possible salvation of the “monstrous races” of the East.¹³

Later Christians, however, came to associate monstrosity as a sign of God’s displeasure, which, in their minds, could only be linked to the enemy of the divine, Satan and the horde of demons who served him.¹⁴ Indeed, throughout the Middle Ages, the term “monster” signified that which was unnatural or effectively against nature.¹⁵ It was believed that by threatening human beings, monsters stood in opposition to the stability of the cosmic order and God himself.¹⁶ The reasons for this radical change in interpretation are wide-ranging and complex, and still contentiously debated by scholars of religion, history, and literature.¹⁷ However, we can say with relative certainty that this perspective largely came about with the prominence of Satan in the Christian worldview and his rise in stature from fallen angel and former servant of the Lord, to the enemy and almost-equal of God, effectively functioning as the source of all evil in the world.

This view of monstrosity as inherently demonic circulated throughout the continent and played an important role later during the fifteenth century. As European imperialists encountered Native Americans in the “strange” and “foreign” New World, they interpreted much of what they encountered through their established religious worldview. They saw the exotic plants and animals in the Americas as symbols of a new Eden, a paradise that had been infiltrated by evil

¹³ Friedman, *Monstrous Races* 69.

¹⁴ Reed Kline 28

¹⁵ Friedman, *Monstrous Races* 110.

¹⁶ Beal 30.

¹⁷ For a historical account about monstrosity’s association with Satan, see Pagels, Elaine. *The Origin of Satan*. New York: Random House, 1995.

humanoid agents of the devil who were functionally perceived as “beasts” and “demons,” due to their uncivilized social and cultural practices.¹⁸ This included their appearance, the stark nakedness of which fascinated Europeans, their religious practices, including cannibalism, which were interpreted as devil worship, and their expressively open sexuality, which was seen as unnatural and sinful.¹⁹ All of these factors reinforced the sense of superiority with which imperialists held themselves over the inferior, monstrous natures of the Native Americans.²⁰ Further, as Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra notes, the process of European colonization was seen as the antidote to this demonic infestation, and a way to do battle against the devil and his minions.²¹

These religious ideas also influenced early Renaissance natural philosophers, like Ambroise Pare, who approached the phenomenon of monstrosity from a more rational perspective. In his influential work *On Monsters and Marvels*, written in the sixteenth century, he interrogates the relationship between odd, exotic creatures and “monstrous births,” children born with deformities or unnatural physical characteristics. In this text, Pare deploys a classificatory system to identify various forms of monstrosity, describing their symptoms and explaining their causes. For him, monsters are defined as things “outside” nature, which exist in the forms of severe excess and lack, while marvels, viewed in a religious context, go “against” nature entirely.²² In defining and classifying monstrosity, Pare reaffirms the classic

¹⁸ Abulafia 4-9.

¹⁹ Abulafia 54; Clendinnen 4, 18; Cañizares-Esguerra 88; Blevins 100.

²⁰ Greenblatt 9.

²¹ Cañizares-Esguerra 12-14.

²² Pare 3.

idea that deviance from a normative standard is unnatural, or even dangerous. Furthering this notion, he claims that abnormalities in women's bodies, resulting from extreme abundance or absence, was bound to produce monstrous children, and that their wombs could birth frogs, toads, snakes, lizards, and harpies.²³ While this is certainly emblematic of the way that the female body has traditionally been associated with monstrosity, it also illustrates how the idea of difference, as deployed in his work, appropriates religious understandings, adapting them for a scientific worldview.

The rise of the Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries resulted in the wholesale rejection of spiritual explanations for monsters, labeling them as mere superstition. It marked the transformation of monstrosity into abnormality and the beginning of a scientific order that classified oddities by way of a unitary and rational system.²⁴ No longer were monsters creatures of mystery and miraculous origin. Rather, they were viewed as natural curiosities that could be interpreted in terms of abnormality or mutation and through a biological understanding of species. As a result, monstrosity, like other physical and behavioral forms of difference, became medicalized, set apart from a normative standard, and transformed into something through which power could be applied to the body, for the purpose of observation, study, and correction.²⁵ Under science, the monster was transformed into a symbol for natural error, deviance, hybridity, and

²³ Ibid. 56.

²⁴ Asma 149.

²⁵ Foucault 52.

irregular excess or lack.²⁶ Formerly rare and mysterious, monsters were now everyday beings, made ubiquitous through the diagnosis of abnormality.²⁷ Michel Foucault describes this discursive transformation, noting that during the eighteenth century, “The monster is the fundamental figure around which bodies of power and domains of knowledge are disturbed and reorganized.”²⁸ From that point on, he notes that this figure existed in the “more modest, discreet, and less scientifically supercharged” archetypes of the criminal and the masturbator, or sexual deviant, who facilitated clinical appeals for the correction of their “dangerous” abnormalities.²⁹

While monstrosity became metaphorical in this sense, described as an observable medical condition or something that could be applied to any undesirable social activity, there continued to be great interest in exploring and cataloguing its manifestations in the form of physical deformity. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the freak show, for example, was utilized as a scientific method of observing bodily difference.³⁰ Exhibitions were often split into two categories: anthropological and abnormal, with the former showcasing examples of “undiscovered” humans, and the latter focusing on individuals with physical abnormalities.³¹ Here, as with monsters, the medical gaze was deployed for the purpose of knowledge and control.³² Interestingly, even after the process of

²⁶ R. Thompson 3.

²⁷ Foucault 163.

²⁸ Ibid. 62.

²⁹ Ibid. 60-75.

³⁰ Bogdan 27.

³¹ Ibid. 6-8.

³² Craton 26.

medicalization had begun, this institution retained characteristics associated with monstrosity, as even the term “freak” connotes the absence of a known categorization, harkening back to the former idea of monsters as mysterious and unknowable creatures.³³ Still, by and large, the freak show was a cultural vehicle designed to highlight genetic variation and generate curiosity and entertainment value through the display of bodily difference.

Having briefly surveyed the historical transition of monstrosity from religious to scientific paradigms, I would also like to explore the theoretical dimension of the subject, as it is understood through contemporary cultural, literary, and film studies. In theorizing the monster, this section provides insights into how and why monstrosity is deployed, helping to frame the representational discussion in the following chapters. Further, it highlights the body of cultural meanings associated with monsters in order to show that this approach, currently thought to be a niche specialty, has much to contribute to other, broader fields of scholarship.

Many contemporary studies on monstrosity utilize social scientific and literary approaches, analyzing the topic through the field of psychoanalysis. One popular way of theorizing monstrosity is by considering it in the context of what Sigmund Freud dubs “the uncanny.” He describes the sensation as one of affective terror, which creates a sense of discomfort in the subject, often manifesting in the form of nausea and panic. Freud claims that this sense of horror is a manifestation of repressed fears, stemming from childhood, and is represented by something familiar that had been transformed into a strange variant of itself that is both

³³ R. Adams 10.

recognizable and unknown at the same time.³⁴ It is precisely as a result of this psychological contradiction that the uncanny inspires a sense of fear or anxiety.³⁵ Thus, embodied in the form of the monster, is a set of conflicting traits, those that remind us of ourselves, but also others that mark it as fundamentally different, and this generates the horror we experience in these cultural encounters.

Likewise, Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection further expands our understanding of the affect produced by the visualization of the monstrous body. For her, the abject generates a sense of fear and fascination in the subject precisely because, like the uncanny, it combines antithetical elements in a single object, existing in a liminal space that is situated outside the symbolic order. Most importantly, it terrifies due to this lack of precise definition, and threatens to violate boundaries, positions, and established rules or conventions.³⁶ The process of abjection is one of border crossing and the destruction of distinctions, in which this fundamental breakdown of symbolic systems simultaneously generates an affect of contradictory extremes, like repulsion and desire. To illustrate how this works, Kristeva cites the example of a corpse, an object that represents the transition from life to death, and notes that

The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance [...] No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border [...] the corpse, seen without God and outside of

³⁴ Freud 141.

³⁵ Ibid. 152.

³⁶ Kristeva 4.

science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.³⁷

Here, we see how the abject is defined by its ambiguity.³⁸ It blends and obscures categories rather than separates, and in doing so manifests as a threatening entity that must be purged for the preservation of the status quo.

In this way, it exemplifies some of the characteristics that Mary Douglas has linked to uncleanness, impurity, and disorder. Like with abjection, she notes that “Danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others.”³⁹ In this sense, the abject is a pollutant, which threatens to not only spread its condition to those around them, but also engage in the destruction of society at large. Consider that the greatest fear surrounding the monster, in addition to the loss of one’s own life, is the idea that by encountering this figure, we engage in a process of becoming, that through exposure and interaction—with a vampire, zombie, or other creature—we will somehow be infected and forever changed. Even in resisting and fighting them, there will be no purification through victory, for as Friedrich Nietzsche famously wrote, “Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look long into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you.”⁴⁰

Thus, the monster functions as abject. Its body, like ours but different,

³⁷ Ibid. 3-4.

³⁸ Ibid. 9.

³⁹ Douglas 119.

⁴⁰ Nietzsche 89.

horrifies and thrills us. It is simultaneously like us, but not like us. In this state, it crosses the border between self and other, between human and animal, between familiar and alien, generating a complex and conflicted affective emotion. More than anything else, it is elusive and ambiguous, which is precisely why we find it so fascinating. It straddles the boundary between distinct categories, and threatens to destroy the wall that separates the acceptable from the forbidden by forcing us to reconsider the naturalized and established categories that we use to understand the world. As a result, by exploring monstrosity, we see how these figures allow for the deconstruction and re-examination of the basic categories, boundaries, and assumptions around which society is constructed. As David Gilmore notes,

Being thus inexplicable, monsters are not only physically but cognitively threatening: they undermine basic understandings. By smashing distinction, monsters offer a threat to the culture's very integrity as an intellectual whole, or more precisely to the assumption that such distinctions can be drawn in the first place. In other words, monsters expose the radical permeability and artificiality of all our classificatory boundaries, highlighting the arbitrariness and fragility of culture.⁴¹

In this sense, monsters are inherently transgressive. Their mere existence challenges established ways of understanding the world.⁴² Furthermore, they are frequently understood through an established dynamic of exteriority and interiority, which marks the divide between the normal and the abnormal.⁴³ But they also do more than that. As Elaine Graham notes, "Monsters have a double function, therefore, simultaneously marking the boundaries between the normal and the pathological but also exposing the fragility of the very taken-for-grantedness of such

⁴¹ Gilmore 19.

⁴² Cohen 16.

⁴³ Beal 4.

categories.”⁴⁴ The monster trespasses over borders and overflows categories. It does not fit within easily containable labels, and as a result, is impossible to classify, categorize, and control. As James Twitchell explains, “By their very definition, monsters are just beyond the pale of the normal [...] Because they are on the seam where our rational world meets the next, they are never totally nonhuman. Instead, they usually combine some major human attribute with some truly bizarre element.”⁴⁵

Perhaps most importantly, the monster has the power to deconstruct oppositional binaries in academic discourse. While there is a tendency to define this figure as being fundamentally other, one whose identity is established purely in opposition to a normative standard, by considering monstrosity as a product of ambiguity and contradiction, combining elements of both the self and other, we end up with a complex constellation of meanings that continually threatens to undermine established ways of categorizing and understanding the world. While it has been suggested that the Self is defined by its relationship to the Other, this approach challenges that notion, and gestures toward alternate modes of identity formation that refute theoretical binaries.⁴⁶ In many respects, monsters embody Homi Bhabha’s notion of hybridity, for they occupy a third space, between self and

⁴⁴ Graham 39.

⁴⁵ Twitchell 24.

⁴⁶ For example, in *Orientalism* Said suggests that the West defines itself in relation to the East, however, if we incorporate the approach suggested by the monster, it is more accurate to suggest that the West views the East as something foreign, yet familiar, and that it is within that contradictory impulse that the desire to separate emerges.

other, that allows for the articulation of subaltern agency in a way that provokes a self-reflective impulse through the process of engagement.⁴⁷

Further, by employing this insight through a historically informed perspective, we can analyze culture in a way that highlights new dimensions in the study of racial representation. While race is a relatively recent invention that developed alongside European imperialism, it owes much of its construction to ancient ways of understanding the world, particularly the interpretation of foreign peoples as “monstrous races.”⁴⁸ We will discuss much of this history in the following section, but it is worth noting here that monstrosity has played a crucial role in our social understanding of the other. Michael Omi and Howard Winant have shown how race is largely a political phenomenon that is intimately linked to both the process of cultural representation and social institutions.⁴⁹ However, by interrogating the former through this analytic, we see how monstrosity is an antecedent of race, firmly grounding the analysis of contemporary racial representations in a much longer historical continuity.

This approach also allows us to consider larger issues in American culture and society. As noted, monsters have frequently been interpreted as metaphors that represent a wide array of fears and anxieties.⁵⁰ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen explains the value of utilizing monstrosity as an analytic, noting that, “The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read [...] Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself: it is

⁴⁷ Bhabha 277.

⁴⁸ Alexander 23.

⁴⁹ Omi and Winant 56.

⁵⁰ Kearney 117.

always a displacement.”⁵¹ The appeal of this interpretive angle is due in part to the multiplicity of meanings that are attached to the monstrous body. As Judith Halberstam puts it, monsters function as “meaning machines,” a kind of narrative technology that allows the reader to project and condense any set of traits onto a single figure.⁵² The monster is never simply a monster. It always embodies and stands in for the assumptions and contradictions present within much larger social discourses.

Even in an age of rapid technological change, we remain fascinated by monsters. Within American culture, they are the focal point for what Cynthia Freeland calls the “cognitive pleasures of horror.”⁵³ She notes that rather than sympathize with the human protagonists in popular filmic and literary narratives, audiences tend to focus their interest on villains, antagonists, and monstrous creatures. As consumers, we gain pleasure by engaging the abject other in locations of safety, like the theater, where we see images of monsters but are fully aware that we will never encounter them face-to-face in real life. As Barbara Creed observes, it is through the horror film that the audience exercises a desire to witness the abject in its perverse glory, viewing violent and horrific images, knowing full well that once their curiosity has been satisfied, they will be able to “eject” the monster, purge it from their system, and leave the theater unscathed.⁵⁴ While this functions as a “safety valve” providing for the productive release of collective anxieties, it also speaks to the cultural value of horror as a representation of the fantastic, and the

⁵¹ Cohen, *Monster Theory* 4

⁵² Halberstam 21-22.

⁵³ Freeland 84.

⁵⁴ Creed 10.

appeal of escapism, visual spectacle, and what we might consider problematic interactions with a manufactured other.

In this respect, monsters function as agents of fantasy that are constitutive elements of the genre. They are products of the imagination that challenge the boundary between the real and fictive worlds. Although they do not exist in the literal sense, we have seen that in their function as metaphors and literary constructs they have an effect on the way individuals view the world and conduct themselves. In cultural texts, the mere presence of the monster can transform an ordinary location into a space of the fantastic.⁵⁵ This is due in part to the way that works of fantasy frequently oscillate between the supernatural on the one hand, and the naturalistic on the other.⁵⁶ While we have already touched on the transgressive nature of the monster, it is worth noting that it is partly because of its fantastic constitution that this figure is able to tear away at established conventions, and provide for the development of alternate norms and social realities.

In her classic study on fantasy fiction, Rosemary Jackson describes the transformative potential of the genre, noting that its power resides in its ability to undermine and deconstruct established structures of meaning.⁵⁷ Through imaginary constructs like the monster, which these narratives also employ to various affect, fantasy enables us to interrogate reality in a non-threatening way, while simultaneously opening up alternate spaces in which to explore possibilities that exist beyond the current social and cultural order. As Jackson writes, “In this way

⁵⁵ Gelder 1.

⁵⁶ Carroll 145.

⁵⁷ Jackson 72.

fantastic literature points to or suggests the basis upon which cultural order rests, for it opens up, for a brief moment, on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which lies outside the law, that which is outside dominant value systems. The fantastic traces the unsaid and unseen of culture: that which has been made silent, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'"⁵⁸ In short, fantasy asks us to imagine otherwise, and not simply envision the world as it is, but rather as it could be.

Judith Butler has also discussed the radical transformative potential of the fantastic, specifically with regard to gender politics and the established norms that dictate socially constructed ideas about normality. For her, fantasy is a means by which the marginal can become mainstream, through recurrent exposure to the abnormal or deviant, resulting its their normalization. She writes,

Fantasy is part of the articulation of the possible; it moves us beyond what is merely actual and present into a realm of possibility, the not yet actualized or the not actualizable. [...] Fantasy is not the opposite of reality; it is what reality forecloses, and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality, constituting it as its constitutive outside. The critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge the cognitive limits of what will and will not be called reality. Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and other otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home.⁵⁹

In short, fantasy affects the real world. As Joshua Bellin notes, it essentially frames social reality.⁶⁰ While on the surface, such cultural productions often problematically reinforce the status quo or replicate existing divisions of race, class, and gender in an imaginary setting analogous of the world we know, they also

⁵⁸ Ibid. 4.

⁵⁹ Butler 28-29.

⁶⁰ Bellin 9.

provide a space, no matter how minute, for the possible interrogation of fundamental social assumptions, which is otherwise impossible in ordinary life.

Far from simply being imaginary creatures that play upon the fears of the young, monsters embody many of the cultural values and anxieties within our society. Monstrosity, as the discursive formation at the heart of these figures, is structured by a multiplicity of meanings, all of which directly affect and reflect the human condition. Theorizing the complex constellation of ideas that constitutes this subject provides us with new ways of conceptualizing established ideas and practices. Further, it provides principles for the reinterpretation of various texts, themes, icons, and genres, which will be discussed further in the following section.

III. The Heroic Monomyth and the Narrative Form of Superhero Comic Books

In order to understand why an examination of monsters is necessary in a study on representations of race in comic books, it is essential that we consider the narrative context in which these figures frequently appear. Doing so highlights the relationship of monstrosity to the subject matter, and illustrates the integral role that monsters play in the mythic and literary traditions. As J.R.R. Tolkien observed in his seminal address, "The Monsters and the Critics," characters like Grendel are a central component to epic tales like *Beowulf*, and function largely as the focal point for all narrative progression.⁶¹ This is due in part to the casting of the monster as the principal antagonist within these fantastic stories, whose defeat is designed to highlight the growth and courageous character of the mythic hero. In the epic tradition, the monster, therefore, represents the challenge that must be overcome in

⁶¹ Tolkien 25-26.

order for the triumph of the protagonist, the preservation of the normal, and the advance of “civilization.”

This basic narrative structure constitutes what Joseph Campbell calls, “The Heroic Monomyth.” His model consists of three main parts, all of which contain various subcategories that can be presented in a variety of ways, essentially functioning as the quintessential quest narrative.⁶² First is the separation or departure, in which the hero is called to leave their home and embark on a journey in order to fulfill their spiritual destiny. This act involves the crossing of a threshold or border, away from the safe and familiar into a foreign area filled with danger.⁶³ After this passage, they face a series of trials and tribulations that test their worth and challenge their resolve. This often manifests as difficulties associated with the journey itself or a conflict with a primary adversary. Finally, there is the return and a reintegration into society, in which the hero, having fulfilled their potential, is reborn, bringing back treasure or restoring peace and needed resources to their native homeland.⁶⁴

In these stories, the hero and the monster exist in a seemingly natural relationship of conflict and violence with one another. The outcome of the protagonist’s journey is dependent upon the presence of this antagonist that must be subdued, either through battle or an act of mental cunning. In order for the hero to become something greater, there needs to be an encounter that tests their character, and in the end, the monster that stands against them usually dies by their

⁶² Campbell 28.

⁶³ Ibid. 64.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 170.

hand. This action lies at the core of heroism in the archetypal heroic monomyth. In this respect, it is akin to what Richard Slotkin identifies as the idea of “regeneration through violence.”⁶⁵ He notes that it functions as an enduring national mythology in America, largely constructed through a social process of myth-making, which essentially defined the relationship between colonists and their surroundings—both the land and its inhabitants—as one of perpetual struggle that placed violent action at the core of the American experience in the New World. This is vitally important, for according to Slotkin,

Myth can be seen as an intellectual or artistic construct that bridges the gap between the world of the mind and the world of affairs, between dream and reality, between impulse or desire and action. It draws on the content of individual and collective memory, structures it, and develops from it imperatives for belief and action. [...] Thus myth visions, which are generated by the mind, ultimately affect both man’s perception of reality and his actions. Myth describes a process, credible to its audience, by which knowledge is transformed into power; it provides a scenario or prescription for action, defining and limiting the possibilities for human response to the universe.⁶⁶

Myths, like metaphors of monstrosity, provide the real world rationale and justification for collective social action. More often than not, this model has been employed to give guiding purpose to nationalistic objectives and to solidify the resolve of a given population during times of crisis. The tendency to celebrate acts of violence by the conquering hero is a foundational trope of the mythic tradition.

Thus, the heroic monomyth itself functions as a narrative structure founded on imperialistic ideals. It is predicated on the notion that the hero must venture into foreign lands, do battle with monsters to prove their worth, and return as a conqueror possessing looted treasure as a symbol of their “growth.” Incidentally,

⁶⁵ Slotkin 5.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 7

Campbell himself seems to recognize this connection in his work. Early on, he describes Columbus as a heroic figure who dared to venture beyond the border of the known world, writing

Beyond them is darkness, the unknown, and danger; just as beyond the parental watch is danger to the infant and beyond the protection of his society danger to the member of the tribe. The usual person is more than content, he is even proud, to remain within the indicated bounds, and popular belief gives him every reason to fear so much as the first step into the unexplored. Thus the sailors of the bold vessels of Columbus, breaking the horizon of the medieval mind—sailing, as they thought, into the boundless ocean of immortal being that surrounds the cosmos, like an endless mythological serpent biting its tail—had to be cozened and urged on like children, because of their fear of the fabled leviathans, mermaids, dragon kings, and other monsters of the deep.⁶⁷

The hero in these stories, then, is essentially the agent of empire, the individual who ventures into foreign territory bearing the flag in service of God or country.⁶⁸ By undertaking this burden, the mythic hero is cast as a savior, whose entire existence is predicated on the idea that they must exterminate or soundly defeat their enemy for the preservation and advancement of themselves and their society. As Slotkin observed, it is through destruction and violence that growth and stability are achieved. Cultural critics like John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett similarly contend that many of our national myths are constructed around narratives of what they call “redemptive violence.” They note that, “Narratives of superheroic redemption have become occasions for confessional statements of personal transformation and new trajectories of life meaning.”⁶⁹ Violence, then, has been

⁶⁷ Campbell 64.

⁶⁸ Greenblatt 74.

⁶⁹ Lawrence and Jewett 9.

deployed in American culture by heroic outsiders, who utilize it for the defense and social redemption of those who find themselves under siege.⁷⁰

At this point, one may be wondering how this fits in with an analysis of comic books. The stories within the medium frequently deploy thematic and narrative structures that rely on a dynamic relationship between good and evil. More than anything else, comic books are didactic vehicles for reproducing and conveying dominant cultural ideas to impressionable audiences in newly updated, and easily accessible forms. Frequently, these narratives deploy established ideas of heroism and villainy, like those found in familiar mythic tales, and knowingly utilize many of the same themes and tropes which directly tie them to classical literature and mythology.

As Richard Reynolds points out, superhero comic books effectively constitute a “modern mythology” for their readers, which is created by he calls “extra-textual continuity,” the continuous and interrelated adventures of characters that inhabit a shared universe.⁷¹ More than anything else, this narrative structure is designed to communicate a simple moral to readers: that the superhero is justified in doing anything and everything within their power to stop the forces of evil that threaten society. Lawrence and Jewett expand on this idea, noting, “It gives Americans a fantasy land without ambiguities to cloud the moral vision, where the evil empire of enemies is readily discernable, and where they can vicariously (through identification with the Superhero) smite evil before it overtakes them.”⁷²

⁷⁰ Ibid. 26.

⁷¹ Reynolds 43.

⁷² Lawrence and Jewett 48.

Naturally, the superhero is positioned as the defender of society within this dynamic, who fights to protect their city, world, or universe from the radical change that the super villain threatens to enact.⁷³ We tend to associate them with all that is right, admirable, and just, for in many ways, they represent our loftiest ambitions, and embody our highest ideals. However, as Reynolds notes, superheroes are also agents of a sanitary, eternally stable, and repressive normality that is ideologically grounded and contributes to the conservative ideas that remain at the core of these narratives. He writes,

A key ideological myth of the superhero comic is that the normal and everyday enshrines positive values that must be defended through heroic action—and defended over and over again almost without respite against an endless battery of menaces determined to remake the world for the benefit of aliens, mutants, criminals, or sub-aquatic being from Atlantis. The normal is valuable and is constantly under attack, which means that almost by definition the superhero is battling on behalf of the status quo. [...] The superhero has a mission to preserve society, not re-invent it.⁷⁴

Ironically, the superhero is a figure that must work outside the system in order to defend it. In these narratives, they function as the symbol of stability in times of crisis, whose actions justify the status quo established by the dominant power structure. Indeed, the victory of good over evil is designed to cement the legitimacy of the existing social, political, and economic order that the hero fights to defend, and has the added effect of dissuading readers who may be tempted to pursue the destructive path of evil taken by the villain.

Like the protagonist in the Heroic Monomyth, the superhero is defined by the challenges they face and overcome. Within comic books, the monstrous evil of the

⁷³ Reynolds 77.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 77.

antagonists of classic mythology is distilled and concentrated in the form of the super villain. They are the threat that the hero must subdue to prove their worth, and it is their villainy against which we measure the bravery and skill of the protagonist. In his analysis, Reynolds implicitly recognizes this point, and echoing Tolkien, he writes, "Superheroes are not called upon to act as the protagonists of individual plots. They function essentially as antagonists, foils for the true star of each story, the villain."⁷⁵ The pairing of heroes with specific, recurring villains, like Batman and his rogues gallery, for example, strengthens the writer's hand by allowing them to "generate new variations on old themes."⁷⁶ Here, he is referring not only to the shared visual cues between the hero and villain, but also to the ways in which comic books retell stories in familiar forms. Even fans recognize the centrality of villains to comic book narratives. As a reader of comics in the Golden Age, artist Jules Feiffer notes that, "with few exceptions, heroes were not very interesting. And, by any realistic appraisal, certainly no match for the villains who were bigger, stronger, smarter (as who wasn't?), and even worse, were notorious scene stealers."⁷⁷

Villains, while charismatic, were frequently depicted in unflattering ways, partly due to the fact that they stood in for the monsters that had previously appeared in mythic narratives. They were characters whose appeal was grounded in the fact that they were outsiders, individuals whose very existence challenged established social norms. MLJ Magazines editor Abner Sundell emphasized this fact

⁷⁵ Ibid. 51.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 49.

⁷⁷ Feiffer 8.

in his guide to writing comics published in the 1942 Writer's Yearbook. He wrote, "Villains should be fearsome individuals, visually. [...] The villain must represent all the vices, all that is evil, in a glance. Artistically, he is a caricature of 'bad.' The juvenile mind will thus identify at an immediate glance the battle between good and evil."⁷⁸ Given the way that many of these narratives were constructed, the villain's defeat was a foregone conclusion, and even their mere existence was only for the benefit of the hero and their victory. Here, it is worth recognizing the common cliché that death has no permanence in comics. This is especially true for super villains, who rise time and time again from the ashes of defeat, much like the antagonists in horror movies, only to have their plans foiled once more, their exploits continually retold and remade, much like the narratives of the medium itself.

Sundell's comment also highlights the degree to which stories in comic books were written according to strict formulas established by editors and publishers in the earliest years of the industry. Fawcett artist Jay Disbrow, for example, noted, "comic books stories were being written to a rigid formula that was rarely if ever departed from. Certain criteria must of necessity be followed, and it would have been unthinkable for any comic book creator to defy those unwritten laws," like having the hero demonstrate weakness or question the righteousness of their cause.⁷⁹ D.C Comics writer Robert Kanigher affirmed the adherence to this formulaic style in his industry manual, *How to Make Money Writing for Comics*, published by Cambridge House in 1943. One of the earliest guides on the subject, it noted that as a standard,

⁷⁸ Sundell 31.

⁷⁹ Disbrow 25.

The comics formula is composed of: 1) The hero; 2) With a female companion drawn along Petty lines; 3) Frequently aided by a juvenile assistant; 4) In a desperate struggle; 5) In which life and the heroine's honor; 6) And a national or global prize is at stake; 7) Against the diabolical plotting of a master villain; 8) And his gang; 9) Against whom the hero has to employ all his super-talents of tossing mountains around, juggling battleships, defying gravity and common sense; 10) In a script employing, in the order of their importance: a) Visualization (pictures) b) Dialogue c) Captions.⁸⁰

This model, with its adherence to a conflict between the hero and villain reinforces the degree to which early comic book narratives borrowed heavily from the mythic tradition and adventure fiction. While there were many factors that contributed to the perception that such an editorial structure was needed, perhaps the most important was a general concern about audience reception. In a medium that was completely dependent upon the interests of its readership, comic book creators often went with established, conventional tales over exploratory storytelling, because they knew such books would sell. Often, this required writing stories that reinforced and adhered to dominant norms, geared toward an imagined audience consisting of straight, white male readers. Even established writers like Gardner Fox, the co-creator of iconic D.C. characters like The Flash and Hawkman, noted that "It was standard practice at D.C. and also at Gaines' outfit to work almost hand-in-glove with the editors. Story lines were always plotted out with the editors with whom one worked."⁸¹ Responding to similar criticism, artist C.C. Beck mused over the subject, rhetorically asking, "Why are comics so cut-and-dried, so formula-ridden? Because the public which buys them will only buy easy to read, easy to follow stories and artwork. A comic book buyer is looking for a how-to-enjoy-yourself kit

⁸⁰ Barr 17.

⁸¹ Fox, "The Life and Good Times of Gardner F. Fox" 25

with step-by-step instructions telling him when to laugh, when to cry, when to hold his breath, when to break out in a cold sweat, and so on.”⁸²

It is also worth noting that various influences of a literary, mythic, and religious nature have been a continual source of inspiration for writers and artists within the industry. Basing much of their output and creative endeavors on these classic works, they have knowingly retrofitted and incorporated familiar themes into new characters, which have then proceeded to become “fan-favorites.” For example, Martin Nodell, the co-creator of the Golden Age Green Lantern, has noted that both the character and his iconic lamp were inspired by Chinese mythological elements. He recalled the process that led to the design, stating, “On my way home, I was jotting down notes, a few things I was interested in, mostly just thinking of Greek mythology, and [I was] interested in Chinese folklore. [...] I designed the character after Greek mythology. Chinese folklore came in by use of a meteor coming and crashing down.”⁸³ Even the superhero’s civilian name, Alan Scott, was derived from “Aladdin.”⁸⁴ Similarly, Marvel Comics’ well-known writer and editor-in-chief, Stan Lee, has frequently admitted to such influences in his work. His character, The Hulk, co-created with artist Jack Kirby, was largely his attempt to hybridize the literary themes and narrative mechanics present in the Victorian works, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr.*

⁸² Beck, “The Birth and Death of the Golden Age” 86

⁸³ Nodell 22.

⁸⁴ Murray “Eternal Green Lantern” 3.

Hyde.⁸⁵ More obviously, Thor, the god of thunder, was taken directly from Norse mythology and incorporated into comic books with only minor modifications.

The presence of such characters within the medium has led scholars to popularly argue that superheroes can be interpreted within a religious paradigm, and that they essentially function as modern gods. Lawrence and Jewett, for example, claim that religious powers are secularized in the superhero and that they function as an all-powerful “everyman,” due to the presence of their civilian alter-ego.⁸⁶ In one of the most well known works on the subject, *Our Gods Wear Spandex*, Christopher Knowles argues that the reverence of superheroes is almost religious in nature, and that these figures essentially serve the same function that gods did in the ancient world.⁸⁷ Similarly, Don LoCicero suggests that these characters are derived from the same archetype as mythic heroes, except for the fact that “science, rather than the gods, provided them with their extra ordinary gifts.”⁸⁸ Others like Simcha Weinstein contend that many of the most famous characters in comic books, like Superman, were directly inspired by figures and beliefs within Judaism, drawing parallels between the character’s origin story and that of Moses.⁸⁹

Given these numerous textual influences, it is no surprise, then, that the earliest defenders of the industry, who spoke out against attacks by a legion of social activists led by the psychologist Fredric Wertham, often compared the stories in comic books to modern day fairy tales or folklore. Some of the earliest studies on the

⁸⁵ Lee, interview 17.

⁸⁶ Lawrence and Jewett 44.

⁸⁷ Knowles 16, 18.

⁸⁸ LoCicero 5.

⁸⁹ Weinstein 26.

subject, including one by child psychiatrists Laretta Bender and Reginald Lourie, considered superhero comics to be modern iterations of ancient narratives, and noted that these characters were “scientific” versions of the “magical” beings that populated fairy tales.⁹⁰ For the most part, this has been a longstanding and established perspective for those who work in the medium. For example, E. Nelson Bridwell, a writer for D.C. Comics, once compared the characters in these stories, to figures from classic works of literature, like *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *The Illiad*, *The Odyssey*, and *The Tempest*.⁹¹ Likewise, Stan Lee, in describing Marvel’s approach to comic books in the 1960s, remarked, “We think of them as fairy tales for grownups.”⁹²

Even the technology of the medium is related to ancient and classical narratives. As Scott McCloud notes, comics are a centuries-old method of pictorial communication, which can potentially be traced back as far as the hieroglyphics of Ancient Egypt.⁹³ Works like the *Mirabilia*, which will be discussed in the following section, feature something akin to comic book panels, wherein a series of monsters are represented visually with descriptive text accompanying each illustration. As if to make the comparison even more apt, in some of the etchings, monsters like the blemmyae even interact with the frame of the panel itself, using their hands to grasp it, as if they were emerging from the surface of the page and into the world of the reader.

⁹⁰ Nyberg 16.

⁹¹ Bridwell 36-38.

⁹² Fingerioth and Thomas 40.

⁹³ McCloud, *Understanding Comics* 10-16.

As a medium, comic books have routinely demonstrated their ability to incorporate existing ideas into their narratives and to reproduce them in new, accessible forms. They have often relied on classic stories for their inspiration and in doing so, have perpetuated ideas and philosophies associated with the binary conflict of good versus evil. Further, as the next section and following chapter detail, this reliance on the use of formulae and the process of incorporation have resulted in negative consequences for Asian Americans, who, I argue, have been shaped by the centuries-old perception that they originate from a land of monsters.

IV. The Monsters of the East

The *Mirabilia*, or *The Wonders of the East*, a medieval manuscript dating from 970-1150 A.D., is a fascinating early example of the extent to which monsters have historically been associated with distant, unexplored parts of the world, particularly the region commonly referred to as the Orient, or the East.⁹⁴ While its title clearly affirms the function of Asia and the Middle East as an exotic locale, filled with unique goods and peoples, this area also functions as a site of danger. Like the impenetrable forests, unscalable mountains, hidden caves, and fearsome rivers of ancient lore, this is a land populated by monsters. The text depicts the numerous creatures, mythic in scale and wondrous in appearance that one could expect to encounter if they traveled out past the borders of “civilization” and into the unknown. In India, it establishes the presence of cynocephali, commonly referred to

⁹⁴ Bovey 8.

as dog-headed men.⁹⁵ Further, it describes curious creatures known as blemmyae, human-like beings without heads, whose eyes and mouths were located on their chests. It tells of a land where creatures of gigantic proportions roamed, where gold-gathering ants grew to be the size of dogs and giant wild men foraged and hunted. Also present were the legendary creatures familiar to the Greeks and Romans—dragons and griffins—ferocious flying monsters that threatened the lives of those who foolishly trespassed into their domain in search of treasure. Throughout the Middle Ages, many manuscripts like this emerged, depicting, through narratives and artistic renderings, the monstrous races and creatures that one could expect to find by venturing to the East.

Since ancient times, Asia has been conceptualized as a foreign, unknown land populated by “monstrous races” and exotic wonders. Naturally, this designation is not based in any kind of factual reality, but one that has been meticulously constructed throughout a long history of cultural, commercial, and imperial interactions and exchanges between the East and the West. To that extent, it functions in the same way as Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism, a knowledge-based discursive formation that defines the exotic, mysterious, backward, and static Orient in opposition to the rational, modern, and progressive Occident. For him, it acts as an imagined space, onto which Western perceptions and desires are projected. However, it does not simply exist for the sake of fantasy, but is a discursive marker that symbolizes the relationship between knowledge and power,

⁹⁵ European descriptions of cynocephali date back to Ancient Greece, where scholars recounted travelers’ tales of encountering monstrous races in distant lands, like India and Ethiopia.

showcasing the way in which the idea of the East has been built, controlled, and authorized for the sake of the West. For as Said notes, “The Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West”⁹⁶

To that extent, the “Wonders of the East” and the monstrous races that populate the region serve a distinct purpose; namely, they exist as part of a location that inspires curiosity and desire. They define Asia as a fundamentally different locale, and mark the presence of goods and materials, through the presentation of their bodies, that cannot be found in the West. In addition to being a desired focal point for commercial trade, it also provides the ideological justification for imperial conquest, marking the people in Asia as different, inferior, uncivilized, and other. Many of these attributes are still associated with Asians today, albeit in a much subtler form. This connection between contemporary ethnic identity and the idea of the East as a land of monsters is important, because as Gary Okihiro has noted, the Asian American experience has been shaped in part by the historical “expansion eastward and westward to Asia for conquest and trade.”⁹⁷ In part, the way that we understand Asians in the present is still rooted in ancient ideas about monstrosity, which was largely constructed alongside the process of exploration.

The idea that Asia is a land of monsters can be traced back to the earliest Western societies. Rudolf Wittkower contends that the idea of the East, understood principally as India and parts of Asia Minor, was developed within the culture of

⁹⁶ Said, 5.

⁹⁷ Okihiro 7.

Ancient Greece.⁹⁸ In the earliest literary works by Homer, like *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey*, there was already a pronounced division in the way that the author understood the world, particularly in terms of East and West.⁹⁹ Further, the descriptions of monstrous races presented in these narratives, like the Cyclops and the Lotus Eaters, are strikingly similar to what others would report for centuries following his lifetime, illustrating the degree to which the world was understood through the paradigms established in ancient texts.¹⁰⁰

The first “credible” account of India was written by Ctesias, a Persian royal court physician in the fourth century, B.C. Positioned at the gateway between the unknown lands of the East and the West, he was seen as an authoritative source whose writing related factual information about the wonders of India to those in Greece.¹⁰¹ His treatise, the *Indika*, while considered a lost work today, was remarkably influential, as everything that we know about it has been relayed to us by references in other manuscripts, like the *Bibliotheka* of Photius, illustrating the degree to which his fantastic accounts were taken as fact by others.¹⁰² However, as medieval scholars note, the work was hardly accurate, and instead operated as a functional collection of Indian folklore and tall tales that he had likely heard from

⁹⁸ Wittkower 159. There is evidence to suggest that these ideas about the East preceded authors like Homer and Herodotus, but there is very little surviving textual information that can be used to draw a definitive link to this idea with any pre-Grecian society. Wittkower speculates that monstrous archetypes, like that of the “magical prodigy,” can be traced back from Greece to Babylonia, potentially signifying an even older intellectual lineage. 168.

⁹⁹ Said 56.

¹⁰⁰ Friedman, *Monstrous Races* 5.

¹⁰¹ Romm 78.

¹⁰² Friedman, *Monstrous Races* 5.

merchants in Persia.¹⁰³ Meant to entertain and amaze more than educate, his text describes a variety of creatures, like cynocephali, pygmies, giants, unicorns, griffins, manticores, and monopods—deformed human-like beings with a single, large foot.¹⁰⁴

As this example illustrates, much of the early information about the East originated from dubious and unreliable sources, like travelers, merchants, and adventurers, who gave accounts about their personal experiences in distant lands.¹⁰⁵ As one might suspect, the tales they told were often viewed as suspect, given the fantastic nature of their testimony. However, they were not roundly dismissed outright because of the fact that their stories were at least partially supported and corroborated by information found in other authoritative texts. Still, serious scholars questioned the accuracy of claims that suggested monsters, like gold-guardian griffins, for example, populated the lands of Scythia, dismissing such creatures as the product of idle fantasy and imagination.¹⁰⁶

Additionally, many writers relied on knowledge that they received from others, often secondhand, primarily because at the time, few Grecians had ventured beyond the borders of the ancient world and into the unknown lands of the East. This kind of invocation, in which the author presented information based on the claims of others, predates surviving manuscripts, and can be traced to the earliest works of antiquity. For example, within *The Histories*, Herodotus repeatedly relays information that he received from the Scythians and Issedones, about the

¹⁰³ Friedman, *Monstrous Races* 5; Romm 86-87.

¹⁰⁴ Wittkower 160-161.

¹⁰⁵ Gilmore 42.

¹⁰⁶ Mayor 46-47, 201.

“monstrous races,” like the Arimaspians, that live beyond their lands. He writes, “While the Issedones themselves are well known we must rely on what they tell us for our knowledge of what lies beyond them—the one-eyed men and the gold-guarding griffins. It is from the Issedones that the Scythians have received their account. The rest of us, because we have heard it from the Scythians, customarily call these people Arimaspians, which is a Scythian word.”¹⁰⁷

This reliance on personal accounts and anthropological evidence as signifiers of expertise is strongly reminiscent of contemporary Orientalism. Said notes that it is primarily through this assembled body of knowledge that an authoritative discourse was constructed around the Orient, creating its imagined geography and the various features and characteristics attributed to it.¹⁰⁸ Here, we see that in the ancient world, knowledge about the East was produced simultaneously with and, to a large degree, as a result of reports of monsters. In this sense, the two are inextricably bound together, as the latter was often used to construct and define the former. It did not matter that these monsters never really existed. What counted was that people thought they could be found in India, and that perception largely shaped the construction of the East throughout the Western world.

Perhaps the most important moment in this ancient chronology is a point of contact between Europe and Asia, specifically Alexander the Great’s military campaign into India in 326 B.C. This expedition into what was then considered to be the unknown lands of the East, produced a wide array of writings and narratives in Ancient Greece, describing the “marvels” of the region, which included strange and

¹⁰⁷ Herodotus 292; bk. 4, ch. 27.

¹⁰⁸ Said 52.

exotic beasts, rare and desirable goods, reports of unfathomable riches, and tales affirming the presence of “monstrous races” unlike any found in the West. In large part, many of Alexander’s findings were influenced by the existing literature produced by others. As much of what he encountered throughout Asia was alien to him, he interpreted most everything through the lens of ancient scholarship. This affirmed the content of existing reports, like the work of Ctesias, for example.

Alexander’s observations about peoples outside of the Western world were strongly influenced by ancient beliefs about ethnic difference. A prominent trademark of many narratives during this period was the use of the term “barbarian” to identify any beings, who were not Greek in origin, effectively dividing the world into “us” and “them.”¹⁰⁹ Further, the world itself was understood through a particularly potent brand of ethnocentrism, wherein Greece was seen as the center or source of humanity, while the lands to the extreme north, south, and east were thought to be the home of exotic, animalistic beings, who engaged in strange and inhuman practices. Indeed, one major result of Alexander’s journeys was that it further framed the world through a discourse of civilization, which defined the Greeks as “civilized” and others as “uncivilized.”¹¹⁰ Much of this had to do with foreign cultures, languages, and social norms, which were largely understood through the contrast and difference to those found in Greece. Tzvetan Todorov writes that such comparisons are frequently used a criterion for evaluating the

¹⁰⁹ Asma 36; Todorov 14.

¹¹⁰ Palencia-Roth 30.

humanity of others, noting, “The culture of foreigners, being incomprehensible, is judged non-existent, and without culture man is not human.”¹¹¹

While some scholars are quick to note that the surviving works of this period do not label these other peoples as inferior or inhuman, so much as they describe them with a great sense of curiosity, it remains certain that this discourse was established as part of an imperialist impulse, which justified conquest through the presence of difference.¹¹² This was reinforced by the social and cultural practices of these foreign populations, with texts frequently referring to them as cannibals, or noting that they consumed raw meat and fish, which could be used as a rationale for controlling, correcting, and eliminating those they encountered.¹¹³

These notions of monstrosity were also grounded in a popular understanding of geography and nature. The Greeks believed that climate had a significant impact on the mental and physical development of the self. Extremes and deviance from the natural standard—established by what one would expect to find in the Mediterranean—was thought to produce abnormalities and differences among people. Due to oppressive heat, areas like India and Ethiopia were believed to be uninhabitable, and as a result, the presence, physical appearance, and social customs of the individuals living there were thought to be non-natural and abnormal.¹¹⁴ In his *Politics*, Aristotle argued that barbarians were difference personified, for their very flesh was marked by the climate, which in turn affected the distribution of the four humors and the bodily fluids that shaped their

¹¹¹ Todorov 28.

¹¹² Reder 51.

¹¹³ Palencia-Roth 44.

¹¹⁴ Wey Gomez 85.

character.¹¹⁵ This understanding of nature and biology was used to explain the presence of unusual creatures and peoples in the ancient world. As John Block Friedman notes, “In the ancient world, nature was understood as always adhering to the mean, and individual births or even races of people who differed from the human or animal norm were imagined as existing outside the order of nature and so were called monsters, reflecting God’s displeasure towards man.”¹¹⁶

While Alexander was not the first to tell of what he encountered in India, tales of his exploits were more influential and circulated on a much greater scale than the reports produced before him. It was primarily through Alexander’s journeys that Greeks not only obtained information about the East, but were also exposed to a variety of rare and desirable goods.¹¹⁷ It is no coincidence that campaigns of conquest and the acquisition of previously unexplored territory resulted in the production of knowledge about monsters.¹¹⁸ Aside from traveler’s tales, imperial adventures were one of the few ways to acquire information about distant lands.

With their assumptions reinforced by this new information, Grecian scholars reiterated existing ideas about India, and further mythologized the East, producing other authoritative texts on monsters. Megasthenes, the most well known of these authors, wrote a treatise describing the geography of the area, its inhabitants, history, and culture.¹¹⁹ Like the works of earlier times, his voice was given authority

¹¹⁵ Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity and Monstrosity* 32-33.

¹¹⁶ Friedman, “Monsters At Earth’s Imagined Corners” 51.

¹¹⁷ Friedman, *Monstrous Races* 75.

¹¹⁸ Graham 51.

¹¹⁹ Wittkower 162.

because, unlike many others, he had actually traveled to the area. As a result, his observations were considered objective and trustworthy. Still, he repeated many of the falsehoods that had been commonplace since the writings of Herodotus and Ctesias, remarking on the presence of gold-gathering ants, cynocephali, blemmyae, and pygmies.

It is important to note the frequency with which authors continually borrowed from one another as they established a base of knowledge about India and the East. Over the course of many centuries, the same mistakes, inaccuracies, and outright falsehoods appeared from text to text, gradually gaining the currency of truth. As Edward Said observes, "Every writer on the Orient (and this is true even of Homer) assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he refers, and on which he relies."¹²⁰ While we know today that creatures like dog-headed men almost certainly never existed in Asia, at the time, even learned individuals, having never been to India, simply related what they were told by others.

In the first century, A.D., Pliny the Elder utilized the accounts of Ctesias and Megasthenes to describe the variety of creatures that were found throughout the East in his multi-volume encyclopedic work known as the *Natural History*.¹²¹ In many respects, this marks one of the most important points in the chronology presented here, as Pliny's work was an important source for the transmission of information about the East during the Middle Ages. It is through his work that the stories of old were preserved and relayed to other areas of the West, forming the

¹²⁰ Said 20.

¹²¹ Friedman, *Monstrous Races* 7.

basis for many medieval tales about monsters, including freshly imagined stories involving Alexander the Great and his travels in India.¹²² From his writings, it is clear that Pliny himself had very little personal knowledge about the East, if any at all, for he frequently confused and conflated India with Ethiopia.¹²³

One cannot overstate the importance of these ancient texts in establishing the framework for how Asia is understood throughout the Western world. This notion of the East as a land of monsters that developed in Grecian culture lasted for more than 1,500 years in the European intellectual tradition.¹²⁴ It was not until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that people began to reevaluate these ideas about India and the East, after numerous expeditions tried and failed to discover the “monstrous races.”¹²⁵ The monsters believed to populate Asia were not imaginary creatures in the modern sense, acting as metaphors for social and cultural anxieties. Rather, they were thought to be real beings that populated the landscape, policing the border between the worlds of civilization and barbarism, whose existence, reinforced by the credible authority of ancient texts, was without question.¹²⁶

Up until this point, we have talked about the region in terms of encompassing India and parts of Asia Minor, which is primarily how it was understood throughout the ancient world. However, by the Middle Ages, and after numerous points of contact with Muslim societies, the East was no longer the mysterious, unexplored space that it had once been. Rather, the unknown lands that were thought to house

¹²² Austin 29.

¹²³ Friedman, *Monstrous Races* 8.

¹²⁴ Wittkower 197.

¹²⁵ Romm 216.

¹²⁶ Edson 21.

monsters shifted to the periphery, specifically the most distant areas of Asia that few Europeans had ever traveled to. As a result, by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the concept of the East itself was modified to reflect this new reality, expanding to include and incorporate the known and the unknown under a single geographical label.¹²⁷ This process would continue over time, illustrating the degree to which the East functioned as an amorphous, loosely defined, yet evolving concept throughout much of European history.¹²⁸

Alongside this model emerged new tales of Alexander the Great, which rebranded him as a Christian hero, conquering and converting the savage hordes of the East. By the twelfth century, his expedition into the region had become a focal point for the medieval Christian tradition, with newly emerging narratives and texts that celebrated his subjugation of Eastern “hairy wild men” and monstrous creatures, defining such actions as a trademark of Western history and civilization.¹²⁹ Indeed, in much of the literature, monsters are cast as minions of the devil and seen as a threat posted by the non-Christian world against the faithful.¹³⁰ It was against this rising tide of demonic evil that Alexander stood as a savior, who, like other Christian heroes, did the work of God through his slaying of monstrous creatures and races.

Of particular importance was the iconography and conceptual figuration of the Gates of Alexander. While the idea originated with the sixth century *Alexander Romance*, it had been incorporated into the Christian reworking of Alexander by the

¹²⁷ Klein 39.

¹²⁸ Said 57-58.

¹²⁹ Friedman, *Monstrous Races* 201-202.

¹³⁰ Graham 51; Gilmore 51.

Middle Ages, and was used, in part, to explain the geographical location of monsters. According to the original narrative, Alexander had chased his foes to a narrow mountain pass in the Caucasus region, and enclosed them behind an impenetrable iron gate, forever separating the barbarians of the north from the lands of the south.¹³¹ However, by the twelfth century, mapmakers frequently repositioned the divide, believing that the structure was intended to separate the tribes of Gog and Magog, positioned in the East in the biblical tradition, from the West.

A famous example of this can be found in the Psalter mappamundi, created around the year 1262 (see fig. 1). It depicts the Christian cosmological universe, positioning Jerusalem at the center of the world, echoing a common belief at the time, with God and his angel above in the heavens, and a pair of dragons, the minions of the devil, down below, seemingly smothered by the weight of the Earth. More importantly however, to the right of the map, situated between Asia and Africa, are Alexander's Gates. While the East is at the top in this representation of the world, other mappamundi, like the Hereford and the Ebstorf, depict Northern Asia and Scythia as a prime area for such creatures.¹³² Of particular importance here is the way that Christianity reworked and incorporated not only centuries-old tales and concepts, but also how it utilized the monster to explain the presence of evil within the religious tradition. Further, the utilization of cartography to depict the location of monsters would continue for centuries as a method of understanding spatial relations, with exotic, dangerous, and unexplored regions labeled as the home of

¹³¹ Asma 87.

¹³² Ibid 87.

these mysterious creatures.¹³³ For example, the sixteenth century Lennox-Hunt Globe uses the phrase, “Hic Sunt Dracones,” literally translated as “Here Be Dragons,” in reference to East Asia, marking it as a dangerous locality that poses a threat, not only to travelers, but the safety of Western Europe itself.

Furthermore, there is another side to this iconographic and religious characterization of Alexander as a heroic defender of the faith and the gatekeeper, safeguarding the civilized world from monsters and barbarians. Despite the prevailing depiction of him as an overwhelmingly positive figure, other interpretations of Alexander emerged in the medieval period that cast him as sinful, egotistical, and driven by a compulsion to murder.¹³⁴ Much of this emerges from his contact and proximity to the monstrous races in the borderlands, as the hero’s righteousness is corrupted by prolonged exposure to an uncivilized region populated by monstrous others, which allows for his transformation from crusader to savage. For example, throughout his journeys in India, Alexander becomes obsessed with proving himself through great deeds, as he raids cities and consistently slaughters a series of beasts, like giant bats and serpents, which threaten him and his men.¹³⁵ Much of this echoes the belief that prolonged exposure to the monstrous East allowed for its nature to permeate the minds and bodies of those who entered it, effectively tainting them and turning them into the very thing they sought to destroy.

¹³³ Tuan 76-77.

¹³⁴ Orchard 117; Oswald 1; Asma 100.

¹³⁵ Orchard 130.

Another aspect of the monstrous East emerged with the Mongol invasions of Eastern and Central Europe in the thirteenth century.¹³⁶ Like the barbarian hordes faced by Alexander, this event had a significant impact on the way that monsters were perceived, transforming them from static agents that existed in unexplored spaces past the borders of civilization, into an organized, militant presence that threatened to breach the known world, conquering and subduing Europe through violence. The Benedictine monk Matthew Paris wrote an account of the Mongols in his *Historia Anglorum*, which summarized existing knowledge about the invaders and their habits. Engaging in the mistaken practice of dubbing them “Tartars,” monstrous humanoids who had emerged from the land of Tartarus from Greek lore, he wrote, “The men are inhuman and of the nature of beasts, rather to be called monsters than men, thirsting after and drinking blood, and tearing and devouring the flesh of dogs and human beings. [...] They have no human laws, know no mercy, and are more cruel than lions or bears.”¹³⁷ He continued, noting,

The Saracens, therefore, desired and begged to be allowed to enter into alliance with the Christians, in order that they might, by multiplying their forces, be enabled to resist these human monsters. These Saracens, the memory of whom is detestable, are believed to have been of the ten tribes, who abandoned the law of Moses, and followed after the golden calves; and Alexander also endeavored to shut them up in the precipitous Caspian mountains by walls cemented with bitumen; but as this work appeared to be beyond human accomplishment, he invoked the aid of the God of Israel; upon which the ridges of the mountains united one with another, and the place became inaccessible and impassable.¹³⁸

This statement by Paris reflects the severity of the threat posed by the Mongols, for even the existing “monstrous races” of the world sought the help of their enemies,

¹³⁶ W. Wu 9-10; Lye 18.

¹³⁷ Tchen, *Yellow Peril* 91.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* 92.

the followers of Christ, whose heroes like Alexander, according to tradition, had sought to seal them away for all eternity behind his mythical gates. These conflicts left an indelible impression on the European imagination, and as we shall discuss in the following chapter, served as the basis for the Yellow Peril, a racial narrative that signifies the threat posed to Western society by people of Asian descent.

Another figure like Alexander who emerged during this period as a fallen religious hero was Vlad Tepes, the fifteenth century Romanian king who acted as a kind of Christian crusader, protecting Romania from the Ottoman Turks in the borderlands between Western Europe and Asia.¹³⁹ While he is known today as the historical inspiration for Bram Stoker's literary vampire, Count Dracula, Vlad initially took up Pope Pius II's call for a new crusade, casting Romania as a last bastion of Christianity in the East, defending the borders of Europe from the army of invading Turks led by the Sultan Mehmed.¹⁴⁰ However, by the latter part of that century, word of his actions spread throughout Europe after Catholic monks fled to Germany following an attack on religious institutions and the seizure of their wealth by the crown.¹⁴¹ They issued a series of religious condemnations, describing Vlad's violence and acts of barbarity, representing him as a man who had been driven insane by his exposure to the East, turning on his allies in the church and engaging in acts of torture for his personal amusement. As a result, a sensationalistic series of pamphlets were published in Germany during the late fifteenth and sixteenth

¹³⁹ Florescu and McNally, *Dracula Prince of Many Faces* 13-14, 28.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 138

¹⁴¹ Florescu and McNally, *In Search of Dracula* 80.

centuries, relating gruesome tales about Vlad the Impaler's murderous impulses.¹⁴² In particular, these materials focused on his penchant for impalement as a preferred method of execution, and featured gory frontispieces depicting such acts (see fig. 2). One manuscript, for example, advertised, "The shocking story of a MONSTER and BERSERKER called Dracula who committed such unchristian deeds as killing men by placing them on stakes, hacking them to pieces like cabbage, boiling mothers and children alive and compelling men to acts of cannibalism."¹⁴³

Prior to this moment, impalement was a practice traditionally associated with Asia, as it was commonly utilized by the Turks, establishing a direct connection between Vlad the Impaler's reputation and the monstrous habits of the East.¹⁴⁴ In Europe there was great fascination with scenes of Chinese torture, particularly as an artistic aesthetic, which, no doubt, reinforced the association between a kind of infectious barbarism and the peoples of Asia.¹⁴⁵ There were long-term cultural effects of this linkage, for as Caroline Frank observes,

It is likely that by the end of the seventeenth-century, given the nature of these impalement stories and the illustrations accompanying them, this form of torture came to be associated in the Anglo-American imagination with a generalized East, blurring distinctions between Eastern Europe, the Ottoman Empire, and Persia, implicating China by virtue of its cardinal orientation.¹⁴⁶

As such, Vlad Tepes' behavior was associated with his proximity to the East, causing him to revert to a savage state, delighting at the use of an Oriental torture to inflict suffering on his victims. Represented as fallen and corrupted in the popular press,

¹⁴² Florescu and McNally, *Dracula Prince of Many Faces* 202.

¹⁴³ Florescu and McNally, *In Search of Dracula* 84.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 91.

¹⁴⁵ Frank 83.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 90.

the story of Vlad the Impaler serves largely as a cautionary tale about the East itself, showing how even the strongest moral constitutions can be corrupted by the infectious influence of Asia.

Along with these materials, the Middle Ages also saw the popularization of various travelogues, of both fictive and factual origin, which continued to promote established ideas about the presence of monsters in the East. One of the most famous of these is the *Book of the Marvels of the World*, more commonly known as *The Travels of Marco Polo*, a thirteenth century text that describes the merchant's journey through Asia. Along the way to China, he encounters various savage races, and fearsome animals. In India, for example, he uses physical differences in the landscape and animals, particularly with regard to size, to explain what he sees, writing, "Not only in this kingdom, but throughout India in general, all the beasts and birds are unlike those of our own country, excepting the quails, which perfectly resemble ours; the others are all different. There are bats as large as vultures, and vultures as black as crows, and much larger than ours."¹⁴⁷ Indeed, almost all of what he recounts in his text is defined by its difference from what one might find in Europe. As expected, he also reiterates the presence of the familiar cynocephali in an isolated space, noting,

Angaman is a very large island, not governed by a king. The inhabitants are idolaters, and are a most brutish and savage race, having heads, eyes, and teeth resembling those of the canine species. Their dispositions are cruel, and every person, not being of their own nation, whom they can lay their hands upon, they kill and eat.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Polo 291; bk. 3, ch. 19.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 281; bk. 3, ch. 18.

Such fantastic descriptions were enhanced by illustrations in the fourteenth century version of the text, which depict foreign races as monsters (see fig. 3). For example, the Mekriti, who Marco Polo describes as “a rude tribe, who live upon the flesh of animals,” are represented by three of the most commonly recognized monsters of the age: the blemmyae, monopod, and Cyclops.¹⁴⁹ He also notes the presence of various cannibalistic tribes in areas like Zipangu and Fekech.¹⁵⁰ When describing these monstrous races, he repeatedly speaks of the gold, silk, and riches that can be found in these areas, echoing accounts by Herodotus and other ancient writers.¹⁵¹ In Kanbalu, for example, the location of the Grand Khan’s court, he writes, “To this city, everything that is most rare and valuable in all parts of the world finds its way,” reporting that it is filled with gemstones, pearls, and spices.¹⁵² In part, this commonality with older texts again illustrates the degree to which ideas about the wonders of the East were passed down in the Western tradition, and evolved over time, as new reports changed the way that they were interpreted and understood.¹⁵³

Another manuscript of note is the *Wonders of the East* written by Friar Catalani Jordanus, a Catholic missionary in India, around 1330. His text, presented as an account of his personal experiences, was actually a compilation of stories he collected during his travels in the East. Throughout, he describes a series of amazing sights, from waters that turn ordinary metals into gold to the nesting habits of dragons, encapsulated in large part by his declaration, “Every thing indeed is a

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 92; bk. 1, ch. 51.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. bk. 3, ch. 3, 11.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 204; bk. 2, ch.25; 207; bk. 2, ch. 49; 211; bk. 2, ch. 52; 221; bk. 2, ch. 62; 227; bk. 2, ch. 67; 267; bk. 3, ch. 5; 270; bk. 3, ch. 7.

¹⁵² Ibid. 153; bk. 2, ch. 17.

¹⁵³ Romm 120.

marvel in this India! Verily it is quite another world!"¹⁵⁴ He notes that almost every monster of European legend and myth exists in India, specifically naming the Roc, a bird "so big that they could easily carry an elephant up into the air," and unicorns, which he claims the natives find useful for medicinal purposes.¹⁵⁵ Like Marco Polo, he describes the cynocephali that inhabit the islands of the East, adding that the women of this strange race are said to be extremely beautiful.¹⁵⁶ He also repeats some of the oldest descriptions of Ethiopia, claiming that, "There are many monsters there, such as gryphons that guard the golden mountains which be there. Here, too, be serpents and other venomous beasts, of vast size and venomous exceedingly."¹⁵⁷ Finally, he ends with a discussion of the Middle East, particularly the ancient kingdoms of Babylon and Chaldea, claiming that they are now "destroyed and deserted, where are hairy serpents and monstrous animals." Jordanus describes the region as a desolate, unpopulated area, noting, "In the night season, are heard such shoutings, such howlings, such hissings, that it is called Hell. There no one would dare to pass a single night, even with a great army, on account of the endless terrors and spectres."¹⁵⁸

Similarly, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, which first appeared in 1371, describes the protagonist's trek away from Jerusalem and into the exotic lands of Asia. Throughout the text, he relates stories and his encounters with a variety of creatures, like the phoenix, centaurs, satyrs, Amazonians, dragons, and cockatrices,

¹⁵⁴ Jordanus 37.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 42-43.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 44.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 45.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 49.

in addition to the cynocephali, blemmyae, and Cyclops that appear in Marco Polo's text.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, one of the central themes of these medieval works is that in order to encounter monsters, one must leave the safe and familiar and venture into the unknown, a task left only to travelers and adventurers, like Mandeville.¹⁶⁰ Further, the text also reinforces aspects of Christian cosmological geography, as the protagonist begins his journey from the heart of Christendom and civilization in Jerusalem, and moves outward, encountering exotic peoples whose everyday existence violates the norms of the West, through the practice of cannibalism, incest, and human sacrifice.¹⁶¹ Again, we see cynocephali as the symbol for these tribes, with the author writing,

After that isle men go by the sea ocean, by many isles, unto an isle that is clept Nacumera, that is a great isle and good and fair. And it is in compass about, more than a thousand mile. And all the men and women of the isle have hounds' heads, and they be clept Cynocephales. And they be full reasonable and of good understanding, save that they worship an ox for their God.¹⁶²

While this description is entirely fictional, it is still worth examining, as it reveals much about the way that the monstrous races were understood within the Christian tradition. Indeed, for the faithful, cynocephali were individuals with the capacity to be converted and saved with their successful acceptance of Christian doctrine. Figures like Saint Christopher, for example, represented such an outcome, and for many of the faithful, dog-headed men were symbolically associated with Islam and

¹⁵⁹ Mandeville 34; ch. 7; 105; ch. 16; 113; ch. 17; 143-144; ch. 21; 147-148; ch. 22.

¹⁶⁰ Oswald 117.

¹⁶¹ Carmago 81.

¹⁶² Mandeville 143; ch. 21.

Muslims.¹⁶³ Cynocephali, then, were an iconic medieval monster precisely because, as Joyce Tally Lionarons notes, they “function in the European Middle Ages as a sort of collective Other for medieval Christian culture—they seem almost, but not quite, human; they are alien, yet in some way still the same.”¹⁶⁴

The fictional basis of these travelogues reflects a kind of imagined geography of the East. While they purport to relate factual details about little known, unexplored areas, the information they provided was largely inaccurate, consisting either of falsified claims, misidentified natural phenomenon, or gossip and hearsay acquired from unreliable third party sources. It is striking, then, that for these writers, all that was required to write about these areas was an assertion of authorial authority, and to claim that as one who had traveled outside of Europe, they had the knowledge and experience to convey the facts about things that they actually knew very little of. This aligns with power dynamics associated with the culture of Orientalism, which, as Edward Said notes, “To have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it. And authority here means for ‘us’ to deny autonomy to ‘it’—the Oriental country—since we know it and it exists, in a sense, *as we know it*.”¹⁶⁵

More importantly, specialization and expertise is attained precisely through the regurgitation of established knowledge or tropes associated with the East. The early authors, compilers, travelers, explorers, and others, were all imbued with authority simply because they described things that were traditionally associated

¹⁶³ Friedman, *Monstrous Races* 67.

¹⁶⁴ Lionarons 169.

¹⁶⁵ Said 32.

with Asia. As Said notes, this process is textual and grounded in the academic process. He writes, “A text purporting to contain knowledge about something actual [...] is not easily dismissed. Expertise is attributed to it. The authority of academics, institutions, and governments can accrue to it, surrounding it with still greater prestige than its practical successes warrant. Most importantly, such texts can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe.”¹⁶⁶

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the medieval characterization of Asia in these stories is the degree to which much of the region was said to hold immense and unfathomable riches. Many of the tales concerning the East, particularly India, describe vast concentrations of gold and precious stones, which one could obtain there. The coexistence of these valuable items, alongside the presence of monstrous creatures was a functional trope of many of these exploratory narratives. The same is true of ancient writings like the *Histories*, for example, where Herodotus notes that “Indians in Asia” who “dwell farthest to the east and closest to the sunrise” gather great quantities of gold.¹⁶⁷ His descriptions are highly comparative in nature, suggesting that distant lands hold great wealth, in contrast to those that are more familiar and closer to home.¹⁶⁸ This narrative is also reinforced by the accounts of ancient prospectors who traveled into Asia Minor, specifically the area of Scythia, and told tales of griffins who were said to guard large caches of gold in the lands of the East.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. 94.

¹⁶⁷ Herodotus 256; bk. 3 ch. 98.

¹⁶⁸ Romm 38.

¹⁶⁹ Mayor 22-23.

Other scholars have also noted this connection. For instance, John Kuo Wei Tchen, in *New York Before Chinatown*, describes the fascination with Chinese goods throughout the period of the American Revolution. He relates that items like porcelain and silk were highly prized as exotic symbols of wealth, and were part of a desirable aesthetic sensibility, due in large part to their association with elite culture.¹⁷⁰ Caroline Frank affirms this notion, pointing out that the consumption of commodities, like pottery, was grounded in the practice of “an obscuring of the people and the place behind, or contained within the prized commodity,” often out of anxiety about the economic status of America itself, and that these decorative objects were appropriated for use by white consumers, who were largely ignorant about the cultural context of their production.¹⁷¹ Further, economist Andre Gunder Frank points out that Asia was once the focal point of the world economy, long before Europe, noting that the wealth of China and South Asia were largely seen as the envy of the world before 1800.¹⁷² This European obsession with procuring the treasures of Asia is part of an established literary and historical tradition that stretches back into the ancient world.

The accounts by Marco Polo and John Mandeville, as well as those found in ancient texts, were an important source of information for explorers in the fifteenth century.¹⁷³ Christopher Columbus, for example, turned to these works as he sought to locate an oceanic passage to Asia. Driven by the stories of riches that had long circulated within Western culture, he believed that he could reach China and Japan

¹⁷⁰ Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown* 6.

¹⁷¹ Frank 12-13.

¹⁷² Gunder Frank 96.

¹⁷³ Romm 6.

by sailing west, thereby securing the rich deposits of gold that Marco Polo had reported in those countries.¹⁷⁴ As Paul Freeman notes,

By the time of Columbus, the astonishing wealth of Asia was accepted, entrancing, and widely mulled over. The frightening marvels of Asia were also still important and associated with exotic products, so that insofar as Columbus heard rumors of dog-headed humanoids or other “monstrous races,” he believed he was close to the spices and the gold of his dreams, but the classic marvels—monsters, snakes, rivers of sand, a land of perpetual darkness—tended to yield to stories that concentrated on the continent’s riches. The strangeness of the East became more a surrounding atmosphere for its wealth rather than the main narrative.¹⁷⁵

As a result, Columbus actively sought the presence of monsters during his expeditions and utilized them as markers, bodily signposts that indicated he was on the right track to India. The inability of explorers to locate these creatures of legend did not deter their efforts. In fact, it strengthened their resolve to find them, primarily because the construction of Asia as a land of monsters was so central to the European understanding of the region, that discarding it would have meant abandoning an entire ideological worldview.¹⁷⁶ While the sustained lack of evidence gradually compelled individuals to abandon these ancient ideas about the people of the East during the Renaissance, this longstanding framework did not go away completely, and instead, I argue, serves as the basis for much of how Asia and its peoples are understood today.¹⁷⁷

Throughout subsequent centuries, ideas about monstrosity continued to evolve, as the existence of these strange beings was understood through science, rather than myth, superstition, and religion. Instead, these creatures became

¹⁷⁴ Abulafia 24-25.

¹⁷⁵ Freeman 143.

¹⁷⁶ Tuan 85-86.

¹⁷⁷ Friedman, *Monstrous Races* 199.

subjects within popular culture itself, and as we shall discuss in the following chapter, were integrated into various forms of social entertainment, like the freak show. They were presented as natural curiosities that appealed to the public precisely because of their exotic nature. With the transition into the modern era, stories about monsters became fictional narratives designed to thrill and enthrall audiences. While it remained possible that the creatures of legend still existed in remote corners of the world, the prospect grew far less probable, and the traditional idea of the East as a land of monsters evolved along with this realization, transforming into a metaphorical figuration that describes the region's peoples.

In many respects, we can see this transformative understanding of monstrosity in the work of Lafcadio Hearn, an American journalist known for his books, *In Ghostly Japan* and *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*. In them, he compiled traditional folk tales and oral accounts of weird happenings throughout Japan, presenting the country, its people, and its culture as exotic and mysterious for the amusement of American readers. While Hearn did not exaggerate or embellish any of the stories featured in his books, his selection of tales reveals a great deal about his mindset in the process of gathering these narratives. The majority of the stories focus primarily on the culture of *yokai*, which will be discussed in length in the fourth chapter, or the spiritual nature of Japan, presenting it as a liminal space, where beings from this life are likely to encounter those of the next, and where humans coexist alongside monsters, like *yurei*, or hostile spirits, like the *yuki-onna* and *mujina*, in spaces of nature, like forests, mountains, and lakes.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Hearn 75, 109.

Interestingly, the book is primarily geared toward entertainment, exposing readers to the “authentically “strange culture of the Japanese, but it also serves a pedagogical function. The majority of the stories are set in the period before modernization, giving the impression that the nation is feudal, deeply traditional, and that located at the heart of Japanese identity is an undefinable and mysterious characteristic that can only be conveyed through folk tales. As a singular piece of Japanese culture presented to a foreign audience that had very little knowledge about the differences between the countries of Asia, books like these significantly influenced the public perception of Japan in the United States, much like the *Arabian Nights* shaped perceptions of the Orient in Europe. Thus, rather than simply being about Japanese culture, these stories became a signifier of the Japanese themselves, helping to establish the idea that Japan is a fantastic space where unexplainable events occur, and where supernatural beings exist alongside humans, within the American imagination.

CHAPTER TWO: YELLOW PERILS: THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE (MONSTROUS)

ASIAN BODY IN THE AMERICAN CULTURAL IMAGINATION

“Four hundred million indefatigable workers (deft, intelligent, and unafraid to die), aroused and rejuvenescent, managed and guided by forty-five million additional human beings who are splendid fighting animals, scientific and modern, constitute that menace to the Western world which has been well named the ‘Yellow Peril.’” ~ Jack London

“Remember, in my day, drawing an Asian was drawing Fu Manchu—that’s the only Asians they knew. The Asians were wily...” ~ Jack Kirby

I. Introduction

“Who...Or What...Is He??!” asks the cover of the first issue of *Yellow Claw*, a short-lived series published in 1956 by Atlas Comics (see fig. 4). It depicts a giant, Fu-Manchu-like character, the Yellow Claw, a “sinister ancient Oriental mystic who had come out of the interior of China bent on a program of world conquest,” towering over the skyline of New York City, his clawed, bony hand outstretched toward the reader and an array of military men, civilians, and government agents in the foreground of the image. In the issue itself, the Chinese Communist High Command, in an effort to advance their “campaign of world domination,” seeks out a mythic individual known as the Yellow Claw to help them deal with the American fleet in the Formosa straits. Journeying deep into the foothills of the Tibetan Alps, a

search party led by General Sung locates the mystic, who humors their wishes, demonstrating his powers of mind control and ability to gaze into the future. They enlist his aid, but as they leave, confident in their future victory, the face of the Yellow Claw displays a sinister grin, he arches his hands together, and declares, “No, General Sung! You are wrong! One rule does not mean your rule...communist rule. It means **my** rule! One day, the whole world will be ruled by the Yellow Claw!”¹⁷⁹

Over the course of the series’ four-issue run, the villain engages in battles of wit and strategy against his nemesis, Jimmy Woo, a Chinese American FBI agent who is widely considered to be one of the first Asian American heroes within the medium. Repeatedly thwarting the Yellow Claw’s machinations, and covertly assisted by the villain’s own niece, Suwan, Woo is depicted as a loyal, honest American, who simply happens to be Chinese, which gives him the ability to move back and forth between Western society and the shadowy, crime-ridden enclaves of Chinatown. As the series goes on, the Yellow Claw himself becomes less threatening and more comical. While part of this is attributable to Woo’s presence, which essentially neutralizes him as a viable threat, the plans that the villain concocts grow more outlandish with each issue. By the end of the series, the Yellow Claw’s machinations involved everything from building a robot patterned after a Chinese giant to convince Malaysians to wage war against the United States to manipulating an alien named, UFO, the Lightning Man, to destroy the American military presence in the South Pacific.

¹⁷⁹ Maneely, et al., 136.

In many respects, the ideas behind Yellow Claw, a character who still exists within the Marvel Universe today, embody the notion of the Yellow Peril, a phrase popularized in America by Jack London, representative of a race-based fear of the East, which assumes that the people of Asia harbor designs of world domination and pose an imminent threat to the continued existence and advancement of Western civilization.¹⁸⁰ Yellow Claw, like Fu Manchu and other Asian villains before—and after—him, is the product of an archetype grounded in a particular understanding of the Asian body that encapsulates and is founded upon elements from theoretical and historical understandings about monstrosity. The numerous inconsistencies, contradictions, mismatched attributes, and confused motivations that define these characters help to reveal more about our own perspective, particularly our cultural understanding of Asia and its people, than anything else.

This chapter argues that for Americans, the Asian body, like that of the monster, is a vessel for expressing cultural anxieties over critical issues, like race, class, gender, and sexuality. Its continued, visible yet somewhat ephemeral, presence is an incessant, haunting reminder of the unresolved historical tensions and unsettling contradictions that shape American society. Despite pronouncements to the contrary, the anxieties encapsulated by the Asian body simmer beneath the seemingly peaceful surface of culture, threatening to destabilize the status quo at any moment through challenges to hegemonic notions of normality, citizenship, and belonging. This is possible because the Asian body occupies a space where the self meets the other, and where seemingly incompatible features exist in unison,

¹⁸⁰ F. Wu 13.

reflecting back and revealing alternate modes of existence that threaten the dominant principles of American national culture.

At the core of the Asian body is an intense and pervasive liminality, defined by contradiction, which threatens to destabilize categorical and classificatory regimes, and undermine the core assumptions that constitute the foundation of American society. The monstrous nature of the Asian body is derived from its defiance of established normality, existing between categories, resisting simple classification, and posing alternate modes of existence and comprehension. The fear and anxiety generated by this vessel is not attributable to the threat of physical violence, despite what we are presented with in popular culture, but rather, due to the chaos and havoc that it threatens to wreak on our collective worldview. It calls into question the myths and assumptions that define the lives and regulate the conduct of ordinary Americans, challenging the status quo and representing the possibilities for radical social change through what Jeffrey Jerome Cohen dubs “category crisis.”¹⁸¹

The purpose of this chapter then, is to put the theory and history behind monstrosity discussed in the previous chapter into practice, by examining how these forces affect the process of representation and the American understanding of the Asian body. Here, we also bridge the gap between Europe and the United States, showing how traditional ideas about monsters were translated, adapted, and incorporated into American culture. We examine how this intellectual tradition was utilized for the purpose of defining Asian populations, and how it specifically

¹⁸¹ Cohen, *Monster Theory* 6.

affected the representation of the Japanese throughout the early part of the twentieth-century.

We begin by exploring the meaning of the Asian body in American society, elaborating on the ideas presented in this introduction, showing precisely how it encapsulates and represents the notion of monstrosity presented in the previous chapter. Specifically, we highlight its subversivity and the transformative potential embodied by its key features of liminality and contradiction. To explore the origin of these features, we then turn to the nineteenth century, charting how medical monstrosity and pseudo sciences like teratology, the study of monsters, evolve into a racialized logic, promoted and perpetuated throughout popular print and visual culture, specifically the institution of the freak show. We see how ancient ideas about monsters and foreign lands are embodied and understood through modern “wonders” like the Siamese twins, Chang and Eng Bunker. Finally, we analyze how these ideas were incorporated into the general panethnic understanding of Asian populations and the popular discourse surrounding the highly charged issue of Chinese, and later Japanese, immigration, which manifested culturally in the idea of the Yellow Peril.

II. The Construction of the Asian Body in American Culture

The American understanding of the Asian body is founded on a multiplicity of contradictions and conflicting ideas. Indeed, the variety of identities attached to Asian populations within the United States run the proverbial gamut, and encompass a wide breadth of the cultural landscape. Consider that in America, Asians are simultaneously: civilized, yet backward; traditional, but modern;

masculine, yet feminine; domestic, but alien; morally degenerate, yet honorable and admirable; threatening, but placid; desirable, yet repellant; like “us,” but different. Further, the Asian body seemingly falls outside established racial schemes of black and white, existing instead in ambiguous shades of yellow and brown. To this extent, it defies classification and categorization, refusing to comply with dominant notions of race, class, and gender typically associated with people of color in the United States. Recognizing this, we ask how we reconcile these seemingly incompatible parts, and consider the source that many of these ideas originate from. Interrogating this subject historically, we find that they share a monstrous origin, at least part of which is uniquely American in nature.

As Lisa Lowe observes, contradiction is a core element of the individual and collective identities of Asian Americans in the United States.¹⁸² Born out of economic, diplomatic, and cultural interaction with Asia and historical engagement with the political processes, particularly with Chinese immigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, she writes that Asians have simultaneously been placed “within’ the U.S. nation-state, its workplaces, and its markets, yet linguistically, culturally, and racially marked Asians as ‘foreign’ and ‘outside’ the national polity.”¹⁸³ As such, the term “Asian American” itself functions as a signifier of contradiction, gesturing toward the perceived incompatibility between the Asian body and the hegemonic ideals of the cultural, economic, and political spheres in the United States.

¹⁸² Lowe 56-57.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.* 8.

Similarly, Gary Okihiro considers the position of the Asian body in terms of race and ethnicity, examining the formation of “yellow” as an intermediary, undefined position between the established binary of black and white. He notes, “By seeing only black and white, the presence and absence of all color, whites render Asians, American Indians, and Latinos invisible, ignoring the gradations and complexities of the full spectrum between racial poles.”¹⁸⁴ While Okihiro primarily interrogates this perspective from an activist standpoint, arguing for cooperation amongst oppressed peoples, others like Frank Wu argue that Asian Americans occupy an ambiguous position within the racial spectrum, observing that at different times, they are conceptualized and understood as both black and white.¹⁸⁵ Due to their status in this undefined, shifting middle ground, Wu writes that “Asian Americans fall outside the scope of even ‘other.’”¹⁸⁶

Indeed, there have been numerous instances in which the ethnic and racial status of Asian Americans has been in legal dispute. Famously, Takao Ozawa, a Japanese national, filed for citizenship in the 1922 Supreme Court case, *Takao Ozawa v. United States*, arguing that Asians should be legally classified as “white,” and therefore qualify for naturalization.¹⁸⁷ The court rejected his claims, stating that only Caucasians could be considered white, and that Asians fell outside the definition and spectrum of whiteness. In fact, this exclusionary process was one of the key factors in the early development of Japanese American identity, as immigrants were forced to articulate new forms of national belonging through their

¹⁸⁴ Okihiro 62.

¹⁸⁵ F. Wu 18-21.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 26.

¹⁸⁷ Okihiro 61.

cultural heritage in response to institutional discrimination.¹⁸⁸ Similarly, until 1923 many South Asians were considered legally “white” because they did not fit into any other racial category.¹⁸⁹ In different parts of the country throughout the nineteenth century, Chinese immigrants were classified as white, Chinese, and even black, as various states and localities struggled to define individuals who were neither black nor white.¹⁹⁰

Sabine Doran, in her rumination of the color yellow and its meaning in European and American culture, observes that it has traditionally been associated with ambiguity and stigma, often applied not only to marginalized populations, like Asians and Jews, but also to unsavory forms of popular culture, such as yellow books and yellow journalism. However, of particular note is the contradictory nature of classic associations with the color, for as Doran writes, “Historically, in Western culture, yellow is the color of light, illumination, enlightenment, and gold (absolute value), but it is also the color of death, decay, and excrement (a figure of negativity). Thus, unlike the dialectical colors of black and white, yellow contains opposition within itself.”¹⁹¹

Thus, as a site of intense cultural contradiction, the Asian body largely functions as a signifier of liminality within American society. It occupies the undefined middle ground, frequently defying easy classification and categorization, in almost every respect to race, class, gender, and sexuality. Consider, for example, the paradoxical nature of many common stereotypes about Asians: they are

¹⁸⁸ Azuma 14.

¹⁸⁹ Ngai 38.

¹⁹⁰ Okihiro 53.

¹⁹¹ Doran 6.

traditional, yet modern; threatening and masculine, but docile and feminine; they are disciplined hardworkers, yet also childlike and lazy; at times they are bestial and inhuman, but look just like us; and finally, they are the unassimilable foreigner, yet also the quintessential model minority. Thus emerges a deep and abiding liminality, which marks the Asian body as undefinable, something belonging neither here nor there, shaped and contained by various conflicting ideas. Recognizing this, the question then becomes one of how we make sense of these seemingly contradictory pairings that embody the political and economic anxieties that surround the presence of Asians within American culture and society.

In many respects, the Asian body, like that of the monster, functions as what Judith Halberstam calls, a “meaning machine,” a kind of technology which, as she notes, “can represent gender, race, nationality, class, and sexuality in one body.”¹⁹² In doing so, they have the ability to break down divisions of identity and challenge, disrupt, and unsettle basic assumptions that reinforce the status quo. Thus, the threat posed by the monstrous body is precisely that it attacks the foundation of knowledge itself, undermining the categories that we use to understand the world. As Dana Oswald observes,

Just like the monstrous body, the human body that does not fit neatly into existing categories of gender, sex, and sexuality not only disrupts the social and sexual order, it reveals the gaps and flaws in the architecture of society. These bodies—like acts of erasure—destroy something that was, but also create something new.¹⁹³

Indeed, while these classifications have traditionally been used to marginalize Asian Americans, along with other people of color by ignoring the nuances and

¹⁹² Halberstam 21-22.

¹⁹³ Oswald 207.

ambiguities of the racial spectrum, they also allow these individuals to, as Lisa Lowe notes, serve as agents of “political change, cultural expression, and political transformation,” precisely because their social and cultural contributions disrupt national identity, revealing its inconsistencies and its relationship to processes of historical “dislocation.”¹⁹⁴ By encompassing both extremes of binary categorization, the Asian body simultaneously incorporates and rejects all attempts at definition, marking it as truly monstrous.

III. Wonders and Curiosities: Teratology, Siamese Twins, and the Culture of the Freak Show

Much of this historical association between the Asian body and monstrosity within the United States, in both a physical and moral sense, can potentially be traced back to the public display of natural curiosities and genetic variation through the institution of the freak show. While religious and scientific ideas about the monstrous nature of the East and its peoples circulated throughout Europe for centuries, many of these core ideas were altered and adapted in their migration to the United States, localized and refined specifically as a result of Americans’ interaction with Asian populations, in the form of immigrants and through cultural and entertainment institutions like the freak show. The presentation of the monstrous, racialized body in these public venues, then, helped to popularize longstanding ideas about Asians in American culture, demonstrating that even in close proximity they remained perpetually foreign and different.

Historically, the freak show is rooted in teratology, the study of monstrosity, primarily in the form of physical abnormality and genetic variation. Human

¹⁹⁴ Lowe 9.

curiosities were first exhibited as part of museums as early as the eighteenth century, presented as specimens of other races in an attempt to help understand humanity's place in relation to the rest of the natural world.¹⁹⁵ Others, like those born with congenital abnormalities, represented unique examples of evolutionary and biological diversity, whose existence taxonomically served to establish the edges of humanity. As early as the eighteenth century, scholars like Carl Linnaeus had sought to demystify such monstrosity, placing it within a strict scientific paradigm and understanding it in terms of natural error rather than the supernatural.¹⁹⁶ Throughout this period, institutions like museums were tasked with providing the public about factual information about biological diversity, a goal that was almost immediately undercut by the rise of P.T. Barnum's American Museum in 1841, and his subsequent traveling circus, Barnum's Grand Scientific and Musical Theatre.¹⁹⁷

While various individuals of Asian descent were featured in sideshow attractions across the United States, like Chinese giants, perhaps the most famous were Chang and Eng Bunker, the famed Siamese twins. The pair were among the first performers with a national audience, having toured across the country starting in the late 1820s, and being renowned as the famed "Siamese Twins."¹⁹⁸ Initially, they were presented as intensely foreign, fitting into what Robert Bogdan dubs, the "exotic mode," wherein "Non-Western people with demonstrable physical differences—those who were very tall, very short, without arms and legs, Siamese

¹⁹⁵ Bogdan 29; Durbach 39.

¹⁹⁶ Asma 125.

¹⁹⁷ Bogdan 32, Asma 136.

¹⁹⁸ Bogdan 201.

twins, and so on—were exhibited within the exotic motif through emphasis of their anomalies as well as their ‘strange ways.’”¹⁹⁹ However, by the end of their career they appeared as domesticated and respectable citizens, dressed in fine western attire and often appearing in photographs with their family by their side.

The intense public interest in Chang and Eng was built around their identity as a dual curiosity, both as a racial other and as a conjoined twin. Questions swirled about how they managed to exist as part of a single entity, ideas which were further complicated by their exotic racial identities.²⁰⁰ Much of this appeal extends back beyond just the American context, for as Michel Foucault observes, conjoined twins have long been a subject of fascination and symbol of the monstrous other. He writes,

The form of monstrosity especially privileged during the Renaissance, both in literature generally and in medical, legal, and religious books was Siamese twins. The one who is two and the two who are one. In analyses at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries we almost always, or at least regularly, come across to a curious reference to an individual who has one head and two bodies.²⁰¹

However, Chang and Eng complicated this tradition, precisely because their condition played into the notion of racial and cultural difference made physical. While early modern scholars like Ambroise Pare had been fascinated by the subject of monstrous births and genetic abnormality, which they believed were due to imbalances in the mother’s womb during fetal development, Chang and Eng, along with their synonymous association with their condition, suggested to Americans that their identity was informed as much by the fact that they were “Siamese” as

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. 107.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. 201.

²⁰¹ Foucault 66.

their unique biology.²⁰² Appearing in the venue of the freak show, which had previously served as an ethnographic vehicle for exposing audiences to foreign people and cultures, the twins' abnormal body effectively functioned as a signifier for Asian identity, popularizing its association with monstrosity in the American cultural imagination.

Having first appeared in the United States during the first wave of Chinese immigration, there is little doubt that Chang and Eng Bunker effectively served as liminal cultural figures, which connected longstanding associations between the East and monstrosity, with the migration of specific Asian populations to America, like the Chinese. No longer were monsters mysterious, unseen beings on the geographical periphery; rather, they were here in America, appearing as natural curiosities, whether in the form of sideshow freaks or strangely dressed foreigners. As Robert G. Lee observes, the migration of large numbers of Chinese to California were seen as a "boundary crisis," which resulted in the reconfiguration of America's envisioned relationship with East Asia.²⁰³ Indeed, when Chang and Eng took control of their own management and presented themselves as respectable, assimilated Americans with wives and families, it blurred these boundaries and categories even further, for as Allison Pingree observes, "Even as the *symbol* of the twins was used to support certain dominant values, their literal *bodies* presented other puzzles and contradictions for the country to solve—ones that, ironically, undermined many of those same norms."²⁰⁴

²⁰² Pare 56.

²⁰³ Lee 31.

²⁰⁴ Pingree 95.

Traditional Western ideas about Asian monstrosity, coupled with popular images of Siamese twins and other exotic, foreign figures, likely fed into the discourse surrounding Chinese immigrants as agents of the Yellow Peril throughout nineteenth century American culture. As noted in the previous chapter, this racial narrative is founded on the fear of a hostile and invasive Asian population, which seeks the destruction of Western civilization through imperial conquest. The notion of the Yellow Peril is historically contingent, as various ethnic groups, including the Chinese, Japanese and Koreans, have been associated with it in the American imaginary at different points in time. While the concept of the Yellow Peril has existed for centuries, the origins of the phrase itself are rooted in the visual culture of the nineteenth century, as it derives from an 1895 painting of the same name commissioned by Kaiser Wilhelm II, which depicts an oncoming clash of civilizations between the East and the West. In it, the religious icons of Europe, led by an angel with a flaming sword, a shining cross in the skies above them, prepare to do battle against a monstrous foe from the East, symbolized by the visage of the Buddha riding atop a dragon, with dark storm clouds heralding his arrival.²⁰⁵ At the bottom of the image, a caption reads, “Nations of Europe: Join in defense of your faith and your home” (see fig. 5).

While clearly hyperbolic, elements of this imagery are also present within popular American publications from the same period, like newspapers and magazines. Often presented in terms of foreign relations, editorial cartoons depicted China itself as a threatening, monstrous entity, despite its victimization at the hand

²⁰⁵ Lye 22; Thompson 1.

of Western powers, and immigrants as sinister agents of crime, disease, economic malfeasance, and racial pollution which threatened the sovereignty of the United States. For example, an illustration from the 1870s featured in *The Wasp* depicts a dehumanized, monstrous-looking Chinese immigrant with a wrinkled brow and multiple arms engaging in numerous tasks, like textile production, the rolling of tobacco, the building of shoes, and construction, while able-bodied white Americans stand unemployed and disheartened outside the building.²⁰⁶ At the top of the image, one of the immigrant's outstretched arms holds a bag of money labeled, "earnings," which he is sending back to China (see fig. 6). Similarly, the August 5, 1899 edition of *Harper's Weekly* depicts an unknowing Uncle Sam crouching toward an open set of ornate, gilded doors decorated by sculptures of twin dragons above it and the image of a demon, with canons and bayonets pointed toward him (See fig. 7).²⁰⁷

Clearly, this signifies the trepidation among cultural elites about expanding commercial trade with China, but it also serves as an example of the common association between the Chinese and dragons in American visual culture. While China reveres them as symbols of benevolence, good fortune, and imperial might, the creature has an entirely different meaning within the European context.²⁰⁸ In the Western cultural tradition, dragons are symbols of danger and destruction, which often guard hordes of treasure and, if awakened from their slumber, lay siege to castles and countrysides.²⁰⁹ Put simply, in Europe, the dragon is a creature, often of Eastern or distant origin, that must be slain by mighty heroes to ensure the survival

²⁰⁶ Choy 88-89.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. 67.

²⁰⁸ Frank 16-17.

²⁰⁹ Honegger 35.

of Western civilization, as in the story of St. George and the Dragon, or the poetic ballad of *Beowulf*, for example. Throughout the Middle Ages, dragons were also thought to be agents of the devil, further imbuing them with negative connotations.²¹⁰ Even today, the dragon is used as a metaphor for the dangerous, duplicitous, and alluring nature of the Asian body, as seen with the gendered stereotype of the Dragon Lady, or in the presentation of martial artists, like Bruce Lee, an icon of Asian masculinity, whose films frequently referenced these mythological creatures. While Chinese culture itself may be partially responsible for this link between itself and dragons in the Western mind—the writings of Marco Polo mention decorative reliefs encircling pillars in the palace of the Great Khan—such associations feed into a constellation of narratives that connect seemingly disparate elements like the monstrous races of the East, the fear of demonic, fire-breathing lizards, the threat of the Yellow Peril, and increasing rates of Asian immigration, transforming them into different faces of the same looming threat.²¹¹

Perhaps no figure in contemporary culture is linked to the concept of the Yellow Peril more than Fu Manchu, the devilish villain created by British novelist Sax Rohmer. Appearing as the central antagonist in more than a dozen novels from 1913 to 1959, the character became a multimedia sensation, featured in comic book, radio, film, and television adaptations, and influenced the creation of numerous other Asian villains in American print culture, including *Flash Gordon's* Ming the Merciless, the Iron Man villain, the Mandarin, and the Yellow Claw, who was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The character's inception marked the

²¹⁰ Chen 359.

²¹¹ Polo 101; bk. 1, ch. 57.

rise to prominence of the archetypal Asian villain within popular culture, which, in turn, largely served as the visual manifestation of anxieties over immigration and the fear of the Yellow Peril. The white protagonist of the Fu Manchu canon, Nayland Smith, famously describes the villain, stating,

Imagine a personal, tall, lean, and feline, high-shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a close-shaven skull, and long, magnetic eyes of the true cat-green. Invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race, accumulated in one giant intellect, with all the resources of science past and present, with all the resources, if you will, of a wealthy government—which, however, already has denied all knowledge of his existence. Imagine that awful being, and you have a mental picture of Dr. Fu-Manchu, the yellow peril incarnate in one man.²¹²

As the monstrous embodiment of the Yellow Peril, Fu Manchu, like the Asian body itself, is defined by contradiction and liminality. Drawing from this description by Rohmer, it is clear that he is a being trapped between competing elements of the human and the bestial, the ancient and the modern, and elements of the East and the West itself. Indeed, the threat he poses stems from the fact that he transcends categories, drawing his power from his identity as a member of an ancient society who also possesses the knowledge and modern scientific know-how of the West, and is able to use its greatest strength against it. Further, it is implied that he draws his power from established sources of evil, given the description, which compares his physical appearance to both Satan and cats, the latter being the common familiar of witches in European lore. Despite his considerable intellect, he is driven by his lust for power and conquest. Like the “entire Eastern race” he represents, he cannot be reasoned with, only vanquished, for as long as he lives his mad, monstrous ambition threatens the safety and security of Western civilization.

²¹² Rohmer 15.

Cultural constructions like Fu Manchu and the Yellow Peril were deployed to demonize Asian populations within the United States and deny their claims to humanity and citizenship during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They helped to solidify ideas surrounding the Asian body itself, particularly that immigrants constituted a threatening, silent invasion, and that they largely functioned as vessels for the culture of Asia itself, marking them on a biological level as unassimilable and eternally foreign. In short, they were monstrous, in both the American imagination and the lived reality of ordinary citizens. Monstrosity is where belief becomes the driver of reality, for as Scott Poole notes, “Belief and ideology, the social realities produced and reproduced by the images of the monster, turn into historical actions and events. It is not enough to call these beliefs metaphors when they shape actual historical behavior or act as anxious reminders of inhuman historical acts, a cultural memory of slaughter.”²¹³

IV. *Takao Ozawa v. United States* and Japanese America

“Who are comprehended within the phrase ‘free white persons?’” Justice George Sutherland rhetorically asked in the case of *Takao Ozawa v. U.S.*, in which the plaintiff, a Japanese national raised and educated in the United States, petitioned for citizenship on the basis that Japanese individuals fell under the purview of whiteness.²¹⁴ Writing on behalf of the majority, Sutherland declared that Ozawa was ineligible on the basis of race as an “alien” who was neither white, nor of “African descent.” While admitting that any standardized racial test was faulty at best, for skin color “differs greatly among members of the same race, even Anglo-Saxons,” he

²¹³ Poole 25.

²¹⁴ *Takao Ozawa v. United States*. 260 US 178. Supreme Court of the US. 1922.

strictly afforded the privileges of whiteness for those of the “Caucasian race.” He concluded, “The appellant, in the case now under consideration, however, is clearly of a race which is not Caucasian and therefore belongs entirely outside the zone on the negative side.”

This ruling, which was firmly grounded in biological and scientific notions of race, drew attention to the liminal legal and social status of Asian immigrants in the United States. Sutherland himself noted that linking the category of “white” with “Caucasian” was problematic and that “controversies have arisen and will no doubt arise again in respect of the proper classification of individuals in border line cases.” This momentary recognition, in which the Justice himself acknowledged the difficulty in classifying Asian Americans in traditional racial schemas of black and white, helps us to understand how the Japanese, as agents of the contradiction and liminality at the heart of monstrosity, challenge existing categories and systems of classification in the United States.

To conclude this chapter, this section directly connects the ideas we have discussed to the history of Japanese immigration and elements of the Japanese American experience to highlight how the cultural and discursive traditions that informed institutions like the freak show, affected the reception of the Japanese in the United States. Here, we contextualize America’s relationship with Japan and the status of Japanese Americans throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and in the lead-up to World War II in order to establish the foundation for the cultural analysis in the following chapters. By considering the role of monstrosity in the construction of these notions about the Japanese, we get a better sense of why

they, and by extension all groups of Asian descent, were regarded as a threatening and invasive force, consisting of perpetual foreigners whose biology prevented their successful assimilation into American society, and how that notion posed various challenges to the legal system.

Japanese immigrants first entered the United States in significant numbers in the later 1880s. To most Americans, they were seen as a replacement pool of unskilled labor that could fill the gap left by restrictive immigration policies that limited the number of Chinese workers who could enter the United States. Indeed, the rise of anti-Chinese sentiment in America throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century is a key factor in explaining the increasing rate of Japanese immigration during this period. Legislatively, we can point to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which effectively ended all incoming immigration from China, and resulted in significant increases in the Japanese immigrant population from the 1890s into the early part of the twentieth century. As Ronald Takaki notes, within two decades of the passage of the Exclusion Act, the Japanese population in America had effectively surpassed that of the Chinese, numbering 72,257 to 71,531, respectively.²¹⁵

From the moment of their incorporation into the American economy, immigrant workers faced exploitative labor policies. They found that their employers treated them as expendable commodities, paying low wages and forcing them to labor in difficult, almost inhumane, conditions. Roger Daniels notes that by the turn of the century, Japanese laborers were regularly using tactics like strikes to

²¹⁵ Takaki 180.

protest their treatment and to organize for better wages.²¹⁶ In response to this resistance, business owners deployed a racial argument, contending that the presence of aggressive Japanese workers threatened the “racial purity” of the United States and the values of “Western Civilization.”²¹⁷ Many of the same arguments had also been made against Chinese workers in the nineteenth century, which illustrates how the Japanese, as an Asian “race,” were seen as an extension of those who came before them, contributing to the notion that they consisted of a Pan-Asian contingent.

Anti-Japanese sentiment during this period can also be read through the lens of the Yellow Peril. Erika Lee notes that the racist attitudes aimed at the Chinese, and later the Japanese, were “grounded in an American Orientalist ideology that homogenized Asia as one indistinguishable entity and positioned and defined the West and the East in diametrically opposite terms.”²¹⁸ Indeed, the notion the Yellow Peril constructed Asia as a singular, undefined entity, and evolved as a political tool to single out specific racial populations at various points in time. As Richard Thompson observes,

These fears of the economic competition of an industrialized Orient fluctuated rather curiously between the Chinese and the Japanese. In times of relative quiet on the international scene, economic yellow perilists warned mainly against Chinese industrial development. Moments of crisis such as the Sino-Japanese War, the Russo-Japanese War and the outbreak of World War I, however, caused the yellow perilists to shift their emphasis to the industrialization of Japan. Following the outbreak of World War I fear of China’s economic potential gave way almost entirely to fears of Japanese industrial development.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ R. Daniels 9.

²¹⁷ Ibid. 19.

²¹⁸ E. Lee 25.

²¹⁹ Thompson 33.

Having established a foothold in areas throughout the western United States, Japanese immigrants were seen by many as an invasive force that threatened to pollute the gene pool and undermine the sovereignty of the American government. As a result of these prejudices, Japanese immigrants, like other Asian ethnic groups, were effectively barred from obtaining citizenship by the American legal system. Denied the basic rights afforded to their white counterparts, they lacked the protections that would have allowed them to advance within American society, effectively rendering them powerless against institutional discrimination, economic exploitation, and localized racial hostility.

In writing after writing, the same themes were utilized as a justification for the mistreatment of the Japanese, all of which label them as an economic, sexual, and racial threat. For example, Montaville Flowers, writing in *The Japanese Conquest of American Opinion*, noted that equal standing under the law would give the Japanese “the right to mix his blood with any blood he chooses to mix it with. And that is a race problem, the impact of which may stagger if it does not at last prostrate the white race of our land.”²²⁰ At its core, this fear of miscegenation was founded on anxieties about the purity of both culture and race, and the belief that hybridity through interracial mixing with “aliens” would result in the creation of monstrous half-breeds, which Flowers notes is “a fatal condition in race mixture, for in the case of human beings it is utterly impossible to destroy the one hundred thousand abnormal, degenerate, and wretched beings that result from race crosses,

²²⁰ Flowers 52.

but each must be permitted to live and to reproduce his stock until its own degeneracy obliterates it from the earth.”²²¹

Ozawa, then, is important to consider precisely because the argument he presented before the court—that he should literally be classified as white because he was a fully assimilated American whose racial ancestry was closer to Caucasians than others like the Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese—illustrates the arbitrary construction of race within the United States, and how it has been used to purposely use to exclude those that fall outside the privileged category of whiteness.²²² As an individual situated squarely in the middle of racial extremes, *Ozawa* was truly monstrous—an individual who embodied the seemingly impossible condition of a fully assimilated Japanese immigrant—and as a result, his case challenged the placement of racial boundaries. It forced the court to resort to strict biological arguments about the criteria used to determine race, and in doing so revealed its institutional reliance on culturally constructed understandings rooted in the early modern era.

Further, the case highlights the degree to which the liminality of Asians problematized the relationship between science and established notions of race. The subversivity of *Ozawa*’s argument centered on the fact that it relied on the same scientific taxonomies of race used to exclude Asians from citizenship rights to undercut the idea that whiteness was a concrete, well-defined category. Through his challenge, he demonstrated that citizenship was being selectively provided to persons of a certain race, and that no matter how much an Asian individual

²²¹ *Ibid.* 213-214.

²²² F. Wu 94.

assimilated to American society, they would forever be excluded simply because of their national origin. By all accounts, Ozawa was as “white” as any American citizen. It was not enough that he had met all non-racial qualifications for citizenship, like attending American schools, speaking fluent English, being a practicing Christian, and residing in the United States for twenty-eight years.²²³ His challenge was seen as the exploitation of an existing loophole in federal law, created by ambiguity surrounding the term “free white,” and his status was determined simply by the fact that he was “clearly of a race which is not Caucasian.” In doing so, the justices essentially rejected the idea that assimilation was possible for Asian immigrants, playing into existing narratives that characterized the Japanese and Chinese as perpetual foreigners who were tied to their native countries through acculturation, socialization, and most importantly, biology.

Additionally, the weight that ancestry was given in the court’s decision gestures toward how it was seen as a reliable method of assessing race. In this way, it functions like the legal concept of blood quantum, designating the degree to which one is classified under a particular racial or ethnic identity. Both notions are grounded in the assumption that there is a universal, quantifiable measurement that can be found in an individual’s body, whether in the form of blood, appearance, or physicality. Much of this logic was predicated on the basis of pseudo sciences, like phrenology and eugenics, which promoted the idea that physical differences among those of different races could be used to determine an evolutionary hierarchy. Naturally, we recognize today that race itself is socially constructed, but by

²²³ Ibid. 94.

examining *Ozawa* in this way we see the obvious ideological assumptions that informed how the justices viewed the world. Their belief that physical, scientifically supported evidence justified the denial of basic rights to the Japanese can be traced back to the ethnological notions established by institutions like the freak show.

The Supreme Court's ruling effectively paved the way for the passage of the Immigration Act in 1924, which virtually eliminated all Asian immigration to the United States until well into the Second World War. While there were other challenges made by Asian immigrants to this racialized logic of citizenship, most notably in *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*, they were largely unsuccessful. Nevertheless, these cases highlight the degree to which defining Asian identity became a difficult enterprise, precisely because they did not fall into established categories of black or white. As individuals whose bodies exemplified the liminality and contradiction at the core of monstrosity, Japanese immigrants challenged existing notions of race and forced the legal system and society at large to adapt to their presence, often resulting in hostile responses and acts of repression.

This threat, coupled with the social anxieties surrounding their immigration to the United States, grew to an unprecedented level as military tensions with Japan increased. Seen from the American perspective as agents of an aggressive empire, these Japanese were effectively caught "between two empires," to use the words of Eiichiro Azuma, defined by their race and country of origin, despite being assimilated, Americanized immigrants, forced to articulate alternate modes of belonging in response to their institutional marginalization.²²⁴ As we shall see in the

²²⁴ Azuma 14.

following chapter, the core of Japanese identity in the American imaginary is also intimately connected to World War II, where the Japanese were introduced to the United States on a national scale within visual culture, particularly the medium of comic books, as fearsome, inhuman, monstrous enemies from the East whose very existence threatened American freedom and democracy.

CHAPTER THREE: ENEMIES REAL AND IMAGINED: THE MONSTROUS JAPANESE IN GOLDEN AGE COMIC BOOKS

“A Jap’s a Jap whether he’s an American citizen or not. I don’t want any of them.”
~Gen. John DeWitt

“Somebody asked me if we should have bombed Japan, a simple, ‘Yes, by all means, sir. Drop that fucker. Twice.’” ~ Captain Frank Ramsey, *Crimson Tide*

I. Introduction

“Wow—Look at all the funny men!” Rusty, the sidekick of the World War II superhero, the Defender, remarks.

“Not funny,” his partner replies. “Just small and brown. In the East, they refer to them as Japs!”²²⁵

This story, appearing in the first issue of *U.S.A. Comics*, a series produced by Timely Publications in August 1941, features the heroic Defender invading the pirate ship of the villainous Dame Kackle, who he believes is responsible for transporting illegal Japanese immigrants into the United States, with the implication being that these individuals are spies who pose a threat to national security.

²²⁵ Shores, et al, *U.S.A. Comics Masterworks* 1: 9.

Such nationalistic fare was commonplace in comic books produced during the Golden Age (1938-1955), particularly during World War II. While the medium had existed for a number of years prior to America's entrance into the war, the attack on Pearl Harbor by Japanese forces fundamentally altered the social, cultural, and political function of comic books, largely transforming them from materials that promoted escapism with tales of larger-than-life heroes and themes of social justice into jingoistic propaganda that not only reinforced the larger political impetus for the war, but also defined the enemy for young readers, often through the use of vicious, and often racist, visual representations. The comic book industry, driven by a series of different factors, introduced the Japanese enemy to the American people as they saw them: monsters.

This chapter explores the roots of the contemporary association of monstrosity with Japanese identity, locating it specifically in the visual culture of World War II. It argues that the monstrous depictions of the Japanese found in the comics of this period are part of a much larger representational process, through which this group was essentially created and defined during the war as a distinct racial category in the American social and cultural imagination. Prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese had been a constituent part of a pan-Asian ethnic identity, which had largely been constructed around the Chinese, a group that had a much longer historical presence in the United States. However, with the onset of the Pacific War and as a matter of political necessity, specifically the need to distinguish the "good" Chinese from the "bad" Japanese, we see the emergence of Japan as a

separate and distinct entity in American culture, and subsequently within the larger national consciousness.

Additionally, World War II functions as the inception point for this discussion because it marks the moment at which the Japanese rose to the forefront of the American consciousness, along with the simultaneous development of the comic book into the dominant form of working class visual culture in the United States. Here, we are concerned with how the core of Japanese identity within the American imagination is intimately linked to the onset of the war and the bombing of Pearl Harbor. More than anything else, these events produced the image of the Japanese as monstrous, subhuman creatures from a distant far eastern land within visual culture that not only threatened the physical wellbeing of ordinary Americans, but our very way of life with their militaristic and backward nature.

Furthermore, it speaks to the alignment of the industry's interests with those of the government throughout the length of the war, specifically touching on how monstrosity was used as a representational force in service of the state to define the Japanese as vile, hate-filled, immoral, inhuman creatures whose very existence threatened the core of American society. By tracking this development within the working class visual culture of the late 1930s and 1940s, I show that it is due in large part to these materials that the events of World War II continue to define Japanese identity in American society. From their inception as enemies of the state to the present, the use of monstrosity has played a primary role in shaping this discourse surrounding the Japanese.

To support this argument, I examine the origins of the comic book industry to show not only how these materials are central to my thesis, but also to illustrate the factors that led to their rise as one of the dominant cultural mediums of the 1930s and 1940s. Furthermore, I interrogate the representations of the Japanese found in comic books and investigate their source, namely the relationship between individual creators, publishers, and departments within the United States Government.

The analysis in this chapter primarily focuses on the comic books produced by the most popular publishers of the era, including D.C. Comics, Timely Publications, Fawcett Publications, Quality Comics, and Lev Gleason Publications.²²⁶ For the most part, the content of these materials is representative of the majority of comic books produced during this era. Further, as successful publishers who sold millions of issues throughout World War II, these entities represent the largest publishers in the industry, and also the most influential. Lastly, many of the most recognizable characters that still exist today originated as icons for these companies, and while many have changed considerably since their inception in the 1930s and 1940s, it is important to highlight their origins and the role they played throughout the Great Depression and the Second World War.

²²⁶ D.C. Comics and Timely Publications are sometimes referred to by other names throughout this study. D.C., short for Detective Comics Inc., was also known as National Publications in the years leading up to the start of the Golden Age. Conversely, Timely Publications changed its name twice throughout its history, first to Atlas Publications in the early 1950s, then to Marvel Comics in 1961.

II. The Golden Age of American Comic Books

For many, comic books are synonymous with superheroes clad in brightly colored costumes fighting villains—aliens, monsters, and other menaces. These narratives are thought to be simplistic and straightforward, supported by cliché dialogue and crude, unrefined drawings. Printed on cheap paper using only the most basic techniques, these materials are ephemera, to be read once, then thrown away and forgotten. In large part, these perceptions about the medium and its readers were established early on, during the Golden Age of American comic books—the primary focus of this chapter and the next—a time when millions of individuals across the country flocked to newsstands every month to purchase the newest issues featuring superheroes, like Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman. For the most part, comic books produced during this period were crude, simplistic, and cheap, designed particularly for the enjoyment of Depression-era youth. However, there are also many deviations from this stereotype, additional layers of complexity, and historical context that need to be understood in order to fully highlight the importance and larger impact of comic books on American popular culture.

Comic books were one of the dominant forms of popular entertainment from the 1930s to the 1950s. In many respects, they were positioned between the mediums of radio and film, playing to the imagination of readers, while still presenting the narrative action through cartoon depictions. Printed and sold in the millions, they were consumed by individuals of all ages, races, genders, religions, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The idea that comic books are predominantly a child's medium is largely a myth created and perpetuated by critics of mass culture

in the postwar era. In fact, for most of the Golden Age, especially during World War II and the Korean War, a significant number of comic books, perhaps even the majority, were sold to enlisted personnel at military Post Exchanges, or PXs.²²⁷ Many of these soldiers were young men, and hardly the children that we typically envision when considering the primary audience for the medium. Indeed, one of the reasons for the wide variety of genres within comic books has to do with the diverse audience they were designed to appeal to.²²⁸ In a time before television, printed ephemera like comics offered something for everyone, which explains their wide-ranging mass appeal.

The modern iteration of the form first emerged in 1934 with the publication of *Famous Funnies* by the Eastern Color Printing Company.²²⁹ The book, which featured reprints of popular newspaper strips in collected form, sold for ten cents and was sixty-eight pages in length. It wasn't until the following year, in 1935, that new material began to be incorporated into these publications. This change was caused by a number of factors, including a lack of readily available material for publication and the high demand by audiences for a greater number of comic books. The first of these series, *New Fun Comics*, was published by National Publications or D.C., and firmly established the anthology format that would dominate the era, offering readers a printed, 64-page package that contained multiple stories for an

²²⁷ Savage 11.

²²⁸ William Savage argues that the readership of comic books, particularly servicemen, contributed to their changing composition throughout the World War II years. He notes that by 1945, their stories and drawings developed a greater sexual orientation, often involving scantily clad women being held hostage by foreign villains who exemplified the threat of rape and other forms of sexual violence. 12.

²²⁹ B. Wright 3-4,

affordable price. During the earliest years of the industry, many publishers did not have access to staff writers or artists, and instead relied on newspaper syndicates, and later, specialized “shops” for their material.²³⁰

The comic book medium itself and the genres it featured originated from a variety of popular sources. Many scholars link comics to a long history of printed ephemera in American and European culture, particularly to nineteenth century “Penny Dreadfuls” in Britain, and later, dime novels published around the turn of the century.²³¹ However, a more direct evolutionary line can be traced from comic books to the pulps, popular magazines featuring works of short fiction that were sold in large numbers primarily throughout the 1920s and 30s. Jim Steranko, in his seminal *History of Comics*, contends that many of the kinds of characters and generic tropes that later appeared in comic originated in the pages of pulp fiction.²³² He argues that masked detectives like The Shadow and adventurers like Doc Savage were prototypes for many of the earliest comic book superheroes. Other characters that appeared in popular newspaper strips, like Dick Tracy, Flash Gordon, Tarzan, and The Phantom, also influenced the tone and content of early comics, as many illustrators strove to emulate not only the style of the artists they admired, but also to replicate their success as well.²³³

Superman, the original superhero, was introduced in the first issue of *Action Comics*, published in June of 1938 by D.C. Comics (see fig. 8). While the character was firmly grounded in the literary tradition of adventure stories and science fiction,

²³⁰ B. Wright 4-6.

²³¹ Beck, “The Great Heroes Were All Losers” 88.

²³² Steranko, *History of Comics* 1: 14, 33-35.

²³³ B. Wright 3.

his success was far from certain early on. In fact, the creators of the hero, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, a young writer and artist team from Cleveland, Ohio, had struggled to sell the strip for months before, having been rejected by multiple publishers until the feature was finally sold to Harry Donenfeld and Jack Liebowitz's Detective Comics, Inc. for \$130.²³⁴ Originally, the publishers were cautious, only printing 200,000 copies of each issue.²³⁵ But soon, as the sales numbers rolled in, they realized that they had an instant hit on their hands, and increased the run significantly. By the seventh issue, *Action Comics* was selling more than 500,000 copies a month, and after the eleventh, Superman was always featured on the cover as the series' primary attraction.²³⁶ By that time, issues of *Action*, which featured one Superman story, were selling 900,000 copies per month, while the character's solo book, which debuted in 1939, sold 1.3 million copies per issue.²³⁷ The success of the character spawned a host of imitators, both at D.C. and competing publishers, and established superheroes as the dominant genre of the comic book medium. For its part, D.C. Comics became the industry leader throughout much of the Golden Age, due in no small part to its ownership of the Superman property.

It is impossible to overstate the enormity of the comic book readership throughout this period. Today, we live in an era where newspapers struggle for survival, print is considered a dying medium, and when even the bestselling comic

²³⁴ Daniels, *Superman* 30-31; Simon and Simon 13.

²³⁵ B. Wright 9.

²³⁶ B. Wright 9; Daniels *Superman* 35.

²³⁷ B. Wright 13.

book series rarely surpass the 175,000 mark.²³⁸ However, at the time of Superman's debut, the average comic book sold between 200,000 and 400,000 copies per issue.²³⁹ In 1941, there were 30 different publishers, printing 150 different titles, which sold approximately 15 million copies a year.²⁴⁰ Only two years later, in 1943, the number of published titles had jumped to 500, with each selling an average of 400,000 copies.²⁴¹ In total, more than 25 million comic books were sold that year, with an estimated readership of 60 million. Considering that these numbers were being generated in the face of various production limitations, like paper shortages and the continual loss of writers and artists to the military draft, the sales of comic books during this period were nothing short of astounding. As one might imagine, from the late 1930s to the early 1950s D.C. Comics was the top publisher in the industry, largely due to the success of Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman, with Fawcett Publications, who printed the popular Captain Marvel books, as their largest competitor.²⁴² Even as early as 1941, D.C. Comics' series comprised 11 percent of titles on the shelves, and 35 percent of all comics sold.²⁴³ Companies like Timely Publications, Quality Comics, MLJ Magazines, the American Comics Group, and a variety of others, which sold comic books in the millions per year, were still considered smaller, lower-tier operations.

²³⁸ Diamond Comic Distributors' monthly sales data dating back to Jan. 1995 is available at The Comic Chronicles website: <www.comichron.com>.

²³⁹ B. Wright 13.

²⁴⁰ Vance 4.

²⁴¹ Disbrow 6.

²⁴² Klein 42.

²⁴³ Murray, "Lost Comics Lore" 38.

At the same time, however, we should also keep in mind that accurate sales figures from this period are notoriously difficult to come by. As noted by the Market Research Company of America, readers frequently shared their comics with one another. According to their findings, only eight percent of adults and two percent of children threw away their comics, while everyone else passed their copies on to others to read. They note that, "If one considers that this applies also to copies that have been acquired from others, as well as those they themselves have purchased, one gets the impression of an endless chain of a constantly augmented stock of comics magazines in circulation."²⁴⁴ Thus, the number of copies sold did not accurately reflect how many people were actually consuming the material. Knowing this to be the case, many companies, like Fawcett, when composing their internal reviews, chose to inflate their figures to account for this phantom readership. Still, even when we take these factors into consideration, they do not discount the sheer quantity of comic books that were sold during the war, particularly if you consider the wide array of titles being produced by the numerous publishers of the era.

There are several reasons why audiences, particularly working class youth, were strongly attracted to comics. The first and most important reason is accessibility. As mentioned in the first chapter, comic books were written with a strict formula in mind, one that was often built on existing genres in other mediums, thereby providing readers with tales that were essentially "new takes" on familiar material. Further, the presentation of stories in comics catered to the least common denominator. During the mid-to-late 1930s when comic books first emerged, there

²⁴⁴ Hammerlink 79.

was still a sizable percentage of the American population that was functionally illiterate.²⁴⁵ By featuring stories with pictures supplemented by text, comic books presented narratives that could be understood and enjoyed by everyone, regardless of their economic status and education. Even the cost of these publications, initially set at ten cents, a price that would last into the early 1960s, was established with this market in mind.

In part, these narratives relied heavily on one's familiarity with a common language and knowledge of the established tropes in American culture. The visual cues and symbols in stories were often intertextual in nature, referencing current events and popular culture, like films and cartoons that the audience would have been familiar with. As a result of the limited space available to tell a complete story, one technique that was frequently utilized in early comic books was that of caricature, particularly of the racial variety. While highly distasteful today, such artistic approaches were seen as a standardized method to quickly communicate complex ideas to readers.²⁴⁶ The representation of various people, settings, and objects were conveyed through their dominant visual form, which assisted in the process of narrative immersion. Echoing this sentiment, artist C.C. Beck noted,

I cheerfully admit that I used stereotyped figures, just as I used standard letter forms when I transcribed [Bill] Parker's words to fit within cartoon balloons and captions. Parker wrote in Standard English, not in slang or street talk; neither of us wanted to impress readers with our ability to create new word forms and distorted hard-to-read alphabets. We both felt that readers, especially young readers, had no interest whatsoever in Literature and Art but wanted to be told stories instead. The less attention we drew to

²⁴⁵ Bossert 40.

²⁴⁶ Fiore, 503.

our words and pictures, the more readers could devote their attentions to the characters and plots and settings of the stories, we believed.²⁴⁷

Comic books were written with a general audience in mind. While different titles may have catered to specific demographics, particularly in the postwar era, with romance comics being marketed to young women, for example, by and large, they were designed to generate mass appeal and produced by individuals who understood that accessibility was a key component of their marketing.

Portability was also an important factor when considering the popularity of comics. Designed as quick, disposable entertainment, comic books were meant for “on-the-go,” reading, and could be transported and distributed anywhere that an individual could travel. This allowed them to be consumed at the consumer’s leisure, whenever they were free to enjoy a story, whether they had a minute or an hour to do so. This is especially important when considering the high circulation of comic books among American G.I.s during foreign conflicts, like World War II and the Korean War. As artist Leonard Starr noted, “The big thing was to get as many books out as possible, and if you looked like you spent a lot of time on it, or were late, [the people in charge] were actually annoyed because the guys didn’t care what the hell they were reading. It was quick read, and they were just relaxing in their bunks or the foxholes, or wherever.”²⁴⁸ In fact, the presence of drawings in comic books gave them an edge over other printed publications, like newspapers, particularly among

²⁴⁷ Beck, “The Real Captain Marvel” 37.

²⁴⁸ Starr 9.

soldiers.²⁴⁹ In their leisure time, the last thing readers wanted was serious material that required significant effort to consume.

Lastly, comic books were popular because they provided escapist entertainment when it was desperately needed in all corners of American society. It should come as no surprise that Superman became as popular as he did during the latter years of the Great Depression. While the character was primarily designed as an act of wish fulfillment on the part of his creators, many of the earliest stories also labeled him as the “Champion of the Oppressed” and positioned him as a solid advocate of liberal policies promoted by Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal.²⁵⁰ In the first few stories alone, Superman went after greedy mine owners, corrupt politicians, and the aristocratic elite, in addition to the usual gangsters and mad scientists. These narratives positioned the character as what Bradford Wright dubs, a “progressive super reformer,” who also “championed social reform and government assistance to the poor.”²⁵¹ In later years, his co-creator, Jerry Siegel emphasized this quality about the character, noting,

We had this feeling that we were right there at the bottom, and we could sympathize with people who were in trouble and that had something to do with the creation of Superman, who would help people in trouble. [...] “Superman” grew out of our personal feelings about life. That’s why quite often, when we saw so many other similar strips coming out, we felt that they, perhaps, were imitating the form and format of “Superman.” But there was something that wasn’t there, and that was this tremendous feeling of compassion that Joe and I have for the downtrodden and the people in trouble. And it is something that’s in your heart and not in your pocketbook.²⁵²

²⁴⁹ Wells 164.

²⁵⁰ Daniels *Superman* 35.

²⁵¹ B. Wright 12.

²⁵² Siegel, Jerry and Joanne 15.

During difficult times, early superheroes gave readers hope, empowered them to act locally in their communities through a combination of public service announcements and fan clubs like the “Supermen of America,” and offered an optimistic view of the future, which said that everything would be okay because heroes like Superman were on their side.

Lastly, one must also consider the cultural position of comic books at the time of their inception into American society. Simply put, the medium was seen by many as trashy popular entertainment that appealed to the basest of emotions. Many publishers were not concerned with producing quality entertainment, but instead wanted to produce material cheaply, sell as much of it as they could, and extract a profit from it.²⁵³ Further, the stories of heroes and villains found in comics were seen as the lowest form of art, and it was assumed that they held no redeeming value whatsoever. This view was not just held by the general public, but also by insiders within the publishing industry, and even comic book creators themselves. The stigma attached to comics was so strong, that some of those who labored in the medium were often ashamed of their work. Artist Sheldon Moldoff recalled the attitude many held toward comics, noting,

The comic books were not looked at as a great field, you know. They took a lot of abuse. A lot of parents didn’t want their kids reading comics because they were a “bad influence.” A lot of teachers were against comic books. I found that even with my children. When I went to school, neighbors would say, “Oh, I wouldn’t let my children read comic books.” And I would say, “What is wrong with comic books?”²⁵⁴

²⁵³ Bell and Vassalo 8.

²⁵⁴ Moldoff 18.

The vast majority of the writers and artists who worked in the comic book industry viewed their work in the medium as a “stepping stone” to bigger and brighter things. Almost none of them harbored ambitions of being a lifelong comic book creator. According to many accounts, work in comics was an entry point for starving artists who could not find employment in any other field. Affirming this point, artist Vic Dowd noted, “I thought, wrongly, that comic books would never last. I aimed higher than comics because I wanted to be an illustrator. A lot of guys I knew felt that way.”²⁵⁵

Indeed, the highest aspiration for many of the early creators in the comic book industry was to one day “graduate” to a syndicated newspaper strip they could call their own, or to enter into the field of animation, particularly at Walt Disney Studios.²⁵⁶ Leonard Starr summed up the feeling, stating, “Comic books at that time were the junk of the industry, and newspaper strips were the pinnacle of that art.”²⁵⁷ Others, like Fawcett’s Mac Raboy, struggled with the fact that they were fine artists trapped within a popular medium, churning out detailed, but time-consuming drawings that were not appreciated by editors obsessed with meeting constant deadlines.²⁵⁸ Even rarer were artists like Will Eisner, who not only engaged their work with a sense of artistry, but who also viewed comic books as an expressive narrative art form that had the potential and mass appeal of cinema, but which also could do things that would be impossible in other mediums, ideas he

²⁵⁵ Dowd 30.

²⁵⁶ Many of the artists forced out of the industry during the postwar era eventually found careers in commercial art, producing images for marketing and advertising.

²⁵⁷ Schelley “The ‘50 Years of Comic Book Fandom’ Panel” 67.

²⁵⁸ Artist Jay Disbrow states that Mac Raboy was criticized by his editor on Master Comics and Captain Marvel Jr., C.C. Beck, for his “high art style.”

later outlined in his theoretical work, *Comics and Sequential Art*. However, even Eisner understood the realities of the industry at the time, for he remarked, “For those of us who were in the Golden Age, [we] didn’t know it was the Golden Age! It was the Leaden Age as far as we were concerned [...] Aside from earning little money, the work you were doing was not regarded by the social, cultural arbiters as being worth anything! So we hardly thought of it as an era of great cultural prominence.”²⁵⁹

It should also be noted that during the Golden Age of American comic books, no one really knew what they were doing, or had any surefire plan for success. The closest thing many publishers had to a business strategy was to pick up on a “hot” trend and thoroughly exploit it until the “next big thing” came along. Artist Jack Binder, who ran his own “shop” during the period, recalled that, “Our instance in the so-called ‘Golden Age’ of comics was a period of time similar to the early movies. No one knew what they were doing. We just had to take the bull by the horns and make this thing go! There were no guidelines set for us to go by. Fortunately, because of the thrill of just doing it and being involved in it, the comics worked.”²⁶⁰ Echoing this sentiment, Marvin Levy noted that, “A lot of comic book companies were fly-by-night operations.”²⁶¹ The uncertainty of the economic climate, with many publishers literally springing up and disappearing overnight, and the constant turnover in writers and artists, particularly after the start of the military draft, often made such ventures impossible to manage. However, this also meant that talented creators

²⁵⁹ Kaplan 6.

²⁶⁰ Binder 7.

²⁶¹ Levy 31.

could do almost anything in comics, so long as it proved to be commercially successful, and this was especially true throughout much of the Golden Age.

III. World War II and Representations of the Japanese in Comic Books

Throughout World War II, monstrosity was the dominant frame for representing the Japanese in American comic books. In constructing this wartime foe, the writers and artists in the industry saw their job as one of national responsibility, in which they were tasked with reinforcing dominant narratives about the conflict, and in many cases, echoing the messages of the state to their readers. Within the medium, the war was justified as a battle against a monstrous and inhuman aggressor, who threatened a full-scale invasion from across the Pacific, aided by agents, namely first and second generation immigrants, who were embedded within American society, ready to sabotage and undermine the country's military efforts. Throughout the hundreds, if not thousands, of stories, cover images, and depictions, the Japanese, who had previously existed as part of a pan-Asian contingent, were made a separate and distinct population, marked and targeted as a monstrous enemy against which Americans fought for their very survival.

While there was often significant variation in the way that the Japanese were depicted, two primary ethnic archetypes prominently appeared in these stories, echoing sentiments within the larger American society: that of the Japanese "Superman," an unstoppable juggernaut that had dealt a significant blow to America's military power, which threatened the core of Western Civilization, and, on the opposite side of the spectrum, the inferior, sniveling, effete copycat whose victories only came by way of underhanded, cowardly tactics, like espionage and

sabotage.²⁶² These figures help to illustrate the conflicting and often contradictory nature of Japanese identity within comic books of the period, and illuminate the ways in which these stories shaped and defined the enemy for the general public. As Bradford Wright notes, “Comic books rendered the Japanese using the most vicious caricatures that artists could imagine. Ghastly yellow demons with fangs and claws or bucktoothed little monkeys with oversized spectacles, comic book Japanese appeared subhuman, inhuman, or even superhuman, but never simply human.”²⁶³

Indeed, many of the most famous images of this era, particularly cover art, cast the Japanese as fanged, inhuman monsters who viciously attacked the superheroes that defended, and even embodied, the United States. Such representations affirm John Dower’s postulation that World War II was effectively a “race war” fought between imperialist powers.²⁶⁴ It should be noted that while the images on covers rarely reflected the actual stories in each issue, the visual flair they radiated was often used for marketing purposes, provocatively designed to catch the reader’s eye and differentiate it from other titles on the racks. In many respects, these covers became lasting symbols for their iconic nature, and may actually have been more effective war propaganda than the actual stories that were presented inside. For example, the thirteenth issue of *Captain America Comics*, the first to be produced following the attack on Pearl Harbor, features the hero punching a monstrous, fang-toothed Japanese soldier in the face, declaring, “You started it! Now—we’ll finish it!” (see fig. 9). At the corners of the image are banners, which

²⁶² Dower, “Race, Language, and War in Two Cultures” 173.

²⁶³ B. Wright 45.

²⁶⁴ Dower, *War Without Mercy* 4.

read, “All Out For America Issue!” and “Remember Pearl Harbor.” Similarly, the eighteenth issue of the series depicts the character struggling against a group of even more monstrous Japanese, who are depicted as yellow skinned, fang toothed, mustached creatures, dressed in green “Oriental” garb, and wielding a long, pointed, scimitar-like sword. To signify their connection to Japan, a ship bearing a sail that resembles the Japanese flag hovers in the background (see fig. 10). Looking more like an alien than a human being, it is clear that villain, possesses a certain level of power and skill, perhaps enough to rival the hero, but also that this strength is rooted in their monstrous origin.

Further, the idea of Japanese military strength is also grounded visually in sheer numbers, and conveyed through the imagery of a horde of invading troops from the East overrunning the continent, echoing aspects of the Yellow Peril. Yet, as propaganda, these covers suggest that America’s superiority will allow the nation to fend off this threat. We see this in many of the Timely covers by Alex Schomburg, particularly with titles like *All-Winners Comics* and *All-Select Comics*, where a small group of heroes, usually consisting of Captain America, the Sub-Mariner, and the Human Torch, do battle against a veritable legion of Japanese troops (see fig. 11). One aspect of these images that stands out to the viewer is the proportionality of the characters, with the heroes standing large, like giants, while the enemy soldiers are often much smaller, almost like Lilliputians, who the “good guys” casually dispatch without much difficulty.

The other face of the Japanese enemy appeared in the form of saboteurs and spies. Here, it was implied that the superior military technology of the West

necessitated the use of nationalist agents, who infiltrated the United States under various guises, and proceeded to undermine the war effort through acts of sabotage, or by smuggling sensitive information and technology back to the homeland. It was typically assumed that the Japanese, as a “backward” and “uncivilized” people, could only win the war through emulation and by using “our” technology against “us.” As a result, these agents posed an even greater danger than those who attacked the nation outright, and in some cases, readers were enlisted to counter such efforts through acts of constant vigilance.²⁶⁵ While there had certainly been stories about saboteurs in the years preceding World War II, particularly featuring Nazis, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, such tactics became racially defined, often casting Japanese agents as fanatic individuals who were bound by their ethnic identity to commit the most egregious acts for the sake of the emperor and the preservation of the nation. The prevailing idea within these stories was that Americans needed to detect vulnerabilities and remedy them before the Japanese had the chance to exploit them and strike again.

For example, the twelfth issue of D.C.’s *All-Star Comics* from August-September of 1942, features a story entitled, “The Black Dragon Menace,” in which the head of the Black Dragon Society, the ultranationalist Japanese political group, declares, “My countrymen are great imitators, but they cannot invent! Therefore, they shall steal the secret weapons the master-minds of America are building!” (see fig. 12).²⁶⁶ From there, the army calls on the Justice Society of America, the first superhero team in comics, to help deter such efforts. Throughout the adventure,

²⁶⁵ Ibid. 36-37.

²⁶⁶ Fox, et al., *All-Star Archives* 3: 69.

Japanese agents attempt to steal everything from experimental bombs and explosives to a dirigible. As the heroes thwart their attempts, the villains incessantly speak of “saving face” in light of their failures and profess their devotion to the emperor, illustrating their racially derived fanaticism.

Another good example can be found in an episode of the Famous Studios’ *Superman* cartoon series entitled, “Japoteurs” (see fig. 13). Produced in 1942, the short animated feature presents a story in which Japanese spies attempt to hijack a new military bomber. Depicting the treacherous and duplicitous nature of the enemy, the opening scene features a Japanese man reading a newspaper, with a headline that reads, “World’s Largest Bomber Plane Finally Completed.” He puts down the paper, and pushes a button on his desk, which transforms the picture of the Statue of Liberty on his wall into an image of the Japanese flag. Without saying a word, he smokes a cigarette and puts it out using the newspaper, setting it aflame.

Within these narratives, the Japanese were incessantly dehumanized, not just in terms of representation, but also in description. In comics, they were called everything from “Japs” to “Nips” to “Japanazis,” a term popularized by D.C. Comics that was designed to highlight the link between the Japanese forces and Nazi Germany.²⁶⁷ Also, while they frequently appeared as spectacled, lemon olive-colored, rat-like creatures, their appearance was supplemented by any number of animalistic terms. Within these stories, the Japanese were referred to as “rats,” “shrimps,” “yellow doggies,” “monkeys,” “jellyfish,” and “inhuman beasts” (see fig. 14).²⁶⁸ These

²⁶⁷ Sprang 7.

²⁶⁸ Some examples can be found in the fifth issue of *Military Comics*, the eleventh issue of *All-Star Comics*, and the twenty-fourth issue of *Sensation Comics*.

descriptions were often linked to the size and stature of the Japanese, in which they were defined as both “small” and “short,” which was yet another way to diminish them in the eyes of readers. For instance, in the twenty-fourth issue of *Sensation Comics* from December of 1943, while fighting the enemy, Wonder Woman remarks, “I hate to hit such a little fellow but even flies can be dangerous when they come in such big droves!”²⁶⁹ This method of dehumanization was certainly not limited to American culture, as Japanese propaganda popularly depicted the United States as an *oni*, or ogre, in the tradition of the folk tale Momotaro, but it is notable for both its variety and consistency of usage throughout the war.²⁷⁰

Additionally, the Japanese were also defined by their lack of humanity, which manifested in the form of their disregard for human life. In these stories, not only did they seek to kill American soldiers in the most painful way possible and launch attacks on civilian targets, but they also had no regard for their own lives, utilizing Kamikaze pilots as weapons, morally reprehensible tactics that contributed to the impression that they were criminally insane.²⁷¹ In many cases, Japanese soldiers sought to torture and mutilate the heroes they encountered, and came across like sadists who enjoyed inflicting pain on others. For example, the eleventh issue of *All-Star Comics* depicts Japanese planes bombing an army hospital in the Pacific, to which an orderly cries, “Bombing hospitals! Inhuman beasts!”²⁷² This impression was reinforced in the following issue, where a Japanese soldier forces Native Americans to steal a tank from the military by threatening the lives of their family

²⁶⁹ Marston, et al., *Wonder Woman Archives* Vol. 3 192.

²⁷⁰ Reider 110.

²⁷¹ Dower, *War Without Mercy* 53.

²⁷² Fox, et al., *All Star Archives* 3: 48

members. With an evil grimace, he declares, “You serve me only because I hold your wives and children as hostages! And unless you obey me—they die!” (see fig. 15).²⁷³ As Edward Ingebretsen notes, this kind of moral monstrosity is applied to individuals who commit inhuman acts, in order to transform the familiar into the other by situating such behavior outside the realm of normality and positioning it as deviant and dangerous.²⁷⁴

Very rarely did “good” Japanese appear within comic books, and even then, they were either subject to intense suspicion or treated as less than human, due to their racial identity. Historians have noted the extent to which, for the Japanese, there was no equivalent to the “good” German or Italian within American culture, and for the most part, comic books reaffirm that observation.²⁷⁵ However, there are a few exceptions that exist which reveal much about the attitude toward the Japanese at this time. For example, in the aforementioned story, “The Black Dragon Menace,” the Atom receives help from a “Yankee Jap” as he searches for a stolen experimental explosive. Upon meeting the hero, the Japanese man exclaims, “I’m Japanese all right, but I was born in America and I love this country as much as you do! There are many more Japanese like me—unfortunately, Imperial Japan has put the pressure on us and we’ve been forced to work against Uncle Sam!”²⁷⁶ To which, the Atom condescendingly replies, “Good boy!” as if speaking to a pet. This story reaffirms the extent to which Americans believed that Japanese Americans were suspect, due to their race, which inextricably linked them to Japan itself.

²⁷³ Ibid. 3: 99.

²⁷⁴ Ingebretsen 16.

²⁷⁵ Dower, *War Without Mercy* 78-79; Westbrook 15.

²⁷⁶ Fox, et al., *All-Star Archives* 3: 86.

Within comics, the idea of loyalty was so strongly connected to conceptions of race, that characters who dared to help the American military in their fight against Japan declared themselves to be “race traitors.” In a story entitled “The Men Who Never Came Back,” in the fifteenth issue of Quality’s *Military Comics* from January of 1943, the Blackhawk squadron travels to South Asia to put down a colonial riot in India, and assist Scottish Highlanders in their fight against Japanese forces at the Burmese border. While there, the men continually fall into a series of traps, but miraculously escape each time, due to the assistance of a veiled figure dressed in a witch’s costume. After they defeat the enemy, their mysterious benefactor reveals herself to be a Japanese woman, who declares, “He’ll never know! Never know that a Nipponese girl, her country’s Mata Hari betrayed her race! All because...all because...East is East—West is West. Oh, Blackhawk...”²⁷⁷ This statement not only reinforces the racial divide which separates the Japanese from America, but also plays into the sexual allure of the Asian female, marking her as an exotic object for the pleasure and consumption of the white male.

It is important to note that these representations did not appear in a vacuum. They were not something that a lone individual produced in isolation. Rather, they were representative of a specific moment in a long historical relationship between Asia, Europe, and the United States. As touched on in the first chapter, the centuries-old association between the East and monsters in the Western cultural tradition facilitated the adoption of a discourse of monstrosity as a tool to define, demonize, and dehumanize the enemy for a receptive public in the wake of Pearl Harbor.

²⁷⁷ Eisner, et al., *Blackhawk Archives* 204.

However, other historical factors also played a role in shaping the form of these depictions. The presence of these elements within American culture enhanced the effectiveness of the representational tactics deployed in comic books, and provided the groundwork that enabled the Japanese to be constructed as monsters throughout the course of the war.

Perhaps the most important factor in shaping the image of the Japanese during World War II was the incorporation of Pan-Asian stereotypes that had previously been applied to the Chinese within mass culture. For decades in the pages of popular publications like dime novels and pulp fiction, the Chinese had been depicted through dominant representational tropes, which cast them, as “Orientals” who were threatening, unassimilable foreigners who occupied the American homeland and built crime-ridden ethnic enclaves.²⁷⁸ Almost every Chinese character that appeared in comic books was crafted according to established archetypes, like the coolie, the Tong, the smuggler, the wizened sage, the “Dragon Lady,” and the embodiment of the Yellow Peril, Fu Manchu. Indeed, many of these representations were very familiar to readers of the era, who took note when the evil “Oriental” suddenly became Japanese. Artist Jules Feiffer, recalled this transformation in his memoir of the medium, writing,

The unwritten success story of the war was the smash comeback of the Oriental villain. He had faded badly for a few years, losing face to mad scientists—but now he was at the height of his glory. Until the war we always

²⁷⁸ An exhibition featuring the comic book collection of William Wu entitled, “Marvels and Monsters: Unmasking Asian Images in U.S. Comics, 1942-1986” was publicly displayed at both the Museum of Chinese America in New York City and NYU’s Fales Library from late 2012 to early 2014. The exhibit identified eight existing Asian archetypes that appear in comic books, including the Guru, Brain, Temptress, Manipulator, Alien, Kamikaze, Brute, and Lotus Blossom.

assumed he was Chinese. But now we knew what he was! A Jap: a Yellow-Belly Jap; a Jap-a-Nazi-Rat: these being the three major classifications. He was younger than his wily forebear and far less subtle in his torture techniques (this was war!). He often sported fanged bicuspid and drooled a lot more than seemed necessary.²⁷⁹

Indeed, stereotypical characters and archetypes had been mainstays of popular culture well before World War II, and their use in demonizing the Japanese is representative of the link between Asian populations and this historical method of depiction that existed in the minds of comic book creators. In large part, these materials tapped into a common language of race that was already present within American culture. Linda Frost notes that this tendency to demonize the other is a longstanding practice within popular culture, and is frequently utilized to deny the humanity of others. Commenting on the strategy of such representations, she writes, “Depicting primitives as either inhuman monsters, bestial and cannibalistic, or children, naïve and ignorant, conveniently positioned them at the beginning of the story of Western civilization.”²⁸⁰ The writers and artists who worked in the comic book industry were not only utilizing a common body of tropes, but were also tapping into a representational tradition that operated on these principles.

Interestingly, due to the nature of many of these early narratives, which were largely fictive pieces in the mold of the detective and adventure genres, Chinese villains were featured everywhere, although none were more prominent than Fu Manchu and his various imitators. Indeed, Sax Rohmer’s “devil doctor” was the archetypal model for many of the Japanese villains that appear later throughout the war. So popular was this symbol of the Yellow Peril that the first issue of D.C.’s

²⁷⁹ Feiffer 59-60.

²⁸⁰ Frost 3.

Detective Comics features the visage of a Fu Manchu-like character on its cover, the crime lord Sen Yoi, who faces off against hero Bruce Nelson in the issue's story, "The Claws of the Red Dragon" (see fig. 16). In fact, such Chinese villains were so popular that the series actually featured adaptations of Sax Rohmer's novel *The Insidious Doctor Fu Manchu* and the film *The Mysterious Doctor Fu Manchu*, which were serialized from the seventeenth to the twenty-eighth issues. The Chinese villains in comic books who ruled over crime-ridden ethnic enclaves also appeared in other popular monthly features, like *Slam Bradley*, which featured a strong-arm detective who often ventured into Chinatown to solve murders and an assortment of other crimes, engaging in fisticuffs with Tongs in the process (see fig. 17).²⁸¹ Fu Manchu's influence can also be seen in other villains, like Captain Marvel's nemesis the mad scientist Dr. Sivana, who was also patterned after the character, despite not being of Asian descent.²⁸²

Perhaps no character was more monstrous than The Claw, a prominent villain throughout the Golden Age that was introduced in the first issue of *Silver Streak Comics*, published by Lev Gleason in 1939 (see fig. 18). The character was initially presented as a demonic, Asian figure, whose mystical origin, as an immortal, spirit-like creature worshipped by cult followers, allowed him to wield supernatural powers, like the ability to shoot lightning bolts from his fingers and grow his body to gigantic proportions. The Claw was clearly patterned after Fu Manchu, dressed in a

²⁸¹ *Slam Bradley* was one of the early creations by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, the team that created Superman. Les Daniels and Jim Steranko recognize the character as an early Superman prototype, through which the creators were refining what would eventually result in the creation of the first superhero.

²⁸² Thomas, "One Man's Family" 105.

long, flowing robe, and often voicing ambitions of world domination. Most striking, however, was his physical appearance. Aside from being colored pure yellow, he was aesthetically monstrous, with slanted eyes, pointed ears, a hollow hole where his nose should be, fanged teeth, and of course, giant clawed hands (see fig. 19). The initial story, which employed lettering featuring an Asian aesthetic, clearly established him as an oriental villain, whose ethnicity was almost certainly Chinese. In later stories, he was be dubbed, the “world’s worst villain” and the “high lord of evil,” with an introduction which exclaimed, “From every corner of the earth have come weird tales of a monster—a terrifying giant—that tramples human rights and brings violent death to those who defy him. [...] This monstrosity of existence—said to be half-man—half-animal—is feared by all who know of him—as The Claw—dwelling in the wilds of Tibet.”²⁸³

There were also a series of stories that attempted to connect the aggressive, militaristic nature of the Japanese directly to the Mongolian hordes that invaded Eastern Europe in the thirteenth century. Numerous comic books stories focused on the Japanese military’s search for the artifacts of Genghis Khan, which would enable them to subdue all of Asia, and unite its people against the West. For example, the seventh issue of Quality’s *Military Comics* features a Blackhawk story entitled, “The Return of Genghis Khan.” Published in February of 1942, the narrative is driven by the discovery of the sword of Genghis Khan, which is used to summon and control a Mongol army, one so furious that “Even Hitler is trembling before their savage

²⁸³ Biro, et al., *Daredevil Archives* 136.

fury!”²⁸⁴ Similarly, the fifty-second issue of D.C.’s *Detective Comics* features a Batman story in which the caped crusader discovers the ring of Genghis Khan, which Loo Chung, the mayor of Gotham City’s Chinatown, uses to gain complete control over the local Chinese, forcing them to pay him a tribute and swear their loyalty.²⁸⁵ Further, an unpublished Wonder Woman story entitled, “The Sword of Genghis Khan,” features a plot in which the Japanese agents embark on a search for the blade, as the wielder of the artifact will be recognized as “the lord of all Asia,” giving Japan, its “rightful owners,” the ability to control native people and create social unrest in places like India.²⁸⁶ Building on stereotypes about the Japanese, these artifacts allowed one to control entire populations based purely on their shared ethnic identities, reinforcing the degree to which ideas about loyalty were embedded in logics of race and ethnicity.

Given the outlandish nature of many of these stories, it may be prudent to consider why comic books were so effective in conveying this image of the Japanese to readers. One reason why they were such an effective vehicle for wartime propaganda is that the medium, with its combination of images and text, enabled writer and artists to imaginatively craft monstrous depictions of the Japanese, reinforcing such representations with narratives of cruelty, dishonesty, and violence that highlighted their inhuman nature. While other mediums like film and radio were equally widespread, comic books had an edge in demonizing the Japanese, because while cinema was forced to work within the confines of realism—as the

²⁸⁴ Eisner, et al., *Blackhawk Archives* 83.

²⁸⁵ Kane, et al., *Batman Archives* 2: 30.

²⁸⁶ Thomas, “Queen Hepzibah, Genghis Khan, and the ‘Nuclear’ Wars! The Lost Wonder Woman Adventures” 10.

enemy could only be as inhuman as makeup would allow—in comics, writers and artists were limited only by the scope of their imaginations and their level of artistic skill.²⁸⁷ Comic books did not present an image of the Japanese as they actually were, but rather as these creators saw them.

However, it should be noted that while using monstrosity to depict the Japanese was the dominant mode of representation throughout the war, not all creators were comfortable with it. Some recognized it as overt display of racism. For example, artist Don Rico recalls,

What bothered me was the showing of a black person in the old days with huge liver lips. I was bothered by the showing of the Chinese as villains, Japanese as villains. I was bothered by the injustice toward people, [...] toward minorities, toward any group as a stereotype. [...] What was exploited was the blacks, the orientals, and that kind of thing. They were the villains. This was World War II, and the tradition of Fu Manchu carried on as a super-villain, you know. And that more than anything else disturbed me.²⁸⁸

Unfortunately, such objections were few and far between, as many writers and artists were happy to engage in such acts of dehumanization to further promote the war effort.

These representations also owe much to the medium's ability to function as a vehicle for propaganda. Even before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, there were efforts by writers and artists working in the comic book industry to advocate for American intervention and to label countries like Nazi Germany, and to a lesser extent Japan, as enemies. In part, this was because many producers of comics felt that America's entrance into the war was inevitable, and realized that the medium

²⁸⁷ Savage 10.

²⁸⁸ Rico 8-10.

could be an effective platform for espousing nationalistic ideas.²⁸⁹ Perhaps the best-known example of this is Timely's patriotic superhero, Captain America. First introduced in March of 1941, nine months before the United States' official entry into World War II, the character was designed by his co-creators, Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, to make a political statement and argue for America's entrance into the war in Europe. As Simon notes, at that time

This country was not at war. Yes, there was a war in Europe, but there was a lot of controversy in this country about whether we should get involved. There was a lot of opposition. [...] The opponents to the war were all quite well organized. We wanted to have our say, too. We didn't want to go to war, but we felt very intense about what was going on over in Europe. So, we had this new character, Captain America, reflect our attitudes about the war. He didn't want to fight, but he knew that the Nazis had to be stopped and he was prepared to do his best to stop them.²⁹⁰

The cover of the first issue of *Captain America Comics* famously featured the lead character punching Adolf Hitler across the face, and introduced readers to Steve Rogers, a weak but patriotic young man who became the superhero Captain America after being injected with an experimental super soldier serum by scientist Josef Reinstein (see fig. 20).²⁹¹ Throughout the life of the series, he fought a series of battles against the Nazis, and after 1941, against the Japanese as well. While the hero sometimes battled against traditional enemies in comic books, like monsters and mad scientists, almost every story featuring the character had a strong political message embedded within it. After all, as Simon remarked, "We saw him as a political statement fleshed out to be an active force. We would have him go through

²⁸⁹ Savage 8-9.

²⁹⁰ Simon, "The American Dream Come True" 8.

²⁹¹ In subsequent revisions of the character's origin, particularly after his re-introduction in the 1960s, the name of the scientist was changed to Abraham Erskine.

an exaggerated adventure and his actions, and the story would be making a political statement.”²⁹² Even Timely’s other superheroes, like the Human Torch and Namor, the Sub-Mariner, who had previously been presented as a somewhat villainous anti-hero, soon entered the nationalistic fray, as they, too, became “Nazi Fighters.” Bill Everett, the creator of the aquatic character explained this shift among characters that previously had nothing to do with nationalism or the war, stating

This was a natural formula. You could wave the flag like crazy. Most of us were flag-wavers, and I was one of the biggest. I wanted to do some of that red-white-and-blue stuff as much as anyone did—and this was a beautiful outlet and a change of scenery, a geographical cure, what-have-you. I was tired of dreaming up situations for him, and here was a built-in, ready-made situation; it was a patriotic thing, and it was the thing to do.²⁹³

While other patriotic heroes had also been created around this time, like Will Eisner’s Uncle Sam, Harry Shorten and Irv Novick’s *The Shield* and Bill Parker and C.C. Beck’s *Spy Smasher*, the overwhelming success of *Captain America* and the Timely superhero line helped usher in a new wave of nationalistic characters throughout the latter part of 1941 and into 1942, like Richard Hughes and Jon Blummer’s *Fighting Yank*, Eisner and Chuck Cuidera’s *Blackhawk*, and Jerry Robinson’s *London*, just to name a few.

Only a few months later in July of 1941, Lev Gleason Publications released *Daredevil Battles Hitler*, the first issue of a series exclusively devoted to the popular superhero, who had previously debuted in *Silver Streak Comics*.²⁹⁴ Designed to build

²⁹² Simon, “The American Dream Come True” 8

²⁹³ Everett 19.

²⁹⁴ There have been two popular characters that have had the name “Daredevil” at different periods in comic book history. The first, referenced here, is the boomerang-wielding hero, Bart Hill, who premiered in the sixth issue of *Silver Streak Comics* in 1940, and is prominently featured in a red and blue uniform, colors

on the rising popularity of patriotic comics, the book was notable not only for its content, but also its iconic cover, which featured a photographic likeness of the German leader under siege by an assault of costumed superheroes, rather than a simple cartoon caricature (see fig. 21). Like *Captain America Comics*, the issue featured stories that put Hitler through a series of humiliating situations, such as having his moustache shot off, being betrayed by his own allies, and having his underlings, like Joseph Goebbels, defeated and returned to him wrapped up like a mummy in bandages and ropes. The last story in the book, entitled, “The Man of Hate,” is a propagandistic cartoon biography of Hitler by R.B.S. Davis that charts his rise to power and declares, “Mars. The greedy god of war again stalked the land—with Adolf Hitler at his elbow! France and England jumped into the fray...’This madman must be stopped!’ But Hitler had the advantage, and one by one, countries began to fall!” Short of calling for direct intervention in the war, the story rhetorically asks, “How will this bloody era end? How will Hitler end up? Exiled? Sick? Hated? Imprisoned? That’s what happened to Napoleon, Caesar, the Kaiser! His time will come! The fate of all dictators!”²⁹⁵

It is also worth noting that the writers and artists in comic books were not the only ones advocating for the country’s entrance into World War II. Other mainstream cartoonists, like Theodor Geisel, better known by his pen name, Dr.

that divide his body in half like the Roman god Janus. This Daredevil disappeared from the industry in the mid-1950s when the introduction of the Comics Code Authority resulted in the closure of Lev Gleason Publications. The second is the Marvel Comics superhero, Matt Murdock, created in 1964 by Stan Lee and Bill Everett, who is a blind character with heightened senses who fights crime in a red devil-like costume. Other than a shared name, the two characters are unrelated.

²⁹⁵ Biro, et al., *Daredevil Archives* 75-76.

Seuss, took a similar position in their work. As noted by Richard Minear, the artist's editorial cartoons, which appeared in the daily newspaper *PM*, mocked isolationists throughout 1941, taking a particularly critical stand against not only Hitler but also Charles Lindbergh.²⁹⁶ Similarly, Milton Caniff, whose newspaper strip *Terry and the Pirates* was one of the most popular of the period, also engaged in the dissemination of pro-war sentiments in his work. Toward the end of the war, the characters in his series, like Connie, the lead protagonist's Chinese sidekick, were assisting in the fight against the Japanese in Mainland China. Commenting on the incorporation of propagandistic themes into the series, Caniff said, "The overtone of propaganda was there and had to be there and should have been there. But propaganda can be handled in so many different ways. It can be cheap and shoddy and off-hand and Jerry-come-lately, or it can be most persuasive in times of emergency."²⁹⁷

These comic books, published only months before Pearl Harbor, were far from the only titles to foreshadow America's involvement in World War II and allude to rising tensions with Germany and Japan. As early as July of 1938, Superman, in his second appearance, sought to prevent a war in the South American republic of San Monte, where a munitions manufacturer was fomenting conflict and enriching himself by selling arms to forces on both sides.²⁹⁸ Smaller publishers, like Fiction House and Quality Comics, were also engaging in the production of these kinds of stories. Often questionable in tone and accuracy, some of these narratives sought to highlight the threat of Nazi Germany by linking the war in Europe with

²⁹⁶ Minear 17.

²⁹⁷ Eisner, *Shop Talk* 80.

²⁹⁸ Siegel, et al., *Action Comics Archives* 1: 24.

anticolonial uprisings, suggesting that the conflict threatened to spill over into other countries, and that intervention was needed in order to restore the status quo and secure American national interests abroad.²⁹⁹ In part, the production of these materials illustrates the extent to which these creators helped to construct a national narrative that justified America's role in a war against the Axis powers.

Within many of these early stories, comics often alluded to Japan under a variety of aliases. Publishers knew that many Americans were weary about the prospect of intervening in World War II, and were careful not to alienate any readers with their narratives. For example, in the first issue of D.C.'s *All-Star Comics*, published in the summer of 1940, the police trio, Red, White, and Blue, foil a plot by "Kavinese" spies to build a secret underground fort in Alaska, which they intend to use as a base of operations for an attack on America.³⁰⁰ Similarly, the heroine Phantom Lady, in the second issue of Quality's *Police Comics*, rescues an ambassador from "Herma" (China) who has been kidnapped by agents of "Kioland" (Japan) in an attempt to manipulate the country into starting a war against the United States.³⁰¹ Clearly, this story was intended to address American fears over a potential conflict with a Pan-Asian force, consisting of a united China and Japan, which was largely interpreted as a foreboding symbol of the Yellow Peril. Coincidentally, a number of stories even predicted the attack on Pearl Harbor before it took place. For instance, a story by Harry Stein in the eighteenth issue of *National Comics*, published a month before the attack, depicted the destruction of the Pacific battleships by "oriental"

²⁹⁹ B. Wright 37-39.

³⁰⁰ Fox, et al., *All-Star Archives* 0: 67-74.

³⁰¹ Eisner, et al., *Phantom Lady Archives* 1: 24.

forces. The story was so prescient that the FBI later questioned Quality's publisher, Everett M. "Busy" Arnold about it.³⁰² This is only a small sampling of the many published stories that hinted at the looming Asian threat.

Early on, there was significant confusion over the cultural and ethnic differences between the Japanese and the Chinese. For the most part, American comic book creators had little familiarity with either group before the war outside of established stereotypes, and subscribed to the idea of a Pan-Asian ethnicity, under which both the Chinese and Japanese were frequently lumped together. The political realities of World War II, particularly the need to combat imperial Japanese rhetoric about the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, which had been used as a rallying cry to unite all Asian populations against the forces of the West, quickly forced them to distinguish between the two groups and utilize a discourse of incorporation and anti-racism.³⁰³ However, the lack of precise and accurate knowledge about Asians resulted in the production of stories that frequently utilized stereotypes for the purposes of visual and cultural representation, and which had the unintended effect of mistakenly conflating aspects of Chinese and Japanese culture, creating confusion among readers. In part, it was this urgent drive to distinguish between the two groups, not just in comics, but in society and culture more generally, that established the image of the Japanese as a wholly distinct and separate group from the Chinese, effectively introducing them to the larger American public.

To further that goal, governmental agencies, particularly the U.S. War Department, produced propaganda utilizing comic artists and other creative

³⁰² Gil Fox, 16-17.

³⁰³ Fujitani 7-8.

professionals in the film and radio industries, to not only demonize Japan, but to also explain how the Japanese were different from the Chinese. For example, in 1942, it published a manual for soldiers, entitled, *A Pocket Guide to China*. Included in this document was an educational comic by Milton Caniff, called, “How to Spot a Jap” (see fig. 22). This short section purportedly detailed the physical differences between the Japanese and Chinese that would assist soldiers in telling them apart. For example, the manual claimed that the Japanese could be identified by three criteria: their appearance, feet, and their pronunciation of words.³⁰⁴ Detailing the first in language similar to eugenics, Caniff claimed that the Japanese are “shorter—and looks as if his legs are joined to his chest,” that their skin color “is lighter—more on the yellow lemon side,” their eyes “have a marked squint” and are “slanted toward his nose,” and lastly, the Japanese have “buck teeth...the Chinese smiles easily—the Jap usually expects to be shot...and is very unhappy about the whole thing.”³⁰⁵ The pamphlet ends with a warning to soldiers, with the narrator stating, “Remember that Jap spies have fooled even the Chinese...They’ll use any trick—even after pretending to surrender...And they’ll try to pose as natives of whatever country they’re in!”³⁰⁶ Aside from the preposterously stereotypical and inaccurate nature of these descriptions, the manual reinforces the urgency with which the American government sought to differentiate between the Japanese and Chinese.

Before the attack on Pearl Harbor, comic books regularly conflated the two groups, construing them as one in the same, or at least presenting them both as a

³⁰⁴ Caniff 74.

³⁰⁵ Ibid. 66-68.

³⁰⁶ Ibid. 75.

negative presence within the United States. For example an early Starman story entitled, "The Adventure of the Singapore Stranglers," which appeared in the sixty-ninth issue of DC's *Adventure Comics* in December of 1941, told of the Singapore Strangers, a group sabotaging American ships, who were inexplicably commanded by the Japanese Captain Fujiyama. As the hero attempts to thwart their suicide mission to blow up a munitions factory, he faces their leader, who "sits in front of a huge mask of Genghis Khan, ancient Oriental warlord!" (see fig. 23). Another example can be found in the second issue of Lev Gleason's *Daredevil Comics*, published in August of 1941. In a story featuring the superhero Nightrö, Chinese agents led by Fu Tong sabotage Navy fliers, with the intent of recovering the planes and pilots after they crash, drugging them, and using them to attack the United States en masse. While the mastermind behind the plot is never revealed within the narrative, it is similar to other tales of the period that implicate Japanese sabotage. However, it is still curious that the creators of the story chose to utilize Chinese agents as antagonists, illustrating a general ignorance of events in Mainland China and a sense of confusion over which Asian country was positioned as the enemy.

In addition to differentiating between the "good" and "bad" Asians after Pearl Harbor, comic books also sought to combat the Pan-Asian rhetoric of the Japanese, which threatened to stir anti-colonial sentiment and unite people of color against the imperialist powers of the West. To do so, comic books portrayed the Chinese as victims of Japanese imperialism and brutality. While other cultural works, like Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*, had humanized China for American audiences, comics

furthered this mission by suggesting that the Chinese were helpless subjects desperately in need of humanitarian and military assistance.³⁰⁷

For example, in the fourth issue of *Wonder Woman* from April-May of 1943, the superheroine meets a Chinese woman named Mei Wu, who is touring the United States to raise money for China relief efforts after escaping the torture chambers of the Japanese. Speaking to Diana Prince, Wonder Woman's civilian alter ego, she says, "You have seen scars where Japanese who take my native village beat me?" She bears her back, and remarks, "I have shown Americans all over country how Japs treat Chinese women—America will now destroy Japan!"³⁰⁸ Similarly, the first issue of *Timely's All-Winner's Comics* featured a Human Torch story entitled, "Carnival of Fiends" in which, "Matsu, a Japanese secret agent acting on his superior's orders...menaces the peaceful Chinese section of New York City!"³⁰⁹ The spy sabotages a festival designed to raise money to help the Chinese fight off the invading Japanese forces. Unable to stop him from destroying the fireworks that highlight the event, the Human Torch and his sidekick Toro light up the sky with their flames, drawing an image of a Japanese soldier, armed with a bayonet, viciously stabbing a Chinese woman and her baby, with a caption that reads, "Help China" (see fig. 24).³¹⁰ Even Lev Gleason Publications' monstrous Oriental villain, The Claw, was suddenly aligned with Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany after

³⁰⁷ Kennedy 401.

³⁰⁸ Marston, et al., *Wonder Woman Archives* 2: 175.

³⁰⁹ Simon, et al., *All-Winners Masterworks* 1: 3.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.* 7.

forming an alliance with Hitler in exchange for “all of upper Mongolia with its millions of natives as slaves.”³¹¹

Comic books, like other cultural media during World War II, utilized the rhetoric of anti-racism to depict a fraternal brotherhood of Americans, consisting of individuals of all races, who stood against the threat posed by the Axis forces.³¹² For example, the sixteenth issue of *All Star Comics* from April-May of 1943 presents a story entitled, “The Justice Society Fights for a United America,” in which the superhero team fights against hatred and intolerance on the domestic front in order to figuratively unite the country against a common enemy. Reinforcing this point, the end of the issue features a tribute to American workers and all those contributing to the war effort. Hawkman declares, “As Americans, we must face the foe united! Hitler fears nothing more than a nation strong in its collective unified strength! No more racial, religious, or class hatreds or intolerance.” Echoing this sentiment, the Sandman remarks, “Polish, Irish, or Italian! Catholic, Protestant, or Jew! Black or white! Rich or poor! An American is still an American!” The scene transitions to Americans declaring their loyalty to the country, and even features a panel with an African American steelworker who declares, “I represent fifteen million colored Americans who are working to get rid of those rascals Hitler, Hirohito, an’ Mussolini!” (see figs. 25-26).³¹³ Likewise, the twenty-second issue of the series published in the fall of 1944 features a similar story entitled, “A Cure for the World,” in which the Justice Society devotes themselves to combating prejudice

³¹¹ Cole, et al., *Silver Streak Archives* 2: 29.

³¹² Fujitani 118.

³¹³ Fox, et al., *All-Star Archives* 4: 120-121.

and discrimination after helping a boy who is picked on for his religion. Traveling back through time, the team members fight against those who persecute others, and at the very end of the story, attend a rally at a local school, at which they salute and declare, “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands; one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for ALL! You know what that means—‘liberty and justice for all’—all regardless of race, color, or religion!” (see fig. 27)³¹⁴

This sentiment within comic books coincides with the coalescing of white identity that occurred throughout World War II, in which ethnic groups that had previously been excluded from the body politic were assimilated and accepted as full-fledged members of American society as a result of the “crucible” of war. In part, it was through their participation in the “assimilatory regiments” of the military, that they gained a recognized form of citizenship, after they had proven that they were willing to risk their lives for not only one another, but more importantly, for their country.³¹⁵ Naturally, this process of incorporation and inclusion did not extend to various minority groups, like African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latino Americans, among others, and is a sentiment that is largely echoed in comics, as many multinational military squadrons from the period, like the Blackhawks, Boy Commandos, and Young Allies, either exclude minorities entirely or relegate them to

³¹⁴ Fox, et al., *All-Star Archives* 5: 184.

³¹⁵ Gerstle 42, 205-206.

secondary positions, in which they fill the role of a racial stereotype, rather than serve as legitimate members of the team.³¹⁶

This rhetoric of anti-racism also resulted in the creation of Chinese superheroes, or more accurately sidekicks and partners.³¹⁷ A small number of these Asian heroes appeared throughout the 1940s, albeit in positions subordinate to the lead white character in these stories and represented through racial caricature. Often, these figures took on the role of comedy relief, much like the other minorities that appeared in comics, like the African American characters Ebony White in Will Eisner's *The Spirit* comic strip, Steamboat in Fawcett's Captain Marvel titles, and Whitewash Jones in Timely's *Young Allies*.³¹⁸ Asian and African Americans were certainly not the only ones cast in the manner, however, for there were also characters from ethnic groups like the Irish and Italians that were portrayed in a similar fashion. A good example of this is the stereotypical Doiby Dickles, a working-

³¹⁶ The perpetuation of such racially exclusive regimes was not the result of a lack of activism on the part of people of color throughout World War II, who championed the idea of Double Victory, against both the Axis powers and the violently repressive systems of racism.

³¹⁷ Chinese sidekicks were also prominently featured in other related formats, like comic strips. For example, in Milton Caniff's popular series *Terry and the Pirates*, the main characters were accompanied by Connie, a Chinese guide, who eventually becomes part of the resistance against the Japanese in World War II.

³¹⁸ It should be noted that these characters were not consciously designed with malicious intent, but were attempts by creators to be more inclusive and appeal to different audiences who were not equally represented in comics. It was commonly and naively believed that readers of color would relate to such characters, despite their representation as caricatures, and would proceed to purchase the book. Over time, however, feedback from readers, particularly African Americans, showed that not to be the case, and these characters were either quickly and deliberately removed by creators, forgotten when the titles they were featured in were cancelled, or vanished outright by the mid-1950s due to restrictions set forth by the Comics Code Authority.

class cab driver clad in suspenders and a bowler hat, who frequently appeared in the Green Lantern stories featured in *All-American Comics*.

Perhaps the most prominent Chinese sidekick of the World War II era was Chop-Chop, the honorary Asian member of the multiracial military platoon known as the Blackhawks, featured in Quality's *Military Comics*. First appearing in the third issue of the series, the character was short and pudgy with a ponytail, appearing much like a "pinhead" from freak shows of the early twentieth century, and dressed in traditional Chinese garb of green, yellow, and red, which frequently set him apart from the rest of the team who were tall, slender, and wore blue uniforms. He spoke only broken English, with his speech often communicated more with symbols of frustration, like stars, lightning bolts, and exclamation points, rather than actual words. Although he sometimes spoke in Chinese, this was conveyed through random crosses and lines that presented an Asian aesthetic, rather than the use of actual language, as the co-creators of the character, Will Eisner and Chuck Cuidera, likely did not know how to speak or write any Chinese. Also, unlike the other members of the squadron, he rarely used firearms, for it frequently ended in disastrous comedy relief, and instead relied on an assortment of swords, wooden bats, and by issue eight, began appearing with his trademark meat cleaver, declaring to the enemy, "Me make hamburger!"³¹⁹

Still, it was made clear early on that Chop-Chop was meant to be heroic. The Blackhawks first encounter him after he crash lands on their island base in an attempt to fly to Yugoslavia to save a Red Cross nurse from a turncoat war profiteer

³¹⁹ Eisner, et al., *Blackhawk Archives* 99.

named Markov who is making money by selling much needed food to starving peasants.³²⁰ They quickly leave him behind and handle the situation. In the meantime, Chop-Chop gets himself tangled in a pile of ropes, and only manages to get free at the end of the story, confronting the team once they've returned, screaming, "Just when me ready to begin adventure you finish same...Me double-closed!! Me slittee throatee!"³²¹ Without any official notice, they accept Chop-Chop into their team, and he serves as the cook and bumbling sidekick on many of their adventures throughout World War II.

While the character was technically a member of the team, it was repeatedly made clear that he was different from the rest, through both text and images. This was particularly noticeable in depictions where the group appeared together, often charging into battle. The cover of the thirty-third issue of *Military Comics*, for example, depicts the members of the Blackhawks rushing into battle in a tight group formation, while to the left, Chop-Chop hops down a dirt path with his cleaver in tow (see fig. 28). His brightly colored foreign clothing is in stark contrast to their dark blue uniforms, as is his short diminutive stature, reinforcing the perception that he is not only separate, but also unequal. It is worth noting that by the mid-1950s and the onset of the Comics Code Authority, the entire look of the character had changed to make him appear less stereotypical—although in a series of stories, Chop-Chop does “pretend” to betray the Blackhawks to their enemies, a narrative device that may have been deployed to test the character’s trustworthiness due to rising

³²⁰ Ibid. 38.

³²¹ Ibid. 45.

political tensions with communist China during the Postwar Era.³²² Looking back on his tenure with the company, former Quality editor Al Grenet couldn't explain the sudden physical transformation of the character, but noted, "It may have just been the temper of the times. Maybe there was a protest or something. I don't know. We did make him more human."³²³

Less well known, but equally prominent was the character Wing How, the partner of the Crimson Avenger and junior member of the World War II superhero team, the Seven Soldiers of Victory, featured in D.C. Comics' series *Detective Comics* and *Leading Comics*. Clad in a bright yellow uniform, opposite his red-adorned partner, Wing, like Chop-Chop, was also represented through stereotypes.³²⁴ In addition to his name, the character, still retained the stereotypes associated with other Chinese sidekicks: he spoke broken English, inconsistently pronounced words with "R"s as "L"s, and was almost always depicted with a smile on his face that accentuated his pronounced bucked-teeth. Also, rather than calling his partner by name, he referred to him as "Mist' Climson," signifying his deferential status. Further, Wing's costume featured an "Asian" symbol prominently displayed on his chest,

³²² Nolan 32. When Quality Comics went out of business in the 1950s, D.C. Comics purchased a few of their properties, including Blackhawk. Since then, there have been a number of attempted re-launches of the title, perhaps most prominently in the 1970s, when Chop-Chop was again rehabilitated and recast as a kung-fu fighter and presented as the model minority member of the team.

³²³ Ibid. 30.

³²⁴ While it is easy to interpret Wing How's yellow costume as a representation of his Chinese ethnic heritage, it is far more likely that it was adopted in order to compliment the color scheme that already existed for the Crimson Avenger. For example, Wing's costume is bright yellow with a red-finned crest on his head and matching underpants. The Crimson Avenger, on the other hand, wears a deep red costume with a yellow head fin and underpants.

conveying that his ethnicity was central to his identity as a superhero sidekick (see fig. 29).

Unlike other Asian sidekicks, however, Wing's origin is specifically linked to Japanese actions during World War II. While the character premiered alongside his partner in the twentieth issue of *Detective Comics* in October of 1938, he was initially just the hero's Chinese chauffeur, rather than his partner. It wasn't until the series' forty-fourth issue two years later that he officially became the Crimson Avenger's costumed sidekick. At that time, Wing's origin was fleshed out, and it was explained that he had fled to America as a result of Japanese aggression in China. Naturally, this revamping of the character's backstory was largely shaped by geopolitical events and the increasingly tenuous relationship between the United States and Japan after the Mukden Incident. Interestingly, in a story from the eighth issue of *Leading Comics*, entitled, "Courage in Canton" the Crimson Avenger and Wing are sent back to Ancient China by a criminal they are pursuing, and witness the "barbarian" Japanese attack the city. Upon seeing the carnage, the Crimson Avenger remarks, "Japanese! We might have known it!" Wing responds, "Hah! Ancient enemy of Wing's people! We teach lesson!" (see fig. 30). Aside from the historical inaccuracies of the story, which suggest that the Great Wall of China was built to repel the Japanese, this narrative reinforces Wing's antagonistic relationship with Japan and proposes that it is not just grounded in contemporary conflicts, but rather is rooted in the ancient past.

Several factors contributed to the presence of these monstrous representations of the Japanese in comic books. For many creators within the

industry, the production of pro-war narratives was not just an exercise in nationalism, but also a matter of ethnic expression and civic necessity. It is well established that during the earliest years of the comic book industry, a large number of writers and artists were of Jewish descent, and had good reason to champion American intervention in World War II. Today, many of the most famous names in comics proudly recognize their ethnic roots, although that was not always the case. A significant number of creators often used pen names, or changed them entirely in order to hide their ethnicities and their involvement with comics.³²⁵ For example, Marvel Comics' writer and editor-in-chief, Stan Lee, famously withheld his real name, Stanley Lieber, because he felt that the material he produced was lowbrow, and that he would save his legal name for when he wrote the "Great American Novel."³²⁶ Similarly, artist Jack Kirby changed his name from Jacob Kurtzberg early in his career, preferring an Americanized alias for publication.³²⁷ Even the creator of Batman, Bob Kane, legally changed his name from Robert Kahn before entering the industry. Artist Gil Kane, who co-created the Silver Age Green Lantern and Atom for D.C. Comics, was born Eli Katz. Kane had so many pen names that artist Joe Edwards remarked, "Eli Katz, Al Stack. He'd change his name like you'd change your underwear."³²⁸

Naturally, one might be inclined to ask why these individuals felt the need to hide their ethnicities as a matter of professionalism. Much of this had to do with an

³²⁵ Raphael and Spurgeon 17.

³²⁶ Fingerioth and Thomas 40.

³²⁷ Jack Kirby's spouse, Roz, notes that his name was legally changed immediately after they got married in 1942. R. Kirby 41.

³²⁸ Edwards 68.

environment of anti-Semitism that existed at the time, particularly within the art, advertising, and publishing industries. In fact, one of the main reasons why many artists entered comics in the first place, rather than taking more respectable jobs, is because their ethnicity made it impossible to secure employment anywhere else.³²⁹ As Will Eisner bluntly stated, “There were Jews in this medium because it was a crap medium. And in a marketplace that still had racial overtones, it was an easy medium to get into.”³³⁰ Timely artist Al Jaffe similarly recalled,

I came into the comic business in 1940, prior to World War II, as far as America was concerned, and the United States still lived under terrible discrimination rules against Jews. Of course, against black people it was ten times worse. But my friends and I who were artists, we sat around trying to figure out if we could get into an advertising agency, and the discussion would be something like, “Forget about it, forget about it, you can’t go to Benton and Bowles, they’ll never hire a Jew.” That kind of thing. Then, suddenly, this miracle happened: the comic book business, which was in large part developed by Jewish people opened up to us.³³¹

Other artists, like Lee Ames, originally named Abramowitz, found that using a nom de plume was necessary because publishers feared that readers would refuse to buy books that were produced by Jews. He noted,

I was conflicted because I did not want to hide my Jewish identity. Then I went to work for Jerry Iger, who you know was Jewish. The first time I was allowed to use a byline, I decided to use my real name. Iger said, “Nope. We can’t do that.” That was the nature of the times; the prevailing fear that anti-Semitism created a commercial hazard. You simply didn’t expose that kind of condition.³³²

Artist Lew Schwartz had a similar experience in the industry, recalling, “That S.O.B. [cartoonist Rube] Goldberg looked at my work and said, ‘You’ve got a lot of talent,

³²⁹ Weinstein 22.

³³⁰ Eisner and Miller 211.

³³¹ Jaffe 28.

³³² Ames 12-13.

kid. But change your name.”³³³ That said, many others like Will Eisner, Joe Simon, Bill Finger, Joe Kubert, Jerry Siegel, and Joe Shuster retained their birth names while working within the industry. There are countless other stories about the anti-Semitism that Jewish writers and artists faced at the beginning of their careers.

It was in the midst of this environment that comic books emerged as a mass medium, and for the first time, gave voice to many creators who had never had such a wide reaching platform before in their lives. While these individuals certainly could not say or do anything they wanted in the medium, as they were still restricted by editors and publishers, they did have the ability to test new characters, concepts, and narratives, which could be used as a pulpit for their personal politics.

Many of these creators were liberal Democrats who held an interventionist stance toward the war. Colorist Jack Adler remarked that during the Golden Age, “All the people at D.C. were Democrats. I’m a Roosevelt Democrat. I voted for him three times and have voted that way ever since.”³³⁴ Thus, given their ethnic backgrounds and status as rising young professionals, it is understandable that many writers and artists felt passionately about American involvement in World War II. After all, while the scope of the Nazis’ atrocities was not fully known at the time, there were certainly murmurings about the targeting, mistreatment, and internment of Jews in Europe. However, this drive also led many of them to engage in the production of the most reprehensible, dehumanizing, and racist imagery of the era. While they are not entirely to blame, as the stories in comic books frequently reasserted and reproduced common narratives that already circulated within American culture,

³³³ Schwartz 22.

³³⁴ Adler 25.

they nevertheless contributed to and greatly advanced the overall image of the Japanese as monsters that emerged throughout the war.

Additionally, like the rest of their generation, World War II profoundly affected the lives of the majority of comic book creators, and almost all of them were actively involved in the war effort at some point during the conflict. While we have seen the advocacy role that these individuals played, many of them were also combatants, serving on the front lines as soldiers after being drafted by various branches of the military. While in the service, their superiors often caught wind of their talents, and as a result, these writers and artists utilized their abilities to create war propaganda and assist with tactical planning in the European and Pacific theaters. While it is impossible to provide a comprehensive list of creators who served in World War II here, it is worth mentioning some of the work that prominent creators did for the military. Artist Jack Kirby famously served as a scout while in the Army with Company F of the Eleventh Infantry, conducting reconnaissance missions and drawing maps of the enemy territory in occupied France.³³⁵ Kirby's fellow artist, Jack Katz, recalled the impact the war had on his friend, noting, "When he was in World War II, Jack was involved in some pretty horrific situations in which he had to do the ultimate thing. [...] Sometimes, I noticed he was staring out the window, and from the look in his eyes, it was apparent to me that he was reliving the War. He talked to me about these things; his eyes were very deep in the past. It was extraordinary."³³⁶ It was also not uncommon for creators to be killed in action. For example, artist Bert Christman, the co-creator of the D.C.

³³⁵ Eisner, *Shop Talk* 215; Morrison 38-39.

³³⁶ Katz 40.

superhero, The Sandman, lost his life when Japanese forces shot down his plane in Burma.

Not all creators were placed in such dangerous positions during the war. Many others, like Will Eisner, Richard Deane Taylor, Harry Lampert, Dave Gantz, Al Plastino, George Tuska, and Kurt Shaffenburger produced posters, films, training charts, and illustrated manuals for their fellow soldiers on topics ranging from vehicle maintenance to venereal disease.³³⁷ Some like Gil Fox, Russ Heath, and Harvey Kurtzman worked as editors and cartoonists for various camp newspapers.³³⁸ Still other big names within the industry, like Stan Lee, Jerry Siegel, Sheldon Moldoff, Carl Burgos, Al Feldstein, Chuck Cuidera, Bob Kanigher, Gil Kane, Gene Colan, and Mickey Spillane served in various branches of the military during the war. Some comic book creators also retained their jobs and positions at their respective companies while they were stationed domestically at camps preparing to be shipped out. They trained and drew throughout the week, traveling to New York City on the weekends to submit their finished materials. Two artists, Vic Dowd and Bob Boyajian were even part of the “Ghost Army,” a tactical division that engaged in deceptive operations against the Nazis after D-Day.³³⁹

These connections are worth noting, because they highlight the degree to which World War II was a personal event for many of the creators in the industry. Even for those who were not of Jewish descent, their lives as young men and working professionals was largely shaped by the course of the war. They were not

³³⁷ Taylor 183; Lampert 18; Gantz 21; Plastino 28; Tuska 12; Hammerlink, “Salute” 45.

³³⁸ Gil Fox 27-28; Heath 3; Gilbert 75.

³³⁹ Dowd 27; Boyajian 40.

simply bystanders; they were active participants in the war effort. Nazi Germany and Japan were not just America's enemies. They were the real-life enemies of many of the people who produced comic books. As with the stories tackling issues of social justice and wealth disparity during the Great Depression, the narratives that these writers and artists produced during World War II were advocacy primarily because they reflected these individuals' personal experiences and beliefs, which in turn, were supported by the economics of the larger industry and the ideological disposition of the readership. In many respects, these factors led to a blurring of the lines that separated the beliefs of the individual, the financial goals of the industry, and the mission of the state.

Further, as previously noted, a large segment of the readership consisted of enlisted military personnel. Comic books were extremely popular with individuals serving during World War II, as the stories within them provided entertaining, accessible tales that boosted morale by reminding soldiers what they were fighting for. Given that these publications echoed dominant narratives about the war, they were widely available and sold in large quantities at PXs. Many publishers recognized the military as a key source of sales during and after the war. For example, Harvey Comics' managing editor Sid Couchey remarked,

During wartime, sales would go up, because servicemen would only read comics when they were always from home. They didn't want to read newspapers, so they read comics. So, during World War II, sales went up, and after the war they dropped. During the Korean War, sales went up, and afterwards, it dropped! During the Vietnam War, it went up, afterwards it dropped! A lot of that had to do with the fact that PXs were big sellers of comics.³⁴⁰

³⁴⁰ Wells 164.

Indeed, by 1943, sales figures showed that comic books outsold popular magazines like *Life* and *Reader's Digest* by a ratio of ten to one on army bases.³⁴¹ Reinforcing this perception, artist Creig Flessel noted, "No one was buying the magazines. Until the war came and you could sell the to the GIs overseas. At a nickel or ten cents apiece, you couldn't go wrong. And the GIs loved them."³⁴² Similarly, D.C. assistant editor George Kashdan observed a drastic change in the readership before and during the war, stating, "When I was a kid during the Depression, the marketplace consisted of corner candy stores. Kids would be hanging around, and in the event of a rainstorm or a snowstorm, they would buy comics for 10 cents a piece, and the War changed that picture altogether. Many of the comic books went out to the PXs, and they sold very well there. Soldiers and sailors liked comic books."³⁴³

In short, publishers were largely dependent on the military for a significant portion of their sales during World War II. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the content within comics was designed, at least to some degree, to appeal to enlisted personnel. Alongside working class children and adolescents, these individuals were the prime audience for comic books, as each soldier was estimated to read approximately 7.6 comics every month.³⁴⁴ Indeed, with such financial incentives in place, the threat posed by ignoring the needs of the military readership was significant.

Furthermore, a body of evidence gestures toward a series of formal and informal alliances between professionals in the comic book industry and public

³⁴¹ Bongco 97.

³⁴² Flessel 57.

³⁴³ Kashdan 55.

³⁴⁴ Hammerlink 77.

officials at the state and federal levels, particularly in agencies like the Office of War Information, whose purpose was to manage propaganda and shape public opinion. Much like with Hollywood, these bodies had no official authority to censor or alter publications, but instead worked in tandem with the industry to produce material in support of the war effort.³⁴⁵ As some scholars have noted, it is no coincidence that the public criticism of comic books, which actually started in 1940, was tempered throughout World War II, as superheroes led a nationalist campaign against America's Axis enemies.³⁴⁶ Indeed, various writers, artists, and editors have spoken out about how the stories they produced during the war not only echoed their own points of view, but also reinforced the propaganda distributed through official channels.

In many instances, public figures did not officially endorse what was being presented in comic books, but instead worked behind the scenes to ensure that the messages being published that were helpful to the war effort could be heard unimpeded. One of the best-known examples of this is New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia's assurance of safety to Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, the creators of *Captain America*. Simon recalled that the publication of the first issue of *Captain America Comics* resulted in a huge backlash from anti-war groups like "American Firsters" and the German American Bund. In addition to sending hate mail and making threatening phone calls, these individuals organized multiple protests around Timely's offices on 42nd Street in Manhattan. The feeling, Simon noted, was that

³⁴⁵ Roeder 49.

³⁴⁶ Raphael and Spurgeon 41-42.

We were all under siege. They were all around us. They're lining up at the building, raging and maybe waving signs, too. I couldn't see them well enough to be sure of what they were waving. Anyway, they must have gotten our address out of the comic books. They were outside, and the police were there, and I did get a call from Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. He was a big comics fan, you know.³⁴⁷

According to his account, the mayor called him immediately after law enforcement arrived at the building, and said over the phone, "You boys over there are doing a good job. The City of New York will see that no harm will come to you."³⁴⁸

Other accounts suggest that federal agencies were actively approaching publishers requesting that pro-war propaganda and negative representations of the Japanese be incorporated into the content of comic books. George Kashdan, an assistant editor for D.C. Comics during the 1940s, recalled, "I know while World War II was on, [Superman editor Whitney Ellsworth] went along with requests of government agencies to show the Japanese as ugly, evil monsters, and showing them like bug-eyed monsters."³⁴⁹ While details about this policy are scarce, Kashdan's statement regarding the close relationship between D.C. Comics and the government is corroborated by a postwar editorial in *Coronet Magazine* by editor Mort Weisinger, in which he defends the Superman character against critics. While he doesn't explicitly address the charge about anti-Japanese propaganda in comics, he does reaffirm the close linkage between the editors of Superman and various governmental entities during the course of the war. He writes,

Recognizing Superman as a wartime public relations expert, the War Department drafted him to spur drives to salvage fats, scrap iron, and wastepaper. [...] When Maj. Gen. Walter R. Weaver of the Air Forces Training

³⁴⁷ Simon, Interview 16.

³⁴⁸ Simon and Simon 45.

³⁴⁹ Kashdan 43.

Command found that thousands of enlisted men were contemptuous of grease-monkey type jobs, he appealed to Superman. The next issue of *Superman* on the PX counters proved that the job of keeping 'em flying was just as glamorous as the duties of the glamorous pilot with wings. When the Navy initiated a special training program, designed to convert illiterates into useful personnel, they turned to the visual appeal of Superman's books. [...] Throughout the war, hundreds of jeeps, trucks, tanks, landing vehicles, and planes bore the Superman insignia.³⁵⁰

Furthermore, D.C. artist Fred Ray produced various anti-Japanese covers for the Superman titles. The most infamous of these features the character operating a printing press, turning out broadsheets which tell readers to "Slap a Jap" by buying war bonds and stamps (see fig. 31). Other, less incendiary layouts featured the character hoisting Hitler and an alien-like Hirohito by their shirt collars, knocking around Japanese soldiers on a motorbike, and literally riding a falling bomb onto the battlefield with a tagline that reads, "War Savings Bonds and Stamps Do The Job on the Japanazis!" (see figs. 32-34).

Similarly, Fawcett Publications maintained a standing editorial policy throughout the war that was established in 1942, which encouraged that Nazis and war-related enemies be incorporated into comic book narratives as often as possible.³⁵¹ Naturally, this was done at least in part for monetary reasons, but one cannot discount the fact that it was also driven by nationalistic fervor and a desire to reinforce the interests of the state. Lamenting this policy decades later, artist C.C. Beck remarked,

Our publisher, correctly figuring that the hysteria of the second World War would make Nazi, Fascist, and Nipponese villains popular, made us introduce not only the villains Captain Nazi and Nippo and other such fantastic creatures as opponents for Captain Marvel but was actually happy when we

³⁵⁰ Weisinger 46.

³⁵¹ Ensign 48.

showed Hitler, Mussolini, and Hirohito—living people—in our comic pages.³⁵²

Fawcett artist Marc Swayze also noticed the swift change in focus following the attack on Pearl Harbor. He mused, “I wonder how many finished peace-time stories were yanked out of typewriters on the morning of Pearl Harbor and fresh paper inserted. Fawcett, like most other publishers, jumped onto the war stories without delay.”³⁵³

Indeed, the propaganda function that many comic book creators served may be the primary reason why they were quietly classified as “semi-essential” during the war. Artist Rudy Palais, for instance, recalled that he used his status to obtain a deferment. He stated, “In those war years, we didn’t realize that anyone involved in doing comics was considered ‘semi-essential.’ That wasn’t common knowledge. I only found it out when I went to my draft board and a chap named Bailey, who ran a syndicate for newspaper strips, said, ‘Mention the fact that you do comic books, and you’ll get an extension.’ So that’s exactly what happened.”³⁵⁴ Similarly, artist Tony DiPreta, recalled that his occupation was defined as “war work” by the government, stating,

I was working, working, working, and one day, there was an article in the paper stating that anyone not doing war work was going to be drafted, no matter what their physical condition was. [...] The paper listed different jobs that qualified as “war work.” One of them was “Dissemination of Public Information.” I chewed down those big words and came up with “propaganda.” I thought, “We’re doing propaganda.”³⁵⁵

³⁵² Beck, “The Birth, Life, and Death of Fawcett’s Captain Marvel” 51-52

³⁵³ Swayze 75.

³⁵⁴ Palais 47.

³⁵⁵ DiPreta 54.

Likewise, Vin Sullivan, the publisher of Magazine Enterprises, who had previously been an early editor for D.C., stated that his company's efforts with military-themed comics had kept artist Creig Flessel, the co-creator of the superhero The Sandman, out of the war. He noted, "[The armed services] would give out a citation to certain publications that were helping the war effort. And so I had *The Marine Corps*. This was like an unofficial magazine of the Marine Corps! [...] As a result of that, I was able to have Creig Flessel not drafted because he was doing work on a publication that was helping the war effort!"³⁵⁶ Other publishers, like Timely, that produced nationalistic series like *U.S.A. Comics*, were allowed to do so unimpeded, despite fears by Martin Goodman, the company's publisher, that the title violated an existing governmental copyright.³⁵⁷ While it is unlikely that the American government would have pursued litigation in any case, it certainly did not hurt that the series featured patriotic stories that contributed to the dominant narrative of the war.

In return for this preferential status, comic books never questioned or discussed certain aspects of the war in their pages, particularly the internment of Japanese Americans. In fact, the camps themselves almost never appear within comic books, with a few exceptions. One of the most famous is a story that appeared in the *Superman* newspaper strip that ran from June to August of 1943, entitled "The Sneer Strikes," in which Clark Kent reports on conditions in an internment camp and discovers a group of Japanese Americans involved in a plot to escape by holding an army officer hostage. Interestingly enough, the story was actually reviewed by the Office of War Information, which advised the McClure Syndicate, the body

³⁵⁶ Sullivan 8-9.

³⁵⁷ Simon, Interview 10.

responsible for the comic strip, to include a mention of loyal Japanese Americans. Regrettably, the request was never granted.³⁵⁸ So incendiary was the material that D.C. refused to grant an Asian American anthology on World War II the rights to reprint the strip, out of fear that it would tarnish the image of the Superman character.³⁵⁹

There are also a few other depictions of the internment camps that appear in the background of comic book covers. For example, the twenty-third issue of Fawcett's *Captain Midnight*, published in 1944, depicts the hero flying down from the sky, pouncing on a group of armed camp escapees, with a sign reading "Japanese Prison Camp," displayed prominently behind them (see fig. 35). Additionally, the cover of the nineteenth issue of *Green Hornet Comics*, from that same year, by Alex Schomburg depicts the hero fighting off a group of "Rampaging Japs" who are attempting to blow up a railroad track as an oncoming train nears, with a sign reading, "Tule Lake Camp" in the foreground of the image (see fig. 36). These images are in stark contrast to the official photographs of Japanese American internment by Ansel Adams, Dorothea Lange, and others—some of which show internees happily reading comics purchased from camp newsstands—which were carefully crafted to convey an image of a potentially treacherous population that was well-treated and provided for, a narrative that masked a much darker reality (see fig. 37).³⁶⁰

More than anything else, what we see in this era, is that three factors: the ethnic identities of comic book creators, the use of their artistic abilities throughout

³⁵⁸ Darowski 8-9.

³⁵⁹ F. Wu 14.

³⁶⁰ Creef 46.

their military service, and the tacit support of the medium by governmental officials and agencies, effectively fostered a link between the interests of the state and that of individuals working within the industry, and as a result, the stories produced within comics often served a propaganda function, reinforcing dominant narratives about the war and America's enemies, particularly the Japanese. Readers, particularly enlisted personnel, played a large role as well, providing a financial incentive to publishers who churned out such material, thereby giving them license to continue producing stories that promoted the dominant narrative of the war.

The representation of the Japanese in these materials, along with those found in other popular mediums like films, newsreels, and radio, contributed to the dehumanizing logic that justified the extermination of the enemy, which was realized through the use of the atomic bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August of 1945. In many respects, World War II represented a perfect storm of events, in which multiple elements, from the rise of comic books to the established tradition of associating monsters with Asia, coalesced in such a way to enable the demonization of an Asian enemy. In no uncertain terms, the Japanese were products of war and introduced to America as monsters; they were vile, hateful, inhuman creatures that had no respect for human life, representing everything that was antithetical to our cherished social norms, while simultaneously embodying the invasive and destructive threat of the Yellow Peril. Interestingly, within the next decade the representational strategy of deploying monstrosity would be challenged by the very authorities that sanctioned its use during wartime, as such depictions came to be seen as corruptive agents that promoted deviant and

abnormal behavior among youth, contributing to rates of juvenile delinquency in the United States.

CHAPTER FOUR: WELCOME TO THE NEW AGE: DEVIANT AND SUBVERSIVE

MONSTROSITY IN THE POSTWAR ERA

“Our American children are, for the most part, normal children. They are bright children, but those who want to prohibit comic magazines seem to see dirty, sneaky, perverted monsters who use the comics as a blueprint for action. Perverted little monsters are few and far between. [...] What are we so afraid of? Are we afraid of our own children? [...] We think our children are so evil, simple-minded, that it takes a story of murder to set them to murder, a story of robbery to set them to robbery?”
~ William Gaines

“This is awful. Atomic tuna, radioactive fallout, and now this Godzilla to top it off! What if it shows up in Tokyo Bay? [...] I barely escaped the atomic bomb in Nagasaki—and now this!” ~ Yamane Emiko, *Gojira*

I. Introduction

On the afternoon of April 21, 1954, Bill Gaines, publisher of the Entertaining Comics Group, presented his testimony before the United States Senate Subcommittee Hearing on Juvenile Delinquency headed by Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver. Within the span of a few hours, key industry figures, social scientists, and clinical specialists were called to testify about the effect of comic books on the development and behavior of children. Earlier that day, Fredric Wertham, a respected psychologist whose popular study, *Seduction of the Innocent*, claimed that comic books, as a result of their extreme violent and sexual content, were a

contributing factor to juvenile delinquency in the United States, had presented his case to the committee, detailing the inappropriate material found within the medium.

Dressed in a suit and wearing his trademark black horn-rimmed glasses, Gaines delivered his rebuttal to charges that singled out his company as one of the worst offenders within the industry. When he was finished, Senator Kefauver held up a comic book published by E.C. Comics, the twenty-second issue of *Crime Suspensstories*, and said, “Here is your May 22nd issue. This seems to be a man with a bloody ax, holding up a woman’s head, which has been severed from her body. Do you think that is in good taste?” (see fig. 38).

Gaines leaned forward and spoke into the microphone before him, “Yes, sir. I do, for the cover of a horror comic. A cover in bad taste, for example, might be defined as holding the head a little higher so that the neck could be seen dripping blood from it and moving the body over a little further so that the neck of the body could be seen to be bloody.”

“You have blood coming out of her mouth,” Kefauver skeptically replied.

“A little,” said Gaines.

“Here is blood on the ax. I think most adults are shocked by that.”³⁶¹

By all accounts, Gaines’ testimony was a disaster.³⁶² For months, he had been cast in the popular press as the defender of the industry’s most controversial content,

³⁶¹ United States, *Hearings Before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency* 103.

³⁶² According to Gaines, two factors adversely impacted his performance. The first was the fact that other witnesses appearing before the committee earlier that day had taken longer than expected, forcing him to delay his testimony until after lunch.

claiming that comic books had been unfairly singled out for criticism by the media, special interest groups, and politicians. While a series of respected specialists and cultural critics, like sociologist Fredric Thrasher and psychiatrist Laretta Bender, had written on behalf of the comic book industry, their work was effectively undermined and undone in the span of a day, as critics seized on Gaines' statements to paint him as a detached and perverse individual whose business purposely exposed children to content that violated the most cherished social norms of the 1950s.³⁶³ In later years, artist Carmine Infantino described the effect that Gaines' testimony had on the entire industry, stating, "He did very badly at the meeting, and all comics took a hit. The whole field fell apart. Comic book sales were dying. Being a cartoonist in those days was like a dirty word. Fear reigned supreme."³⁶⁴

With the onslaught of criticism and the threat of government action looming overhead, the industry's largest publishers took the drastic step of self-censorship, and established the Comics Code Authority, a regulatory body tasked with approving the content of all comic books published in the United States. This action resulted in the closure of more than forty publishers, and effectively banned mature content from appearing within the medium.³⁶⁵ Interestingly, one of the main targets of the Comics Code were monsters, which were frequently featured in the popular genre of horror comics. For nearly two decades, vampires, zombies, werewolves, and ghouls were forbidden from appearing in the medium, for they were perceived

Additionally, Gaines had purportedly been on diet pills during this period, which affected his concentration, particularly as their effects began to wear off throughout the questioning. Nyberg 60; Raphael and Spurgeon

³⁶³ Nyberg 16.

³⁶⁴ Infantino 8.

³⁶⁵ Schelly, "The Forgotten 50s" 69.

to be symbols of abnormality that threatened to upend proper socialization and impede the transmission of moral values to young people.

It is with considerable irony then, that only a few months later on the other side of the Pacific, Japanese cultural producers utilized monsters to explore and interrogate the lingering psychological trauma from the events of World War II, specifically the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In late October 1954, Director Honda Ishiro's *Gojira* premiered in Japan to much fanfare.³⁶⁶ Released by Toho Company Ltd., the movie featured a reptilian monster, the first in what became the *kaiju*, or "giant monster" genre, rampaging through Tokyo after being awoken and mutated into a radioactive abomination by American atomic testing in the Pacific. Recognized by scholars as work that utilized the fantasy setting of science fiction to interrogate and critique the use of the atomic bombs against Japan, the film placed monstrosity at the forefront of its approach, illustrating the destructive potential of American nuclear power and the unintended consequences associated with unfettered technological advancement.³⁶⁷ The resounding financial and critical success of the film resulted in the creation of a veritable franchise of monster movies for Toho and an English adaptation in the United States, released in 1956 as the severely edited, *Godzilla: King of the Monsters!*

This chapter explores this differing use of monstrosity in the United States and Japan during the postwar era. It examines the profound shift that occurred throughout American society, in which comic books, having previously functioned as a vehicle for promoting monstrous depictions of the Japanese, were effectively

³⁶⁶ Ryfle 33.

³⁶⁷ Noriega 56; Sontag 216.

marginalized and assailed by social and cultural critics as the leading cause of juvenile delinquency. It documents how the working relationship between the United States government and the comic book industry eroded altogether in the decade following World War II, as the foreign and domestic policy interests of the former came into direct conflict with the financial and business interests of the latter. No longer able to sustain themselves financially by producing stories that echoed dominant social narratives, publishers instead turned to new genres, like crime and horror, which utilized both figurative and literal monsters that threatened the status quo and normalcy of the 1950s.

Further, it considers the ideas at the core of the anti-comics movement in relation to the sudden emergence of Godzilla in Japanese culture, and its subsequent importation to the United States. Having primarily focused on the American perspective throughout the previous chapters, this section delves into the Japanese historical understanding of monsters, specifically the cultural tradition of *yokai*, in order to explore the reasons for their filmic deployment in the postwar era. Here, we are concerned with two different but related issues. First, and perhaps most importantly, we focus on how Godzilla serves as a vehicle for critiquing American foreign policy in the immediate aftermath of the occupation of Japan. We consider why monsters were such potent signifiers for understanding and coping with the aftermath of World War II, tying their use directly to the historical understanding of monstrosity. Secondly, it interrogates the reasons for strong and lasting association between Godzilla and Japan in the American imagination, exploring how the English adaptation reinscribes the text, transforming the monster into a symbol of Japan

rather than the embodiment of the threat posed by nuclear weapons. Here, we ask why Godzilla is so frequently representative of Japanese identity in the culture of the United States, suggesting that it is because the monster itself resonates with foundational ideas about Japan that were introduced to the American public throughout the war.

In broader terms, this chapter adopts a comparative transnational perspective to detail how the postwar era serves as another key moment that connects monstrosity to Japanese identity in the American imagination. It describes the profound and lasting consequences of the negative depictions of the Japanese presented throughout World War II, and how they continue to shape the way that we understand Japan today. By exploring the stigma against monsters in comic books and the use of *kaiju* as a means of international critique, this chapter lays the groundwork for the final part of this study, which brings us into the 1960s where the legacy of the anti-comics movement and the proliferation of monster movies results in the rebirth of superheroes in American comic books and their inception into Japanese manga.

II. The Rise of Crime and Horror Comics in Postwar America

The end of World War II marked the beginning of drastic changes within the American comic book industry. Most importantly, the return of servicemen from the European and Pacific theaters ended the labor shortages that many publishers had dealt with throughout the conflict, which had forced them to rely on young, untested talent and women. Lee Elias, the co-creator of The Flash, noted that the war enabled many artists to secure work, recalling, “It made it a little easier because it removed

some of the manpower, and there weren't many good artists around to begin with. Soon, even poor ones were hard to find."³⁶⁸ As a result, many of the individuals who went on to become the best talent in the field, like Joe Kubert and Alex Toth, got their start during this era.³⁶⁹ Comics also served as an occupational entry point for many women, like novelist Patricia Highsmith, who authored a number of stories for Timely throughout the war, including *Jap-Buster Johnson*, which appeared in *All-Select Comics*.³⁷⁰ As artist Lily Renee succinctly put it, "They only [hired women] because of the war. They didn't have enough men."³⁷¹ Fawcett artist C.C. Beck described the situation posed by continual drafting of creators, noting that many were called into service "before they could even finish a story and got hauled away to serve in the armed forces as musicians, cooks, guards, even as fighting men in foxholes and in invading forces. [...] Our artwork got worse and worse."³⁷²

Further, the postwar era also saw the end of paper shortages that had drastically affected the output of many publishers throughout the war. At one point, the lack of paper was so severe that publishers like Fox and Ace cut back their line of titles or ceased publication entirely.³⁷³ Even the larger companies, including D.C. Comics, Timely Publications, Quality Comics, and Fiction House were affected by shortages after 1942, although to a much lesser extent. Artist Marvin Levy described the effect it had on the business, noting, "One of the key issues was the matter of who got paper. Paper was rationed, and if you were a bigger publisher like D.C. and

³⁶⁸ Elias 45.

³⁶⁹ Theakson 6.

³⁷⁰ Schenkar 126-130, 162-163; Howe 25.

³⁷¹ Renee 13.

³⁷² Beck, "The Birth, Life, and Death of Fawcett's Captain Marvel" 48.

³⁷³ Miller 84.

Timely, then you got your paper quota. If you wanted to come out with something and you were not in the publishing business, then you had a problem.”³⁷⁴ The end of rationing and shortages in the postwar era resulted in the emergence of many new publishers and a gigantic wave of new titles and genres that flooded the market.

These changes were not limited to the production side of the industry. The content of comic books was changing as well. The many superhero titles that had been so popular throughout the war, suddenly struggled on the newsstands as readers abandoned the genre. One problem that plagued many of these characters was their intimate connection to World War II. Once it ended, they became irrelevant and struggled to find a proper peacetime role. Even worse, their presence was a continual reminder of the cartoonish stories where costumed heroes fought the Nazis and Japanese, which retrospectively trivialized global tragedies like the Holocaust. Timely artist Allen Bellman reinforced this idea, stating, “I’m sure the public was sick of heroes fighting Nazi and Axis villains. When the true horror of the Nazi regime was exposed to the world, it likely made super-heroes seem silly in comparison.”³⁷⁵ As a result, by the late 1940s many superhero comic books had all but petered out.

In the cultural climate of the postwar era superheroes were interpreted symbolically as either representative of the very fascist regimes that the Allied forces had fought against during the war, or as propagandistic icons for imperialist conflicts for which the American public had neither appetite nor interest.

Particularly hard-hit by these changes in attitudes were characters like Superman.

³⁷⁴ Levy 31.

³⁷⁵ Bellman and Burlockoff 18.

While he had been introduced as a champion of the downtrodden during the Great Depression, the war transformed Superman into an agent of the state—an identity that he retains to this day—and positioned him as a larger than life authority figure. At home and abroad, he was viewed as being akin to a “benevolent fascist,” an identity that for many was too closely aligned to the image of the Nazis.³⁷⁶ Subsequently, throughout the 1950s the character underwent a series of changes, as editors took to softening his image in response to social criticism, shifting the narrative focus of the series to outrageous science fiction tales and placing the character at the center of a “Superman Family,” which included stories about his childhood and upbringing as Superboy, his relationship with his newly discovered cousin, Kara Zor-El, popularly known as Supergirl, and even giving him a series of super-powered pets, like Krypto the Superdog.³⁷⁷ Other titles, like *Superman’s Girlfriend, Lois Lane* and *Superman’s Pal, Jimmy Olsen* were launched to highlight his personal relationships and introduce the human element of the franchise’s supporting characters.

Others, like Captain America, however, did not fare as well. While the character had been one of the leading comic book symbols of American victory throughout World War II, the end of the conflict resulted in a steep decline in sales, which was largely attributed to his newfound irrelevance and the public’s distaste for what he represented. This was due to the hero’s patriotic baggage, as the focus of

³⁷⁶ Skeates 29.

³⁷⁷ The first appearance of Superboy is in the one hundred and first issue of *More Fun Comics*, Supergirl first appears in the two hundred fifty second issue of *Action Comics*, and Krypto the Superdog is introduced in the two hundred and tenth issue of *Adventure Comics*.

the series quickly shifted, pitting him against gangsters, communist agents at home, Russian saboteurs, and Chinese soldiers with the onset of the Korean War (see fig. 39). As sales declined, the series became increasingly stranger, as it attempted to piggyback on the popularity of new trends. By the seventy-fifth and final issue, it had been re-titled, *Captain America's Weird Tales*, and the main character was no longer even featured on the cover (see fig. 40). As artist John Romita explained, the character's political symbolism played an important role in the series cancellation, stating,

Stan [Lee] told me *Captain America* was cancelled [in 1954] because of its politics. Timely got a lot of mail complaining about chauvinism. The American flag was a dirty word in those days, because of the backlash of the Korean War. We had gone to war seemingly unnecessarily. It was a "police action" and people died. People were saying that America was putting the American flag over human safety, and that they weren't going to buy *Captain America*, because it's an excuse for people to kill other people in the world for America's sake. [...] For a while, Captain America was a dirty name!³⁷⁸

When Timely Publications, renamed Atlas, attempted a superhero revival in the 1950s, the character was briefly brought back, but the effort quickly failed, and Captain America was forgotten until 1964 when Stan Lee re-introduced him in the fourth issue of *The Avengers* (see fig. 41). The hero's exploits as a "Commie Smasher" in the 1950s were retroactively dismissed as an embarrassing mistake, and the character's history was rewritten to suggest that he had been frozen in ice since the end of World War II after disappearing during a final mission in Berlin (see fig. 42).³⁷⁹

³⁷⁸ Romita, interview by Jim Amash 24.

³⁷⁹ B. Wright 122-123.

The decline in the popularity of superheroes led to significant experimentation among publishers in an attempt to find the next big trend. Further, the rise of new communication and entertainment technologies, like television, forced creators to be edgier in order to compete for the attention of their readers.³⁸⁰ As a result, many new genres of comics emerged and found an audience during the postwar era, including romance, Westerns, and high-minded science fiction.³⁸¹ More often than not, successful titles inspired a horde of imitators, as publishers sought to exploit the profitability of series that proved to be a hit with readers. Of all the genres that rose to prominence during this period, two were the most commercially successful: crime and horror comics. These books were not necessarily the product of new ideas, but instead built on a foundation of established templates, as writers, artists, and editors continued to borrow ideas from the pulps.³⁸²

The first comic book series in the former was *Crime Does Not Pay*, a title produced by Lev Gleason Publications (see fig. 43). The brainchild of creators Charles Biro and Bob Wood, each issue featured multiple stories that purportedly related tales of “true crime” to its readers, with content taken directly from newspaper headlines. Gruesome in its aesthetic, these stories were surprisingly conservative in nature, as criminals and lawbreakers almost always met with a violent end as punishment for their misdeeds, hence the title of the series. While *Crime Does Not Pay* actually debuted to much success in 1942, it did not reach the

³⁸⁰ Jones 237.

³⁸¹ Joe Simon and Jack Kirby are widely recognized as the creators of the romance genre of comic books in the postwar era. Their title, *Young Romance*, published by Crestwood Publications in 1947, was specifically aimed at young girls, a segment of the market that had been ignored up until that point.

³⁸² Vance 96.

peak of its popularity until the end of World War II, when sales consistently topped a million copies per issue.³⁸³ Remarking on the breakout potential of the title, Biro himself exclaimed, “I think the first issue made money, which was fantastic in those days. [...] The second book zoomed up more than 23%, which was unheard-of. And in two or three issues, the book was just right at the top. And the sales were so phenomenal consistently [...] that every publisher in town, without exception, had an [imitation of Crime Does Not Pay].”³⁸⁴

Horror comics also debuted to great success shortly after World War II with the publication of editor Richard Hughes’ *Adventures Into the Unknown* by the American Comics Group, or ACG, in 1948 (see fig. 44).³⁸⁵ Like the crime genre that preceded it, these comics frequently featured stories that were conservatively didactic in nature, ending with criminals, lawbreakers, and wholly immoral characters punished for their misdeeds or trespassing into forbidden zones. However, authority figures and the legal establishment were often not responsible for administering punishment in these stories. Rather supernatural forces, like

³⁸³ N. Wright 26.

³⁸⁴ Cox 21.

³⁸⁵ Vance 49; Jones 237. *Adventures Into the Unknown* was not the first horror comic ever published, but it is recognized as the series that largely started the trend in the postwar era. The first series devoted exclusively to horror was *Eerie Comics* published by Avon in 1947, which lasted only a single issue. Further, it’s important to note that many histories of the medium mistakenly imply that EC Comics “created” the horror genre and that all the other titles produced during the 1950s were imitations of the company’s style. Rather, it’s more accurate to say that EC was an imitator that outdid their competition and their predecessors in the industry to become known as the premier publisher of horror comics throughout the era. For a comprehensive review of all non-EC horror series published throughout the 1950s, see Lawrence Watt-Evans’ article “The Other Guys: A Gargoyle’s-Eye View of the Non-EC Horror Comics of the 1950s” in the ninety-seventh issue of *Alter-Ego* magazine.

monsters, were cast as the agents of justice, tasked with the job of condemning those who were beyond the reach of the law. As with other genres, the success of horror comics resulted in a wave of imitators from a variety of publishers, particularly Atlas, who sought to capitalize on their popularity. ACG itself followed up on their own success with the debut of other horror titles, like *Forbidden Worlds* in 1951, and *Out of the Night* and *Skeleton Hand* in 1952.³⁸⁶ All told, between 1950 and 1954, a total of twenty-eight companies produced more than a hundred different horror titles.³⁸⁷

Of all the companies actively producing crime and horror comics during this period, perhaps the most popular and well known was E.C., or Entertaining Comics, which first rose to prominence in 1950, when publisher Bill Gaines introduced their “New Trend” line, consisting of crime, horror, science-fiction, and war titles, which were purposely written and illustrated with an exceedingly high degree of artistry which had been all but absent from the industry prior to that point.³⁸⁸ Further, while E.C. had not been the first to produce crime and horror comics, they perfected the formula of these genres by introducing a discussion of mature topics and an element of chance into their stories, which created suspense by leaving readers to wonder whether or not the featured characters would survive or perish by the end of each

³⁸⁶ Watt-Evans 8.

³⁸⁷ B. Wright 156.

³⁸⁸ Gaines had only been the head of E.C. Comics for two years when he introduced the company’s “New Trend” line. He had inherited the business from his father, industry pioneer Max Gaines, who died in a boating accident in 1947, who had originally started the label three years before as “Educational Comics,” publishing titles like *Picture Stories From the Bible*, a supreme irony considering the criticism the company later received for publishing “indecent” and “immoral” material. For a comprehensive look at E.C. Comics, see Grant Geismann’s *Foul Play! The Art and Artists of the Notorious 1950s E.C. Comics* and *Tales of Terror! The EC Companion*.

tale.³⁸⁹ All told, E.C. was responsible for some of the most well known, perhaps infamous, titles of the era, including *Tales From the Crypt*, *Shock Suspenstories*, *Weird Science*, and *MAD*, which was published in comic book format until it transitioned into a magazine with its twenty-fourth issue in 1955 (see figs. 45-49). While a comprehensive discussion of the importance and legacy of E.C. Comics is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note the company's contributions to the industry, as it became the leading scapegoat for attacks by social critics.

The visual aesthetic of crime and horror comics contributed significantly to the public outrage that centered on the medium in the postwar era. While comic books had come under fire for their content as early as May of 1940, with the publication of Sterling North's editorial "A National Disgrace" in the *Chicago Daily News*, the onset of World War II had tempered such attacks, as the content often reflected national policy interests throughout the duration of the conflict.³⁹⁰ However, the drastically altered social and cultural environment following the war, structured in part by the postwar liberal consensus, reinforced the value and importance of normality and its relationship to capitalism.³⁹¹ The content of crime and horror comics, with its representations of violence and deviant behavior largely defined the medium as a disruptive cultural force to those outside the industry, which threatened to undermine the core values of American society.

Furthermore, the rising tide of youth culture, famously depicted in the form of rebellious, "out-of-control" teens in films like Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without A*

³⁸⁹ Daniels, *Comix* 63; B. Wright 136.

³⁹⁰ Beaty 113; Raphael and Spurgeon 41-42; Nyberg 3-5.

³⁹¹ Gilbert 14-15.

Cause, heightened fears that the breakdown of the family unit and social institutions, coupled with the enhanced purchasing power of young people resulted in the consumption of products that promoted, glorified, and even caused juvenile delinquency.³⁹² As a medium that stereotypically catered to the youth market, the use of supernatural creatures and “moral” monsters, like criminals, was defined as the source of the comic books’ power as a corruptive force, for they often painted abnormality in a positive light, encouraging children to act out in socially destructive ways.³⁹³ Summarizing the common fear at the time, Mary Louise Adams writes, “More than anything else, it was normality that was deemed to be under threat from the pulp publications. They were accused of making immorality seem normal, of shifting the boundaries of what was seen to be acceptable. [...] Arguments against the dangers of indecency suggested that a whole process of moral degeneration would be put into effect if ‘immature’ teenagers read pulps, absorbed their sordid values, and carried them into the 1960s.”³⁹⁴

More importantly, the rise of these genres marked the divergence of the business interests of the comic book industry and the domestic and foreign policy goals of the United States government. While comic book narratives had largely echoed the views of the state during World War II, particularly with regard to defining the Japanese enemy, the changing tastes of readers forced publishers to adapt their content and cater directly to their audience, which resulted in the production of more violent, sexually mature, and realistic stories that were often

³⁹² Gilbert 71, 214.

³⁹³ Barker 69.

³⁹⁴ M. Adams 140.

deemed inappropriate for children.³⁹⁵ This shift in the economics of the industry was largely responsible for creating the rift between producers of comic books and the federal government, which, after significant public pressure, resulted in the Senate Subcommittee Hearings on Juvenile Delinquency in 1954, painting comic books as tools of disorder that threatened to upset the delicate balance of civil society.

In addition to selling material that knowingly violated social and cultural norms, comic book publishers were also engaging in the production of narratives that questioned the nature of American foreign policy, particularly after the start of the Korean War. Titles like EC's *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales* featured anti-war stories by writer-editor Harvey Kurtzman, which attempted to realistically depict the horror of war, relate a moral lesson to readers, and implicitly challenge the official rationale for military conflict.³⁹⁶ While the earliest issues of *Two-Fisted Tales* had been devoted almost exclusively to adventure stories, within half a year the success of Kurtzman's approach resulted in their takeover of the entire book.

For example, in a story entitled "Corpse on the Imjin," which appeared in the twenty-fifth issue of title in 1952, an American G.I. is forced to kill a lone enemy soldier in hand-to-hand combat after being ambushed on the banks of the Imjin River. At first, the G.I., holding his knife in-hand, is reluctant to fight, but after the Korean soldier lashes out with a club, breaking the man's fingers, he reacts, charging the enemy and knocking him into the river. Using his body's weight, he holds the Korean soldier under and drowns him. The American G.I. steps out from the water

³⁹⁵ Savage 12.

³⁹⁶ Kitchen and Buhle 61-62.

and the narrator declares, "Suddenly, your mind is quiet, and your rage collapses! The water is very cold! You're tired...Your body is gasping and shaking weak...And you're ashamed!" The Korean soldier's body drifts downriver, and the story ends with the words, "And now the current, weak near the shore, slowly turns the body around and around...and it is as if nature is taking back what it has given! Have pity! Have pity for a dead man! For he is now not rich or poor, right or wrong, bad or good! Don't hate him! Have pity...for he has lost that most precious possession that we all treasure above everything...He has lost his life!"³⁹⁷

Further, Kurtzman regularly explored the human cost of conflicts like the Korean War, not only from the American perspective but from the other side as well. In a story entitled, "Dying City" in the twenty-second issue of *Two-Fisted Tales* from July to August of 1951, he describes a young man named Kim who leaves his family and his home to enlist with the North Koreans. Soon, the man's town becomes the site of a giant battle between the nationalist forces and the armies of America, its European allies, and the Chinese. The grandfather, the family's remaining patriarch, describes the scene, stating, "Airplanes, tanks, cannons, guns, guns, guns! Everywhere there were guns!"³⁹⁸ Soon, the conflict spreads to their home, and the explosion from a stray grenade kills the entire family, except the grandfather. Kim returns home with the North Korean army to find his family gone and his home destroyed, and in a panic is caught in the middle of a bombing raid. In the aftermath, the grandfather cries, "Did you see our city, broken and ruined? Did you see the

³⁹⁷ Kurtzman, et al., *Two-Fisted Tales Archives 2*: 67-68.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 158.

destroyed homes and factories? What does the future mean when everything you love is dead, my son? What is left? What good is your revolution? What good?"³⁹⁹

These are but a few examples of the many anti-war stories that appeared in these titles throughout the early 1950s. These books were pushing boundaries in an attempt to explore the limits of the medium as a vehicle for exploring issues of morality, and as a result, they generated considerable anxiety within both the military establishment and the federal government. Kurtzman later explained his rationale for writing these stories, stating,

When the Korean War broke out, I naturally turned to the war for material. But when I thought of doing a war book, the business of what to say about war was very important to me and was uppermost in my mind, because I did then feel very strongly about not wanting to say anything glamorous about war, and everything that went before *Two-Fisted Tales* had glamorized war. Nobody had done anything on the depressing aspects of war, and this, to me, was a terrible disservice to children. In the business of children's literature you have a responsibility, and these guys feeding this crap to the children that soldiers spend their time merrily killing little buck-toothed yellow men with the butt of a rifle is terrible.⁴⁰⁰

Other publishers like Atlas were also adversely affected by their production of titles that imitated the E.C. formula. Stan Lee noted that the company's books were pulled from PXs by the military establishment during the 1950s, resulting in a significant loss of revenue, because of the overt anti-war tone of the material, which painted the conflict in a negative light.⁴⁰¹ In fact, records indicate that comics had been banned for their content at some army bases as early as 1949.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁹ Ibid. 160.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid. 1: 76.

⁴⁰¹ Romita, interview by Roy Thomas 11; Howe 94.

⁴⁰² Beaty 203; B. Wright 99.

However, that is not to say that all comic books were critical of America's military conflicts in Asia. On the contrary, many comic book series were still focused on depicting America's enemies as villains. While the Japanese became U.S. allies following the end of World War II, the tropes that were used to identify them as the enemy lived on, both as caricature and stereotype, which were then applied with equal measure to the Chinese and Koreans, particularly in war comics like Quality's *G.I Combat*, DC's *All-American Men of War*, *Our Army At War*, *Star Spangled War Stories*, and Atlas' *Battle, Battlefield*, and *War Comics*, to name a few (see figs. 50-51). The stories featured in these titles depicted Asian soldiers who were often just as inhumanly cruel as the Japanese had been—although much less physically monstrous—with the main difference being that they espoused communism as the philosophy that drove their actions rather than devotion to the emperor.⁴⁰³ As Bradford Wright observes, "Sometimes the similarities between America's Asian foes were a little improbable, as when the Red Chinese charged in human waves shouting the Japanese battle cry 'Banzai!'"⁴⁰⁴ However, the attitudes of the public toward the Korean War quickly forced comic book creators to be much more subtle in their approach to telling these stories, and even then, many of these books did not last for very long on the market. However, this did not stop the continual use of these visual tropes to define the Asian enemy, as the use of stereotypes continued with regularity throughout the subsequent decades.

It is important to stress that comic books were not singled out for criticism until their content began to challenge the dominant social and cultural narratives of

⁴⁰³ Savage 54.

⁴⁰⁴ B. Wright 114.

the postwar era. Horror titles in particular were the subject of intense scrutiny. The monsters featured in these books quickly went from being tools of the state, used to demonize the Japanese enemy and advance wartime policy goals, to symbols of corruption and social disorder that threatened to undermine stability and consensus throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s.

III. *Seduction of the Innocent* and the Comics Code Authority

All told, by 1954 many Americans believed that comic books were turning their children into monsters, and that their ubiquitous influence was a primary source of juvenile delinquency, due largely to the deviant content that was featured in their pages. When one considers the staggering number of comic books being consumed in the postwar era it becomes understandable why many believed that they had such a pervasive influence on young people. By 1950, there were forty publishers producing a total of more than three hundred titles, which sold approximately fifty million copies per month.⁴⁰⁵ D.C. Comics alone accounted for a huge portion of this figure, selling roughly twelve million comic books each month.⁴⁰⁶ In 1952, circulation had jumped to between fifty-five and sixty-five million copies.⁴⁰⁷ In 1953, sales rose even higher topping seventy million copies per month.⁴⁰⁸ To critics, the ever-increasing sales of comic books indicated that the problem of juvenile delinquency that they were associated with was only getting worse.

⁴⁰⁵ Jones 237.

⁴⁰⁶ M. Adams 143.

⁴⁰⁷ Klein 41.

⁴⁰⁸ B. Wright 155.

While many organizations were involved in the anti-comics movement, including various librarian, parent-teacher, law enforcement, and religious groups like the American Legion, Fraternal Order of Police, and the Catholic National Organization for Decent Literature, the individual most associated with spearheading the campaign against the industry was psychologist Frederic Wertham, who presented his initial critique in the March 1948 issue of *Collier's* magazine, in an interview entitled, "Horror in the Nursery."⁴⁰⁹ After writing a series of other editorials, which were published in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, he became known as an expert on the effect of comic books on the behavior and development of children. Perhaps his most influential article, entitled, "What Parents Don't Know About Comic Books," appeared in the November 1953 issue of *Ladies Home Journal*, in which he examined a series of comics and alleged that there was a direct correlation between the cultural materials that children consumed and their negative behavior.⁴¹⁰ More than anything else, what made him credible was the fact that he had statistical data and personal accounts that purportedly established a connection between the act of reading comic books and juvenile delinquency, which neither public intellectuals nor social scientists had been able to prove before.⁴¹¹

In 1954, Wertham compiled and advanced his findings, publishing them in *Seduction of the Innocent*. His book made a series of claims against the medium, charging that it was a lowbrow cultural form that promoted illiteracy, caused bad

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid. 89.

⁴¹⁰ Wertham, "What Parents Don't Know About Comic Books" 50-53.

⁴¹¹ Jones 238; Beaty 8.

taste and social “maladjustment,” fostered unwholesome fantasies, and that it resulted in criminal and sexually deviant behavior in young people.⁴¹² Further, he famously made a case against superheroes, alleging that Superman inspired power fantasies and dreams of flight in children through identification and imitation, that Wonder Woman promoted bondage and sadomasochism, as she was often tied up with her magic lasso in stories, and that Batman and Robin were emblematic of a gay relationship, “like a wish dream of two homosexuals living together.”⁴¹³ Much of the evidence for these claims consisted of testimony from his young patients, clinical observation, and his own reading of the medium, which has since been debunked as deeply flawed.⁴¹⁴ In many respects, Wertham’s critique fed into an existing cultural narrative about the relationship between youth culture and a disintegrating social order. Above all else, adults feared that the breakdown of the family and existing core institutions, like the school and church, had resulted in the socialization of improper behavior, which amounted to young people being educated through cultural transmission.⁴¹⁵

While Wertham has long been vilified as an egotistical zealot by those who study the history of comic books, recent scholarship, particularly by Bart Beaty, places the psychologist’s critique of comic books as part of a well-intentioned, but ultimately misguided movement against mass culture, considering it in the full context of the postwar liberalism. According to this view, Wertham sought to present a wide-ranging critique about the detrimental effects that these cultural

⁴¹² Beaty 139.

⁴¹³ Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent* 116-117, 190-191, 193.

⁴¹⁴ Thrasher, 200; Tilley 386.

⁴¹⁵ Gilbert 92.

products had on society as a whole, and merely used comic books as a means of articulating that argument, because of their popularity and ubiquity at the time.⁴¹⁶ The fact that comic books were also the least regulated of all mass cultural mediums at the time also influenced his decision to make them his target.⁴¹⁷ Furthermore, it should be noted that Wertham did not single out the entire medium for criticism, but rather, the largest segments of it that were the most popular.⁴¹⁸

The widespread national concern over comic books came to a head that same year, when the aforementioned United States Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency held investigative hearings on the medium. Senator Estes Kefauver, head of the subcommittee, even took steps toward seeking a ban on crime comics, consulting with the Postmaster and Federal Communications Commission to inquire if the distribution of such materials could be legally suppressed.⁴¹⁹ Similar pressure was applied at the state level, as New York and other local governments held hearings and passed laws restricting the consumption of comic books. The furor resulted in the public burning of comics in cities and small towns across the country. While the extent and impact of these events has been overstated in some studies,

⁴¹⁶ Beaty 56.

⁴¹⁷ Nyberg, "Comic Book Censorship In the United States" 43; Gilbert 97.

⁴¹⁸ In *Seduction of the Innocent*, Wertham occasionally mentions that there are wholesome comic books in publication, although he never explicitly notes the titles he has in mind. In his later years, he also wrote a manuscript praising an offshoot of the comic book industry, fanzines. Foreshadowing many of the arguments later articulated by Henry Jenkins in his reading of fan culture, Wertham's book *The World of Fanzines: A Special Form of Communication* (1973) favorably described fandom-based science fiction publications, arguing that they acted as a nexus for community formation through the communicative process. These facts call into question the common depiction of Wertham as a moral crusader who sought to destroy the entire comic book industry.

⁴¹⁹ Gilbert 146.

newspaper reports and magazine articles substantiate them occurring as early as 1948 in West Virginia, New York, New Jersey, Missouri, and Illinois.⁴²⁰

Rather than wait for the almost-certain implementation of restrictions from the federal government, comic book publishers instead sought to self-regulate, and banded together to form the Comics Magazine Association of America.⁴²¹ The organization, founded on August 17, 1954 and incorporated less than a month later on September 7, consisted of thirty-eight publishers and distributors.⁴²² Together, they established the Comics Code Authority (CCA), an independent body designed to regulate the content of publications produced by the industry. The Comics Code, the CCA's guidelines for approving the content of comic books, was largely developed in response to public criticism, and patterned after the Motion Picture Production Code, or the Hays Code, that governed the content of Hollywood films.⁴²³ Consisting of three parts, the code heavily restricted sex and violence in the medium, imposing a series of rules on writers and artists.

The most important aspects of the code pertained to the treatment of authority figures, monsters, and sexuality within comic book narratives. In fact, the first section is specifically aimed at crime comics, mandating that criminal acts could never be depicted in a positive light and instead only shown as a "sordid and unpleasant activity," that violence should be minimized, and most importantly, that

⁴²⁰ Hajdu 116-119; Jones 240-241; Sergi; B. Wright 58.

⁴²¹ The CMAA was the second organization formed by publishers to control the content of comic books. A similar effort had been undertaken in 1948 with the Association of Comics and Magazine Publishers when criticism of the industry first became widespread. The association was largely an ineffectual body, as many publishers disregarded its regulatory code.

⁴²² Nyberg 109-110.

⁴²³ *Ibid.* 112, 156.

“policemen, judges, government officials and respected institution shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority.”⁴²⁴ Similar restrictions were applied to horror comics, as the code states, “All scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, masochism shall not be permitted.” Further, the words “horror” and “terror” were banned outright from all titles, and monsters like zombies, vampires, ghouls, and werewolves were completely forbidden from appearing in comic books.⁴²⁵ Finally, with regard to sexual material, the code prohibited nudity or “indecent or undue exposure,” outlawed “suggestive or salacious illustration,” and reinforced the value of normative interpersonal relationships, by forbidding “illicit sex relations,” “sex perversion,” lighthearted discussions of divorce, and disrespect of the “sanctity of marriage.”⁴²⁶

The debate that emerged over the content of comics and the subsequent political pressure placed on the medium is important for a variety of reasons. First, it illustrates the degree to which monsters were seen as agents of disorder and immorality that threatened to upend the established values of the 1950s. Young children could not be allowed to read stories that glorified violence and abnormality, for they overtly highlighted the social and cultural anxieties at the core of postwar American identity. That so many individuals throughout all levels of society were ready to wage a figurative war against the medium reveals much about the perceived power and influence of these materials. Furthermore, while monsters in

⁴²⁴ Ibid. 166.

⁴²⁵ Ibid. 167.

⁴²⁶ Ibid. 167-168.

general were not banned outright from comic books, in that the Comics Code only prohibited the most popular creatures from being used in stories, these restrictions effectively neutralized the subversive potential of the horror genre and strongly limited its appeal. Unable to print stories aimed at mature readers that featured vampires, werewolves, zombies, and ghosts, the publishers that continued to produce these books were forced to invent their own monsters, often on a monthly basis, which, more often than not, resulted in the kinds of campy, derivative narratives that were found in “giant monster” movies.

Also, while the Comics Code applied only to materials published in the United States, it’s important to note that it was merely one part of a larger transnational movement to globally censor and restrict the content of graphic narratives. As Roland Kelts notes, between 1940 and 1960 anti-comics movements took place in more than twenty countries on four different continents.⁴²⁷ While a complete discussion of this aspect of the medium’s history is outside the purview of this study, it should be noted that similar campaigns occurred in places like Canada, Britain, Germany, France, Australia, and even Japan due to concerns over juvenile delinquency and the pervasive influence of American culture.⁴²⁸

Finally, the Comics Code also had a significant impact on representations of race within the medium, particularly with regard to Asians. For all the flaws in his study, even Wertham recognized the extent to which the depiction of wartime enemies and villainous others was representative of racist tendencies in American

⁴²⁷ Kelts 162.

⁴²⁸ See John Lent’s *Pulp Demons* for an examination of the international dimensions of the anti-comics movement and Martin Barker’s *Haunt of Fears* for the campaign against horror comics in the UK.

visual culture. In *Seduction of the Innocent*, he tackled the subject outright, arguing that crime comics had made implicit connections between criminality and race, writing

If I were to make the briefest summary of what children have told us about how different people are represented to them in the lore of crime comics, it would be that there are two kinds of people: on the one hand is the tall, blonde, regular-featured man sometimes disguised as a superman. [...] On the other hand are the inferior people: natives, primitives, savages, ape-men, Negroes, Jews, Indians, Italians, Slavs, Chinese and Japanese, immigrants of every description, people with irregular features, swarthy skins, physical deformities, Oriental features. [...] The brunt of this implied inferiority in whole groups of people is directed against colored people and “foreign born.”⁴²⁹

He continued his critique by specifically describing representations of the monstrous Asians enemy featured in war comics, writing,

War comics, in which war is just another setting for comic book violence, are widely read by soldiers at the front and by children at home. It seems dubious whether this is good for the morale of soldiers; it is certainly not good for the morality of children. Against the background of regular-featured blonde Americans, the people of Asia are depicted in comic books as cruelly grimacing and toothy creatures, often of unnatural yellow color.⁴³⁰

Wertham suggested that such depictions planted the seeds of “race prejudice” in the minds of children.⁴³¹ While we now recognize that the influence of such materials is far more complex than he believed, the fact that the blatant use of racist imagery in comic books of the era was enough to prompt such a critique is quite remarkable.

Due in part to such criticism, one of the Comic Code’s provisions regulated the representation of race in comic books. Falling under the category of religion, the 1954 guidelines stated, “Ridicule or attack on any religious or racial group is never

⁴²⁹ Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent* 101.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.* 105.

⁴³¹ Beaty 157.

permissible.”⁴³² While this rule proved to be minimally effective for the representation of people of color, in that it did not outlaw racial stereotypes from the medium—only overt displays of racism against minorities—it can be seen as a positive step toward more equitable depictions throughout the industry, as only a few years later in 1956, the first non-stereotypical Chinese American hero, Jimmy Woo, was introduced in the pages of Atlas’ short-lived series, *Yellow Claw* (see fig. 52). However, that certainly does not excuse the heavy-handed imposition of these regulatory regimes onto comic books, which effectively stifled creative production within the medium’s mainstream for more than two decades.

IV. *Gojira* v. *Godzilla*: From Subversive Monsters to Subversion of the Monster

Since its debut in 1954, *Godzilla* has become emblematic of Japan within American culture. The image of a giant, radioactive, fire-breathing, dragon-like monster attacking the urban landscape immediately recalls the cultural memory of the films, *Gojira* and its English adaptation *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!*, starring Raymond Burr. In this respect, it is impossible to discuss the role that monstrosity plays in the construction of Japanese identity in American culture without considering both the character and its filmic texts, despite the fact that they fall somewhat outside the purview of this study’s focus on comic books. However, that is not to say that the monster is irrelevant to the developmental history of the medium in the United States and Japan. On the contrary, *Godzilla* and the *kaiju* genre it introduced had a significant impact on the evolution of comic books and manga, a point that will be explicated throughout the remainder of this chapter and the next.

⁴³² Nyberg 167.

Godzilla emerged in Japan at a curious moment, precisely when American society was attacking monsters as an inherently destructive cultural force that threatened to destabilize established notions of normality within society. It is interesting then, that only months after the implementation of the restrictive Comics Code in the United States, that Honda Ishiro's *Gojira* premiered in Japan, inspired by true events about American nuclear testing in the Pacific. This section attempts to make sense of this fascinating timing and analyzes how both Japanese and American audiences interpreted the messages presented within the film. Here, we consider how this moment and the cultural response to the text not only speaks to postwar anxieties, but also why, along with World War II, it has significantly shaped the image of Japan within American culture.

While scholars have largely interpreted Godzilla as the expression of Japanese anti-nuclear sentiment, I contend that within the American imagination the filmic monster has been reinscribed, largely through the processes of adaptation and localization, so as to become representative of Japan itself rather than the byproduct of America's military presence in the Pacific, as it was originally designed. Through the careful and deliberate editing of *Gojira* into its English variant, *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!*, Hollywood effectively nullified the subversive and critical overtones within the film, transforming it into a campy, low-budget monster movie that highlighted the inferior nature of the Japanese film industry. With its message altered, Godzilla was no longer about the nuclear testing which led to the creation of the monster, but rather the creature itself, which was distinctly Japanese in nature, both in its origin and locale, which for American audiences tied it directly to

Japanese identity. Indeed, it is arguable that one reason why Godzilla became so popular in the United States is because it resonated with existing narratives about the Japanese that were deployed during World War II, and because it seemingly made monsters into comical figures that posed no overt threat to the status quo.

V. The Development and Function of *Yokai* in Japanese Culture and Society

In order to fully comprehend the significance of Godzilla and how it has been interpreted in America, one must first understand the inspiration for the creature and its origins, which are rooted firmly within the traditional Japanese cultural understanding of *yokai*. Defined in the most basic sense as “strange beings” or the uncanny, they can be found throughout many of the most popular of Japan’s folk tales, and take a variety of forms, which can be humanoid, spiritual, or animalistic in nature. One of the defining characteristics of these creatures is their transmutability and ability to transition from one state to the next, defying boundaries or limitations, as evidenced by terms like *bakemono*, literally translated as “changing things.”⁴³³ Connected to a larger understanding of the natural world, particularly in a religious context, the existence of *yokai* was an unquestioned reality throughout much of Japanese history, which in turn, shaped the form of everyday life. While it is impossible to detail the multiplicity of *yokai* here due to their sheer numbers, some of the most recognizable and iconic creatures include the *kappa*, a water sprite which wears the shell of a turtle on its back and is said to lurk in ponds waiting to ambush small children, *tengu*, long-nosed, bird-like creatures that reside in forests,

⁴³³ Papp 10.

and *oni*, demonic ogres of enormous size that live deep in the mountains (see figs. 53-54).

While *yokai* have long been a constitutive part of Japanese culture, perhaps as early as the Jomon Period (12,000-300 BC) interest in them and the supernatural in general, surged throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as scholars and humanists sought to catalogue and evaluate the reality of Japan's folk beliefs.⁴³⁴ The first of these individuals was Toriyama Sekien, an artist whose *Gazu Hyakki Yagyo* was the first work to identify *yokai* individually and organize them in an encyclopedic format, moving them from the realm of the abstract to the concrete.⁴³⁵ First published in 1776 and consisting of four volumes, it explored the various entities associated with the Muromachi era's popular artistic theme, the *Hyakki Yagyo*, or the *Night Parade of One Hundred Demons*, assigning names and narratives to each being in the montage-like aesthetic (see fig. 55).⁴³⁶ While most of the more than two hundred *yokai* presented within the codex were recognized entities from Japanese literature, Sekien also incorporated a dozen other creatures from Chinese sources and invented nearly eighty-five more, an important point to note, for he was the first to compile the fractured accounts of mysterious beings that were spread across the various facets of folk culture, defining them concretely for a larger

⁴³⁴ Ibid. 21.

⁴³⁵ Papp 33; Foster 62.

⁴³⁶ Foster 55-56. Interestingly, some scholars have made a connection between these manuscripts and the comic book form. Much like early European texts about monsters, like *The Wonders of the East*, Toriyama Sekien's codex is consists of a mixture of illustrations and text, which are used to construct descriptive narratives about each individual being. Foster 70.

readership.⁴³⁷ The images and descriptions in his work were used as a referential touchstone by his successors and the producers of Edo-era woodblock prints, known as *ukiyo-e*, or “Images of the Floating World.”

Throughout the following century, *yokai* were employed for a variety of contradictory purposes, particularly after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, as folk beliefs were simultaneously assailed for being emblematic of backward superstition, but also enshrined as evidence in favor of arguments about Japanese exceptionalism forwarded by nativists and devotees of the imperial state. One example of this can be found in the work of Hirata Atsutane, specifically the *Senkyo Ibun*, or *Strange Tidings From the Realm of Immortals*, published in 1822. In it, Hirata, a religious scholar, presented stories that he claimed identified the “true nature of Japan,” including a long exploration of Torakichi, a boy who had supposedly been raised by a *tengu* deep in the mountains of Japan.⁴³⁸ Such remote environments have long been of great fascination in Japanese culture, for as Iwasaka Michiko notes, “Mountains represent a liminal area where almost anyone is likely to intersect with other dimensions.”⁴³⁹ Using him as an informant and employing a pseudo scientific approach, the manuscript constructs an ethnography of a supernatural “other world” in service of ethnocentric ideas, justifying Japanese superiority through the nation’s privileged and uncorrupted access to the realm of spirits via indigenous folk culture.⁴⁴⁰ Further, this text is particularly important because it explicitly established the link between Japanese national identity and the exotic spirituality

⁴³⁷ Foster 71-72.

⁴³⁸ Hansen, 5.

⁴³⁹ Iwasaka 88.

⁴⁴⁰ Hansen 103.

constructed around mysterious beings that was later projected to the western world in the works of Lafcadio Hearn. As Wilburn Hansen writes, “The only lasting effect of Atsutane’s discourse on Japanese superiority and unique Japanese cultural identity exists in lingering present-day ideas of a Japanese spirituality shrouded in mystery. Atsutane was not the only thinker who tried to place the essence of Japan in a spiritual dimension, but he was among the first.”⁴⁴¹

Another major figure in the study of *yokai* was Inoue Enryo, a religious scholar and philosopher who was an outspoken critic of the belief in the supernatural and the unknown. Throughout the Meiji era, he interrogated folk culture through his discipline of *yokai-gaku*, or monster studies, by grounding the analysis of such discourses in a foundation of science, medicine, and rational thought, claiming that stories of *yokai* were nothing more than fantasy, which were either the result of misrecognizing ordinary phenomenon or symptoms of mental illness.⁴⁴² At the core of Inoue’s project was the idea that Japan and its people had to dispense with superstitious beliefs in order to become modern and compete with Western nations.⁴⁴³ Despite this approach, however, his work did allow for true cases of the supernatural. While he claimed that nearly ninety percent of reported *yokai* were fabricated, he asserted that a small number of events could be classified as *fushigi*, or mysterious, and that they could not be explained even after rigorous scientific examination.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴¹ Ibid. 196.

⁴⁴² Figal 51.

⁴⁴³ Ibid. 87.

⁴⁴⁴ Figal 41-42; Papp 42.

Also of note is the work of Yanagita Kunio, one of Japan's earliest folklorists, who, like Atsutane, approached *yokai* through the prism of nativism, suggesting that Japanese tradition, particularly the retention of folk belief, made it unique among other nations in the world, for it possessed an indigenous culture that had not been corrupted by foreign influences.⁴⁴⁵ He posited that the heart of Japanese identity could be found in those that had not been touched by modernity, particularly populations who lived in remote regions of the country, like the *sanka*, or mountain people.⁴⁴⁶ As Marilyn Ivy writes, the discipline of folklore "was concerned with preserving the traces of a folkic world not only as a representation of the unwritten essence of ethnic Japaneseness, but also as an indication of a non-West that could never be subsumed under the dominant signs of western modernity."⁴⁴⁷ As such, Yanagita, through his compiled works like the *Tono Monogatari*, sought to capture the fading essence of Japan by gathering traditional materials, like oral histories about *yokai*, and preserving them in writing for future generations.

The cumulative effect of this work, particularly the approaches of Inoue and Yanagita, was to enshrine *yokai* under the management of the state during the Meiji Era (1868-1912). By simultaneously linking these creatures to both antiquated folk belief and a Japanese essence, these scholars effectively invented a modern, uniform national tradition linked to ethnic identity. Prior to that point, there had been a series of disparate populations scattered throughout the country that held their own belief system, including their own specific varieties of *yokai*. Fueled by a sense of

⁴⁴⁵ Vlastos 12.

⁴⁴⁶ Hashimoto 135.

⁴⁴⁷ Ivy 73.

nostalgia and a desire for authenticity, “true” Japanese identity manifested in the form of shared cultural practices like religious rituals—State Shinto around 1900—and widespread knowledge of folkloric figures and narratives.⁴⁴⁸ In large part, this process was undertaken for the sake of advancing the project of modernization, as a balance between the past and the rapidly changing present became essential for the development of the imperial state and controlling the larger population.⁴⁴⁹

Throughout the nineteenth century, Meiji officials utilized *yokai* by repositioning and redeploying folk belief, so as to imbue its leaders and institutions with a greater sense of legitimacy. Gerald Figal argues that the uncanny is a key element in the production of Japanese modernity, in that *yokai* were central to the project of constructing a shared ethnic identity and a sense of nationalism through newly developed traditions articulated during modernization.⁴⁵⁰ Further, he contends that this sentiment resided at the core of the *tenno*, or emperor system, noting,

Japan’s modern discourse on the fantastic entailed both a negative repression and management of beliefs in monsters and spirits and a positive identification of “Japanese” mentality with their production. [...] The drive to forge a homogenous national citizenry from disparate regional populations throughout the archipelago was accompanied by an effort to displace or identify diverse spirits within a Japanese spirit. In the case of efforts by government authorities and leading intellectuals, this Japanese spirit was

⁴⁴⁸ Ivy 13, 58; Hardacre 5.

⁴⁴⁹ Kunio Ito 38.

⁴⁵⁰ Figal 15. An alternative reading of *yokai* during this period can be found in the aesthetic of Erotic Grotesque Nonsense, or *Ero-Guro*, a popular artistic movement within Japanese culture throughout the early twentieth century that frequently depicted scenes featuring monsters, graphic violence, and sexuality. Miriam Silverberg frames *Ero-Guro* as an attempt to challenge state ideology and produce an alternative to modernization by drawing on exaggerated images that invoke the traditional past, similar to Edo era *ukiyo-e* and *shunga*.

ultimately embodied by the newly constituted emperor, a modernized supernatural being. [...] The Meiji emperor, who as a manifest deity was perhaps the most fantastic creature in all Japan, became a kind of ideological lightning rod to rechannel, focus, galvanize, and control the outlet of worldly thoughts and sentiments as well as otherworldly fantasies and desires that coursed through Japanese bodies.⁴⁵¹

Enshrined within this comprehensive worldview was the idea that Japan had to modernize in order to regain its independence and repel invading Western forces, a process that required not only individual sacrifice, but also a fundamental realignment in how the Japanese perceived the world.⁴⁵²

The result of reinforcing the emperor's divinity in this manner was that *yokai* became agents of the government, and were symbolically deployed to advance the policies of the state, particularly with regard to military action. For example, as early as the first Sino-Japanese War, *ukiyo-e* artist Utagawa Yoshiiku utilized the theme of the *Hyakki Yagyo* to depict Chinese soldiers as monsters during the Japanese military campaign to take Korea at the turn of the twentieth century.⁴⁵³ More prominently, the story of Momotaro, or the "Peach Boy," was frequently used as an allegory to depict Japan's foreign enemies as *oni* during World War II. It effectively reinscribed the original folk tale, in which the young protagonist travels to *Onigashima*, or "Demon Island," and with the help of his animal companions, infiltrates the fortress of the *oni* and defeats them. As Noriko Reider notes,

The cartoons, magazines, and animated films for the Momotaro story were made to help support the Japanese cause and encourage nationalism. The concept of an *oni* Allied force was spoon fed to Japanese youth quickly disseminating into the larger populace. [...] Far from an image that evolved

⁴⁵¹ Figal 15.

⁴⁵² Daikichi 61.

⁴⁵³ Papp 44.

over time, this use of oni was a ploy that exploited fearful associations and thus advanced the Japanese wartime ultra-nationalist agenda.⁴⁵⁴

This, then, is largely the culture of *yokai* in which Godzilla was produced. Situated at the crux of a series of conflicted binaries, wherein monsters were understood as both real but also figments of the imagination, representative of the emperor (self) but also the enemy (other), and functioning as symbols of a traditional past but also drivers of the future, Godzilla encapsulates many of these contradictions that have defined Japan for America and the world since the postwar era.

VI. Godzilla: Nuclear Critique and the Containment of Subversive Monstrosity

“I can’t believe that Godzilla was the last of its species. If nuclear testing continues, then someday, somewhere in the world, another Godzilla may appear,” Professor Yamane Kyohei warns at the end of *Gojira*, immediately after the deadly Oxygen Destroyer, a weapon developed by Dr. Daisuke Serizawa, vanquishes the monster. This statement by one of the main characters in the film affirms the widespread interpretation of *Gojira* as a veiled critique of nuclear weapons through the genre of science fiction.⁴⁵⁵ In this sense, then, the movie is grounded in the narrative tradition of moralizing parables designed to warn against the consequences of uncontrolled scientific and technological development, and highlight its potential to create monsters.

This kind of warning is one of the oldest and most common themes found in the genre, and can be seen throughout literature, film, and other forms of popular culture. Many scholars directly link this narrative to the archetype of the mad

⁴⁵⁴ Reider 110.

⁴⁵⁵ Biskind 159.

scientist and argue that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was the among the first to utilize this formula, illustrating the disastrous consequences that occur when human beings attempt to play God and violate the order of the nature.⁴⁵⁶ This particular thematic spoke strongly to audiences of Victorian literature, whose understanding of the world was regularly upended by scientific discoveries that called established knowledge into question. Likewise, we see this idea routinely emerge within science fiction films of the postwar era, as American audiences and cultural producers considered the implications of the nuclear age and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

While this generic tradition certainly informed the creation of *Gojira*, there were other influences on the film as well. For example, the storyline about an aquatic, dinosaur-like monster destroying an urban metropolis was largely patterned after the 1953 American production, *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*.⁴⁵⁷ Honda Ishiro, the director of *Gojira*, also noted that *King Kong* was extremely influential in his vision for the film.⁴⁵⁸ In fact, Toho had initially considered using stop-motion animation, the technology pioneered by special effects guru Willis O'Brien to bring the giant ape to life in the 1930s, but instead opted for a man in a rubberized suit, primarily due to scheduling and budgetary issues.⁴⁵⁹ However, while *Gojira* was largely patterned after these American films, its narrative message, particularly the ending, varied significantly from other works in the genre. As Donald Richie observes about *kaiju* films, "The moral of all these films was the same:

⁴⁵⁶ Schelde 45; Bloom 12; Savage 22; Beal 161.

⁴⁵⁷ Kalat 14.

⁴⁵⁸ Shapiro 44.

⁴⁵⁹ Ryfle 27.

Japan is ravaged by monsters who are defeated, not by warlike methods, but by technological know-how. The hero is the Japanese scientist who 'to make the world safe' gladly gives up his life."⁴⁶⁰ In this way, the film enshrines the values of self-sacrifice and pacifism over egocentrism, hyper masculinity, and militarism.

Furthermore, *Gojira* was inspired by real events in the Pacific, specifically American nuclear testing in the Bikini Atoll in March of 1954. There, the United States military detonated a fifteen megaton H-bomb, and the fallout from that incident affected a nearby Japanese fishing boat, the *Daigo Fukuryu Maru*, or Lucky Dragon No. Five, which resulted in the entire crew developing radiation sickness, and the death of its communications specialist.⁴⁶¹ The Japanese media quickly publicized the event, going so far as to call it the "third atomic bombing of Japan."⁴⁶² Coupled with this, Honda drew from his own wartime experiences in the creation of the film. During his time in the military, he had not only survived the firebombings of Tokyo, but was also a prisoner of war in China when he heard about the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. According to David Kalat, "Visiting Hiroshima in 1946, he became fascinated with the nuclear holocaust, particularly the destructive power of an invisible substance (radiation). Honda felt compelled to translate the horrors of modern war into a film."⁴⁶³

As such, *Gojira* has commonly been interpreted as a representation of the Japanese apocalyptic imagination. Produced only a few years after the official end of the American Occupation of Japan in 1952, the film is one of the best-known

⁴⁶⁰ Richie 29.

⁴⁶¹ Noriega 57.

⁴⁶² Perrine 80.

⁴⁶³ Kalat 15.

attempts to interrogate the end of World War II by utilizing the genre of fantasy.⁴⁶⁴ For Honda, it was about exploring a serious topic in a playful manner.⁴⁶⁵ While the premise for the film may be laughable on its face, when coupled with the director's incisive style, where each shot is presented almost like a war documentary, it has the effect of invoking vivid memories and images that were fresh in the minds of individuals during the postwar era.⁴⁶⁶ Indeed, as Toni Perrine posits, "For Japanese audiences, and Americans, too, the shots of a smoldering Tokyo connect to the experience of World War II, the firebombing of Japanese cities as well as aerial shots of Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the atomic bombings."⁴⁶⁷ These observations lead some scholars to posit that Japan is the world's first post-apocalyptic society.⁴⁶⁸

Along with the film's striking imagery, *Gojira* also operates on the level of metaphor. While the monster itself is a destructive force, it clearly stands in for other, real life equivalents. As Susan Sontag notes,

One gets the feeling, particularly in the Japanese films but not only there, that a mass trauma exists over the use of nuclear weapons and the possibility of future nuclear wars. Most of the science fiction films bear witness to this trauma, and, in a way, attempt to exorcise it. The accidental awakening of the super-destructive monster who has slept in the earth since prehistory is, often, an obvious metaphor for the Bomb.⁴⁶⁹

David Kalat affirms this analysis, asserting, "In the Japanese context, the monster is less a reaction *to* the bomb than a symbol *of* the bomb."⁴⁷⁰ Therefore, as Sontag states, we can view *Gojira* as an attempt by Honda to come to terms with the atomic

⁴⁶⁴ Shapiro 5.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid. 288-289.

⁴⁶⁶ Ryfle 43.

⁴⁶⁷ Perrine 91.

⁴⁶⁸ Kelts 26.

⁴⁶⁹ Sontag 218.

⁴⁷⁰ Kalat 14.

bombing through film, and to manage the anxieties produced by living in the nuclear age. Further, Adam Lowenstein contends that films like *Gojira* are used to interrogate these memories of collective trauma by forcing the audience to recognize their connection to such events through axes of text, context, and spectatorship, and using the allegorical moment provided by film, in which an event is visually reproduced, to simultaneously combine the past and present, thereby reconnecting with history.⁴⁷¹ Susan Napier even suggests that the film allows Japanese audiences to not only engage in a form of cultural therapy, but to effectively rewrite the war's ending, by providing them with an opportunity to attain a sense of closure through the monster's demise.⁴⁷²

While *Gojira* was not the first film to explore the effects of the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan, it was easily one of the most popular and influential. Almost immediately after the end of the American occupation, Shindo Kaneto directed *Genbaku no Ko*, officially titled *Children of Hiroshima*, a film that depicts the effect of radioactive exposure on the Japanese survivors of the bomb. This production was in stark contrast to the policies that American censors had instituted during the occupation, which effectively painted the use of the bomb as a strategic measure necessitated by the radicalism of imperial militarists.⁴⁷³ Further, as Kyoko Hirano notes,

⁴⁷¹ Lowenstein 9.

⁴⁷² Napier, "When Godzilla Speaks" 10.

⁴⁷³ Hirano 104. Jay McRoy also notes that censors operating during the American Occupation of Japan prohibited the production of *kaidan*, or horror films, set in historical periods, as officials viewed them as cultural vehicles that reinforced nationalist ideology and could potentially be used to inspire anti-American sentiments. McRoy 7.

The visual impact of the effects of the bombing and its aftermath was of great concern to the censors. They tried to minimize on the screen the devastating physical effects of the bombing on people and the environment. [...] The censors worked to maintain an image of the Americans as humanitarian and civilized, and they knew that the bombing would render Americans as cruel and barbaric in the Japanese mind.⁴⁷⁴

Thus, films like *Children of Hiroshima*, while not directly depicting the dropping of the bombs, were aimed at exploring a subject that had been prohibited for almost seven years after the war's end. While the film was commercially successful in Japan, it was criticized for its elegiac tone, which cast the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a national tragedy, rather than a rallying point for anti-Americanism.⁴⁷⁵ *Gojira*, on the other hand, due in part to its foundation in science fiction, allowed for a combination of visual spectacle and scathing critique, which would have been difficult to depict in traditional drama.

Additionally, it's important to remember that Godzilla itself embodies the essence of a *yokai*, for it is an ancient creature worshipped by the natives of Odo Island, and is tied directly to both nature and the "other world," exemplifying within its being a transitional state represented through the process of transmutation—via nuclear radiation—and the breakdown of established categories.⁴⁷⁶ Even the depiction of the monster itself is reminiscent of creatures of legend, like a dinosaur, or perhaps more accurately, the dragon, for it not only features the characteristic spines that run down its back, but also possesses atomic breath, which it uses in the film to melt electrical towers, burn houses, and destroy the industrial centers of Tokyo.

⁴⁷⁴ Hirano 115.

⁴⁷⁵ Richie 22.

⁴⁷⁶ Foster 161.

As a creature infused with the power of the atomic bomb, Godzilla mirrors the construction of Japanese *yokai* as entities trapped between the competing forces of the past and future, but unlike traditional monsters, the creature owes its existence to outside forces, namely the American military. Thus, as a being representative of a Japanese essence and empowered by the nuclear might—and filmic influence—of the United States, Godzilla can be interpreted as a kind of transnational, postmodern construction, which attempts to simultaneously create a vision within Japanese culture that utilizes the recent and pre-modern past to convey a message about the future. The film’s enduring legacy is that it helped establish this mode of narrative and thematic presentation within Japanese society. Indeed, as William Tsutsui notes, the influence of Godzilla is ubiquitous throughout the Japanese postwar era. He writes, “One finds genetic traces of Godzilla [...] throughout the subculture creations of postwar Japan: the foregrounded nuclear menace, the fascination with mutation, the proximity of apocalypse, a perverse sense of alienation intertwined with an enduring sentimentality, a honest conviction of pacifism combined with an ‘obsessive fondness for military weaponry.’”⁴⁷⁷

Thus far, this discussion has centered on the Japanese perspective and the cultural logic behind the creation of *Gojira*. Here, our focus shifts, as we turn to the interpretation of the character within the American imagination. Having seen how the film operates within the Japanese context, it is remarkable how radically different Godzilla has been perceived in the West. This is due to the fact that in its transition to the United States, the film underwent a series of changes. First and

⁴⁷⁷ Tsutsui , Introduction 4.

foremost, the title was changed to *Godzilla: King of the Monsters!*, effectively romanizing the name of the creature. Additionally, an entire plot involving an American journalist named Steve Martin, played by Raymond Burr, was added to the film, which resulted in the re-editing of much of the existing footage. In the English version, Martin serves as the narrative perspective for the action, interpreting the story for the viewer in flashback, whereas in the original film, events occur chronologically and are not filtered through a particular perspective.

Most importantly, however, the anti-nuclear overtones, which were present throughout the original version of the film, were completely edited out, effectively transforming it from a technological parable into an unadulterated monster movie.⁴⁷⁸ While the American version retained the idea that Godzilla had been awakened by H-bomb testing, it lacked the condemnatory warnings and language found in the original, making it more about the dangers of scientific hubris than nuclear weapons.⁴⁷⁹ In short, Godzilla's subversive function as a vehicle for critiquing the dropping of the atomic bombs and ongoing nuclear tests in the Pacific was completely neutralized, as the focus of the film shifted from the cause of the monster's awakening to the monster itself. It is no coincidence that upon its release in the United States critics focused primarily on the film's production values and special effects, as the various edits redefined these aspects as central to understanding the movie.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁸ Gutherie-Shimizu 57.

⁴⁷⁹ Kalat 157.

⁴⁸⁰ Noriega 70.

As a result of these changes, the overall quality of the film suffered considerably. In the few scenes where Martin interacts with the main characters, like Emiko and her father Professor Yamane, they are always shown from behind in profile, as new scenes were shot to accommodate the change in narrative perspective, and did not include the original Japanese actors. Additionally, the English version suffered from various lip synch issues, where newly written dialogue did not match the words spoken by the actors.⁴⁸¹ These factors accentuated the general silliness associated with 1950s monster movies, marking the production as particularly foreign in nature. As Anne Allison observes, “In the United States, *Godzilla* took off in large part for the differences it posed from Hollywood productions: differences—an actor dressed up in a monster suit instead of high-tech animation, a foreign language dubbed into English, Tokyo and its Japanese population getting creamed—whose effect was viscerally exciting yet judged (too often) to be technically unconvincing and cheap.”⁴⁸²

Indeed, the cumulative effect of localization was that the film reinforced existing narratives about Japan that had been established during World War II. While the postwar era had effectively ushered in an age of partnership between the United States and its former enemy, the Japanese were still viewed as a completely foreign, practically monstrous people, whose identities were inextricably linked to the events of the war in the American cultural imagination, specifically the attack on Pearl Harbor and the dropping of the atomic bombs. It is likely that audiences viewing *Godzilla* would associate the film with the *hibakusha*, or survivors of the

⁴⁸¹ Kalat 25.

⁴⁸² Allison 49-50.

bomb, whose damaged bodies represented the destructive force of the weapons used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Enduring the stigma associated with exposure to radiation, they were ostracized by the larger Japanese community, but banded together and engaged in anti-nuclear activism, drawing national media attention in the United States. This included coverage of the Hiroshima Maidens, a group of twenty-five women disfigured by the bomb, who traveled to the United States for corrective surgery in 1955, a year before the film's release in America.⁴⁸³ This physical manifestation of monstrosity, in which exposure to nuclear fallout is interpreted as bodily pollution, coupled with the metaphorical variant so frequently espoused throughout the war, almost certainly had an impact in reinforcing the view that the Japanese, although now allies, were still the monstrous race that had once been our enemy.

From this perspective, then, *Godzilla* stands in for Japan itself serving as a signifier for a country whose legacy and identity, even today, remain shrouded in the events of World War II for many Americans. This reading of the monster ties into established modes of representation within fantasy cinema, where giant creatures have functioned as racial allegories in American culture.⁴⁸⁴ The prime example of this is *King Kong*, a film that has been interpreted in many ways, but most strikingly functions as an articulation of racist ideology, which strongly suggests that whiteness must be defended against the threat of black male sexuality—embodied by the giant ape—through acts of bodily violence.⁴⁸⁵ Further,

⁴⁸³ Poole 115.

⁴⁸⁴ Bellin 2.

⁴⁸⁵ Bellin 24, 31.

it is arguable that the genre itself is built on themes established by anthropological and ethnographic film, in which both science and fantasy are deployed to make a racial argument to audiences.⁴⁸⁶ As Fatimah Tobing Rony writes, “*King Kong*, labeled a fantasy horror film, was successfully modeled on a narrative of an expedition film. The fantasy of the movie draws its sustenance from the science of the museum expedition.”⁴⁸⁷ After all, Kong is found on Skull Island, a region of the East, located near Indonesia, which is separated from the rest of the world, and populated by all manner of dinosaurs and “lost” creatures. It is no coincidence that when taken outside the Japanese anti-nuclear context, *Godzilla* is strikingly similar to the archetype of the dragon, a symbol associated with a monstrous Asia throughout much of European history, practically lending itself to allegories that classify the country as inherently pre-modern, mysterious, and possessing an alluring and undefinable spirituality.

Finally, I would like to turn the focus back to Japan and note that this chapter would be remiss without a discussion of *Gojira's* role in promoting the idea of World War II as a “victim’s narrative” within Japanese culture. Throughout the Asian mainland, much has been made of Japan’s consistent refusal to acknowledge its role as an imperialist power throughout the conflict, particularly when it comes to accepting responsibility for its actions in China and Korea. Perhaps most emblematic of this tendency is the textbook controversy of the 1980s, in which the Ministry of Education requested that the wording describing the events of the Sino-Japanese War be modified, casting Japan’s “invasion” of China into an “advance into”

⁴⁸⁶ Tobing Rony 159-160.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 164.

the country.⁴⁸⁸ Indeed, the construction of this narrative extends to the earliest postwar cultural products, as Donald Richie notes, “From the first films on, Hiroshima was not an ‘atrocious,’ but a ‘tragedy.’”⁴⁸⁹ By focusing purely on the bomb and not the events that preceded it, Japan has effectively rewritten the narrative of the war and disavowed any responsibility for its actions.

Films like *Gojira*, while subversive and inherently critical of American military policy, have the effect of glossing over Japan’s own wartime atrocities, and reaffirming this narrative of Japanese victimization at the hands of foreign powers. As Anne Allison notes, “For Japanese audiences, then, *Gojira* provided a vehicle for reliving the terrors of war relieved of any guilt or responsibility—solely, that is, from the perspective of the victim.”⁴⁹⁰ Some scholars have viewed Godzilla as a creature that metaphorically stands in for Japan itself in the context of the film, interpreting the monster as an unfortunate casualty brought on by American imperialism. Perhaps this is because, as some have argued, Japan’s inability to come to terms with its past is intertwined with America’s refusal to apologize for the dropping of the atomic bombs.⁴⁹¹ Further, this sense of victimization is reinforced by the official narrative established at the Tokyo War Crimes Trials, where the Japanese people and the emperor were cast as innocent victims of fanatical militarists who had taken over the government.⁴⁹² These factors, which were largely compromises made to secure Japanese cooperation and partnership in the Cold War,

⁴⁸⁸ Seaton 51; Itoh 77.

⁴⁸⁹ Richie 22.

⁴⁹⁰ Allison 45.

⁴⁹¹ Seaton 73.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.* 40.

have complicated efforts to officially recognize the country's culpability in atrocities that occurred throughout World War II.

The success of *Gojira*, both in Japan and the United States, resulted in the proliferation of monster movies at the box office.⁴⁹³ In the latter, the creature became iconic, achieving mass popularity through public access programming, facilitated, in part, by inexpensive licensing fees.⁴⁹⁴ Cast in America as a goofy B-movie monster with a strong appeal to younger audiences, Godzilla's image was solidified into a symbol for a tame and culturally inferior Japan. Throughout the decades, the monster's image in both countries evolved, as it effectively became something akin to a superhero within its home country, protecting the Earth from other, worse creatures in later films, and in the United States, where Godzilla still oscillates between the movie monster it once was—as evidenced by the recent American remakes in 1998 and 2014—and an icon for both the country's strategic alliance and economic competition with Japan, perhaps best exemplified by the playful 1992 Nike ad campaign, *Godzilla vs. Charles Barkley* (see fig. 56). Still, one only needs to examine the IMAX promotional poster from the most recent filmic release, which positions Godzilla in front of a giant red circle and stark white background, closely resembling the Japanese flag, along with the inclusion of *katakana* symbols behind the English title, in order to see how intimate this connection between Japan and Godzilla still remains within the United States (see fig. 57). *Gojira* is continually associated with Japanese identity, and serves as a touchstone for the relationship between monstrosity and Japan in the American imagination, grounding the country

⁴⁹³ Ryfle 65.

⁴⁹⁴ Pike 3.

as an entity trapped between the competing forces of tradition and modernity,
defined, in large part, by the events of World War II.

**CHAPTER FIVE: MONSTROUS MARVELS AND ATOMIC HUMANOIDS: A
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF AMERICAN AND JAPANESE SUPERHEROES OF
THE 1950S AND 1960S**

“I never really got the whole superhero thing, but lately it does seem like we have a lot in common. Tragic beginnings, secret identities, part-human, part-mutant, archenemies...” ~ Dexter Morgan, *Dexter*

“Well, I just can’t understand any of this. Everybody in Japan is either a ten-year-old girl or a monster!” ~ Peter Griffin, *Family Guy*

I. Introduction

“I am Iron Man,” Tony Stark declares before a shocked group of reporters, who rush toward the stage with a barrage of questions, cameras flashing in the background. As he abandons all pretenses at a secret identity and the complications that accompany it, the music plays and the credits roll, establishing Stark as an unconventional, yet compelling superhero. That scene from the 2008 film, *Iron Man*, which raised the character’s profile from B-lister to cultural icon, marked the inception of the larger Marvel Cinematic Universe, an entertainment franchise based on comic books that has grossed billions of dollars worldwide. As familiar as Stark’s origin has become to us—an industrialist taken prisoner while overseeing military

projects abroad, forced to build a suit of weaponized armor to escape his captors—there are others that resonate just as strongly in our cultural memory.

There is the group of four, given fantastic powers—bodily elasticity, invisibility, spontaneous combustion, and superhuman strength—after being exposed to cosmic radiation during an experimental test flight. There is the scientist whose uncontrollable anger transforms him into a hulking beast with incredible strength, having been bombarded by the nuclear fallout of a gamma bomb. There is the teenager bitten by a radioactive spider, given the proportionate strength and amazing abilities of the arachnid, who learns the hard way that with great power comes great responsibility. There is the lawyer—blinded by radioactive waste as a young man, but gifted with heightened senses and athletic ability—who dedicates himself to cleaning up Hell’s Kitchen, becoming the man without fear. There are the “strangest heroes of all,” a new, uncanny species of human beings—homo superior—who arise at the dawn of the nuclear age and are sworn to protect a world that hates and fears them. There is a super soldier, the living legacy of World War II, awakened after spending decades frozen in a block of ice drifting in the Atlantic, a veritable man out of time.

These stories, the foundational narrative cornerstones of the Marvel Universe, have taken on the status of mythology within contemporary American—and even global—culture, due in no small part to the popularity of the filmic productions that have reintroduced new audiences to these decades-old characters.⁴⁹⁵ Indeed, at this moment in the early twenty-first century, superheroes

⁴⁹⁵ Reynolds 7.

have never been more popular, appearing in everything from comic books to television shows to movies to cartoons to video games and everything else in-between. Yet, despite this increased exposure, relatively few fans today have an intimate understanding of these popular characters, and even more importantly, the genesis of their creation. Further, there is a tendency to view these characters apart from the rest of global culture, and to treat them as part of a unique, quintessentially American genre, one that symbolizes the country's highest principles and aspirations, often echoed in catch phrases like, "Truth, Justice, and the American Way." However, within the world of comic books, most insiders recognize that although America may have refined the modern superhero, by no means did it create the archetype, nor has it stopped evolving after being popularized in the United States. Rather, the development of the superhero is historically something of a transnational product, shaped and molded by a series of influences and cultural exchanges within the United States, but just as importantly, abroad.

This chapter explores monstrosity as a foundational trope of the contemporary superhero in the United States and Japan, detailing the origin of Marvel Comics and the impact of films featuring "giant monsters" on cultural production within the comic book and manga industries. Specifically, it focuses on the Silver Age (1956-1970) as an outgrowth of both science fiction and the *kaiju* genre, examining superheroes in relation to their counterparts in Japan. Here, I argue that protagonists in both American comic books and Japanese manga, particularly those created in the 1950s and 1960s, share many of the same origins, respond to similar anxieties, and utilize their identities as metaphorical and literal

monsters to engage with important social, political, and cultural issues through the comic form.

As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen reminds us, monstrosity is inherently transgressive, and, in the case of both the American comic book and Japanese manga industries, its incorporation as a central thematic allowed for the production of subversive narratives that leveled social, cultural, and political critiques through the use of fantasy.⁴⁹⁶ Indeed, we find that many of the stories produced by the top Japanese creators of the postwar era, like Tezuka Osamu, strongly criticized America's imperialist foreign policy throughout the Cold War, as well as the Japanese wartime regime in visually powerful ways that resonated with readers. The use of monstrous heroes, many featuring characteristics and themes taken directly from Godzilla and other giant movie monsters, laid much of the groundwork for these narratives. Further, while American superheroes were initially slow to engage this function throughout the Silver Age—largely due to the regulatory regimes established by the Comics Code Authority in the 1950s—by the middle of the following decade, their stories were nearly as activist in tone as their Japanese brethren, using heroic monsters as symbols and allegories to interrogate important political issues within the context of a didactic medium. What we effectively witness in this period is the subtle reemergence of subversive narratives within American comic books, due largely to this generic modification.

However, the use of monstrosity in these forms, particularly manga, has not been without ill effects, for despite the similarities between both American and

⁴⁹⁶ Cohen *Monster Theory* 7, 16.

Japanese characters, those in manga have largely been viewed apart from this narrative tradition in the United States, and have instead been used to reinforce the existing cultural discourse that defines Japan as a strange, weird, and bizarre fantasy landscape, defined by its status as a wartime enemy and association with both traditional and futuristic monsters. In large part, the characters featured in manga—and more recently anime—function as signifiers of Japan within the United States, with their subversive and critical tone tempered down or nullified altogether by both the act of localization and consumption by readers who lack the proper cultural context to understand the full meaning of these narratives. Rather than transmitting moral lessons as Japanese creators had intended, the output within the medium has instead been used to define Japan itself within American society.

As such, this chapter delves into the origins of manga as a mass medium and the rise of anime in Japan, describing the function of these mediums in their native country and why they have effectively been labeled as “exotic” and seen as fundamentally different from comics and cartoons produced in the United States. By exploring a few of the series created during the 1950s and 1960s, like Tezuka Osamu’s *Tetsuwan Atomu* and Mizuki Shigeru’s *GeGeGe no Kitaro*, we see how the meanings associated with these popular icons were transformed by their importation, adaptation, and incorporation into American culture. Most importantly, by examining the history of comic books and manga in this way, we see them as products of transnational cultural exchanges between the United States and Japan, showing how American print and animated products influenced the form and

aesthetic of manga and anime, and how Japanese cultural texts like *Gojira* shaped the modern comic book industry.

In broader terms, this chapter is fundamentally a comparative analysis of the most popular characters and series from American comic books and Japanese manga. It demonstrates how monstrosity informs the reception of Japanese culture within the United States, and ties this critique into older historical associations that define Japan within the American mind, like the events of World War II. Here, we are concerned with how American and Japanese superheroes emerged as distinct, but related entities, and how the creation of each group was informed not only by historical factors, but also the cultural products of the other. Additionally, we see how creators in both the United States and Japan utilized and transformed existing ideas about monstrosity through their cultural interactions, building on the information presented throughout the previous chapters.

II. The Dawn of the Silver Age and the Origins of Marvel Comics

When it comes to Marvel Comics, one is likely to associate the latest comic book-inspired superhero films with the publisher, like *The X-Men* (2000), *Iron Man* (2008), *Thor* (2011), *Captain America* (2011), *The Amazing Spider-Man* (2012), and the \$1.5 billion grossing, blockbuster, *The Avengers* (2012). This makes perfect sense given that the company and its foundational creators, like Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and Steve Ditko, among others, were responsible for introducing some of the most well-known and successful characters in the history of American comic books. However, there is another side to this story that is far more obscure. In many respects, the origins of what we know today as Marvel Comics are firmly grounded

in the “giant monster” narratives from the 1950s. While Marvel had existed for decades prior to the 1960s, both during World War II as Timely Publications and the postwar era as Atlas Comics, the publisher, like others following the implementation of the restrictive Comics Code, struggled to maintain their readership and gain traction in the rapidly dwindling market. The incorporation of giant monsters into their line of titles was the key element that enabled and facilitated the company’s success, both then and now, and serves as the foundation for the contemporary superhero.

Before delving into the specific monster-oriented titles produced by Marvel Comics throughout late 1950s and early 1960s, it’s important to understand and highlight the post-Wertham context of the industry, and to specifically recognize the conditions that allowed for the resurgence of superheroes. For all intents and purposes, the American comic book industry was left in shambles in the aftermath of the Senate Subcommittee Hearings on Juvenile Delinquency in 1954. The largest problem that many publishers faced was not lagging sales, but concerns from distributors who had become weary about associating their companies’ reputations with the stigmatized comic books. Some entities associated with the medium collapsed entirely. As a result, publishers lost the means of distributing their product and space on the newsstand, as a series of mainstream outlets refused to display controversial titles at their establishments. As Ted White notes, “The real and absolute reason E.C. stopped publishing comics was that their distributor folded from under them and left them with a great number of unpaid bills. But they could have weathered this if it had been at all profitable for them. It was not profitable,

due to pressures that were brought to bear against them.”⁴⁹⁷ In fact, the mainstream perception of comics was so bad that D.C. Comics’ well-known “public service” pages—short informational segments about various issues and causes in American society developed by the company’s well-known leftist editor Jack Schiff and produced in conjunction with government agencies and nonprofit organizations—were largely born out of a need to improve the company’s public image following the anti-comics movement (see fig. 58).⁴⁹⁸

Additionally, the guidelines established by the Comics Code intensely restricted the content of these materials, sometimes to an absurd degree, making any kind of artistic expression nearly impossible. Such strict constraints had the effect of sanitizing many narratives, removing even the slightest bit of questionable content, which often infuriated frustrated writers and artists. As mentioned in the previous chapter, particularly concerning to the Comics Code Authority were depictions of anything that could be construed as sexuality or violence. As D.C. Comics editor Al Grenet recalled,

I was interviewed by the Kefauver Committee; one of his aides talked to me. He asked me why we were trying to corrupt kids...like maybe we were a plot from Russia or something. It was stupid, because we didn’t have any real violence in our stories. If we had a girl wearing a shirt without sleeves, we were forced to add sleeves. They went overboard.⁴⁹⁹

His account is supported by Harvey Comics inker and art director Ken Selig, who stated, “When I signed on at Harvey, I was given a very difficult assignment: to adjust bust lines of the female characters in our comics. [...] The Harveys had to toe

⁴⁹⁷ Schelly, “The Forgotten 50s” 68.

⁴⁹⁸ Donenfeld 22.

⁴⁹⁹ Grenet 32.

the line, and the unnecessary cleavage had to be eliminated.”⁵⁰⁰ The producers of comic books struggled in the face of these new restrictions, after having relied on a combination of mature storylines and sensationalistic fare to sell their publications for nearly a decade, unable to find a genre or trend that could pass the Code’s standards and also connect with readers.

As in the postwar era, publishers experimented with new genres and different kinds of books, but it wasn’t until the fall of 1956 that anything found lasting success. It was then, with the publication of the fourth issue of *Showcase*, a D.C. Comics title designed to introduce new characters, that editor Julius Schwartz, along with writer Robert Kanigher and artist Carmine Infantino, resurrected the superhero genre by introducing a new version of The Flash (see fig. 59). While Atlas had attempted an ill-fated superhero revival a few years earlier, and other D.C. titles like Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman had never actually been cancelled, superheroes were far from prominent within the industry, having fallen out of popularity with the end of World War II.⁵⁰¹ However, Schwartz’s approach to these characters was different. Inspired, in part, by his background in science fiction, having served as a high-profile literary agent for a number of years, he proposed infusing a strong sci-fi element into the new characters he co-created, and it proved to be a hit with readers, beginning what we recognize today as the Silver Age of

⁵⁰⁰ Selig 57.

⁵⁰¹ Aquaman and Green Arrow were also continuously featured in backup stories found in the anthology series, *More Fun Comics* and *Adventure Comics* throughout the 1940s and 1950s, but neither hero had titles specifically devoted to them until the former in 1962 and latter in 1983.

American comic books.⁵⁰² Recalling his role in the creation of the Flash, Infantino noted,

We kept experimenting: romance, science-fiction, westerns...anything. We were desperately trying to find a field that would connect. Nothing really sold that well. One day I went in to the office to pick up some work. We never knew what we were going to get, and Julie Schwartz said to me, "We're going to try a super-hero again. We are going to bring the Flash back and I want you to design a costume for him." I said, "OK." Kanigher had written the first script and designed the first cover. So I went home and designed the costume, and if you notice, I kept it very simple. Because, anybody who was a speedster wouldn't be encumbered with too many things. I brought it in, and it was approved. And that was the beginning of the new age of super-heroes.⁵⁰³

One of the main reasons why Schwartz opted to return to the superhero genre was the prevailing logic within the industry that readers were only active consumers of comic books for a short time—approximately five years—before they got older and moved on. Therefore, for a new batch of readers characters like the Flash would be seen as something novel and different.⁵⁰⁴

Indeed, the Silver Age Flash, Barry Allen, was unique by many standards of the time. Designed as a new version of an older character—the original Flash, Jay Garrick, was created in 1940 by Gardner Fox and Harry Lampert—this updated speedster was a police scientist who received his powers by being struck by lightning in his laboratory and doused with a variety of chemicals that changed his molecular makeup, giving him super speed. Rather than his predecessor, whose powers were gained by inhaling "hard water," the basis for the new Flash's abilities was grounded firmly in the tradition of science fiction, with his origin tied directly to

⁵⁰² Broome 30.

⁵⁰³ Infantino 10.

⁵⁰⁴ Thomas, "Who Created the Silver Age Flash?" 41; Drake 22; Wells 22.

the power of lightning, as Schwartz felt it made logical sense since it was the fastest thing in the world.⁵⁰⁵ The success of the Flash inspired a host of superhero revivals and new titles, as D.C. steadily introduced updated versions of Green Lantern, Hawkman, and by 1959, the superhero team, the Justice League of America, patterned after the older WWII version, the Justice Society of America (see figs. 60-62). Like the Flash, many of these characters had new origins, which used either science or—in the case of Green Lantern—extraterrestrial forces—as the basis for their powers.

It was in this environment of experimentation and uncertainty that Marvel Comics was born. Having failed with their own superhero revival and suffering from weak sales, Atlas Comics, the entity that had previously been known as Timely Publications—best known for their characters Captain America, the Human Torch, and the Sub-Mariner—desperately tried to find something that would catch on with readers. Going back to World War II, the company’s publisher, Martin Goodman, had operated via a business model designed around the practice of “jumping and pumping,” which involved identifying a new trend, jumping on it, and pumping out as many titles as possible before it died out, but in the climate of the late 1950s, nothing seemed to be sticking.⁵⁰⁶ In fact, the company was so well known for this within the industry that artist Gil Kane remarked, “In my view, [Timely] never had creative leadership until the 1960s. They were simply an imitation company that managed to take advantage of a going situation, catch the momentum, ride it for a number of years; and then, when the momentum ran out, *they* fell out. [...] Timely

⁵⁰⁵ Thomas, “Who Created the Silver Age Flash?” 41.

⁵⁰⁶ Bell and Vassallo 26.

simply milked each situation for as much money as they could.”⁵⁰⁷ As a result, following the implementation of the Comics Code, the company produced sanitized horror books, like *Strange Tales*, and Westerns featuring characters like the Two-Gun Kid, Outlaw and Kid Colt in the hopes of squeezing out a profit.⁵⁰⁸

However, beginning in 1959, the publisher, led by editor-in-chief Stan Lee, introduced a new genre of comic books inspired by the “giant monster” movies that were popular during the 1950s.⁵⁰⁹ Scattered throughout various titles in the company’s line, like *Tales To Astonish*, *Tales of Suspense*, *Journey Into Mystery*, and *Strange Tales*, these narratives featured a series of giant monsters, often with goofy names, like “Gorgilla,” “Goom,” “Spragg,” and “Orrgo,” that appeared from unknown areas of the world to wreak havoc on mankind (see fig. 63). Like the films of the genre, these stories often imparted the simple lesson that tampering with the forces of nature and venturing into areas where humans don’t belong leads to dangerous and destructive encounters with monsters.⁵¹⁰ Further, it is clear that many of them were built upon the archetypal narrative frame of adventure stories, placing these creatures in distant uncharted areas of the world, particularly remote areas of the East. Whereas the comic books of the early 1950s utilized classic monsters like vampires, werewolves, and ghouls to sell their stories, the prohibition of such creatures by the Comics Code resulted in the appropriation of more recent cultural archetypes like Godzilla and the Blob.⁵¹¹ Additionally, unlike the horror comics

⁵⁰⁷ G. Kane 42.

⁵⁰⁸ Wells 31.

⁵⁰⁹ Fingerioth and Thomas 22.

⁵¹⁰ B. Wright 202.

⁵¹¹ Nyberg 158.

produced throughout the previous era, the campy nature of these stories allowed them to operate with little censorship, as many of these narratives were designed more for entertaining spectacle than any concrete didactic value.

While some critics and historians of the medium have dismissed this particular line of comics, suggesting that the stories were so “tossed-off and formulaic” that they “might as well have been a single series,” others have discussed the important foundational role that they played in establishing the themes and aesthetic style that would later be incorporated into Marvel Comics.⁵¹² Indeed, Jack Kirby, the artist who, along with Steve Ditko, drew many of these stories and went on to become one of the company’s premier talents, saw these tales as part of a much larger literary and oral tradition. As Jordan Raphael and Tom Spurgeon observe, “Kirby was enamored of monster stories as a kind of universal campfire fodder for the ages, a way for humankind to show its mastery of the world around it by defeating a rampaging enemy, often of its own creation.”⁵¹³ Further, Charles Hatfield describes how these monster comics allowed the artist to develop the fluid, energetic style that he would later bring to Marvel’s superheroes, writing,

Offsetting the formulaic nature of these stories was a dash of invigorating absurdity: the tales had Kirby’s energy and, courtesy of Lee, confessional, first-person titles typical of sensation-mongering tabloids and comics [...] What Kirby’s monster stories offered was a chance for him to draw myriad weird creatures in violent action. As science fiction, they weren’t much, being brief and obsessively narrow in concept, but they paved the way for The Fantastic Four.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹² B. Wright 202; Wells 32.

⁵¹³ Spurgeon and Raphael 62.

⁵¹⁴ Hatfield 100-101.

In fact, Marvel's superhero line grew directly out of these books, with characters like Ant-Man, Iron Man, Thor, the Hulk, and Dr. Strange literally taking over titles that had previously featured giant monsters.⁵¹⁵ As inker Joe Sinnott recalled, "That period from '58 to 1961 was a pretty interesting time, because we were doing all those monster books. Stan was trying to find a new trend, and the monsters were selling pretty well, and they might have even gotten more popular if the super-heroes hadn't taken off. They killed the monster books."⁵¹⁶

It is impossible to overstate the impact and influence that "Saturday matinee monster movies," like the American version of *Godzilla*, had on the production of these narratives. Aside from the obvious aesthetic similarities, they shared many thematic qualities as well. Bradford Wright notes, "Often, they were awakened by reckless scientists or atomic testing. [...] Even though humanity inevitably overcame the destructive consequences of its own actions, the lesson was always the same: tampering with unknown forces beyond man's control invited trouble."⁵¹⁷ By engaging with narratives in this genre, the creators of these books inadvertently tapped into a subversive tradition that slowly undermined the principles at the core of the Comics Code, providing them with an effective model to produce more dramatic and compelling narratives.

⁵¹⁵ This was largely due to a distribution issue with International News that limited the number of titles that Atlas/Marvel could produce. When Marvel's superheroes became popular in the 1960s, they took over books like *Tales to Astonish*, *Tales of Suspense*, *Journey Into Mystery*, and *Strange Tales*, rather than getting their own series due to this restriction. This stems from the collapse of Atlas' distributor in the 1950s, which forced the company to rely on the same distribution channels as D.C. Comics. See Howe's *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story* and Bell and Vassallo's *The Secret History of Marvel Comics*.

⁵¹⁶ Sinnott 12.

⁵¹⁷ B. Wright 202.

One of the most fascinating and enduring monsters produced in this era was Fin Fang Foom, a giant, super intelligent, alien dragon—often depicted wearing purple underpants as a result of the Comics Code—discovered hibernating in a remote section of Communist China (see fig 64). When awakened, the creature proceeds to wreak havoc across the country, including one instance in which he rips a section of the Great Wall out of the ground and uses it like a “bull-whip” against the soldiers who attempt to subdue him.⁵¹⁸ In recent interviews, Stan Lee has noted that the monster is the “best” one he ever came up with, and explained the origin of his name, stating,

When I was a kid, I loved going to the movies...And there was this one movie I'd seen, I remember nothing about it except the name. It took place in China, I believe, and the name of the movie was *Chu Chin Chow*. Now I have no idea what it meant—I don't know if it was somebody's name of a country or a city, but I never forgot that name. Those three words just stuck in my memory: Chu Chin Chow. So when I was looking for the name of a monster, I remembered Chu Chin Chow...And that's how Fin Fang Foom was born.⁵¹⁹

Aside from the association between dragons and China in Lee's story, the origin of the monster's name highlights the extent to which these characters were labeled and identified using words or terms that were chosen specifically because they sounded unusual, foreign, or different. Often, Lee did not know what the names of these monsters meant—if they had any meaning at all—but was just looking for labels that resonated with the cultural associations embodied by a particular creature. It didn't matter whether the name was Chinese; it sounded like it was to American readers. Further, it's also worth noting that as a character, Fin Fang Foom is one of the few from this era to survive into the present, and since the 1950s has

⁵¹⁸ Lee, et al., “Fin Fang Foom” 7.

⁵¹⁹ Lee, Interview 21.

become largely associated with the Mandarin, a Chinese villain patterned after Fu Manchu, particularly in *The Dragon Seed Saga*, a storyline that ran throughout the Iron Man series in the early 1990s (see fig. 65).

In many respects, the “giant monsters” featured in these books were the prototypes for the superheroes produced by the company only a few years later in the early 1960s. Not only were there striking parallels between the different kinds of characters created in the two eras, but many also shared the exact same names. Jack Kirby recalled, “We had Grottu and Kurgo and It...it was a challenge to try to do something—*anything* with such ridiculous characters. But these were, in a way, the forefathers of the Marvel super-heroes. We had a Thing, we had a Hulk...we tried to do them in a more exciting way.”⁵²⁰ While the earlier incarnations of the Thing and the Hulk were certainly very different from the characters we know today—the Hulk, for example, was a giant beast with orange fur, looking incredibly similar to Gossamer from Looney Tunes—they both retained the sense of physical strength they had possessed in their earlier incarnations (see fig. 66). Indeed, prototypes for other well-known characters, like Dr. Doom, Magneto, Dr. Strange, Electro, Diablo, the Sandman, Cyclops, the Thing, and even Spider-Man can be found throughout many of these titles (see figs. 67-74).⁵²¹

There were even some characters created during the transition from monsters to superheroes that were incorporated into the Marvel Universe. For example, the twenty-seventh issue of *Tales to Astonish* introduced readers to Hank Pym in a story entitled, “The Man in the Ant Hill,” a character who would later take

⁵²⁰ J. Kirby 181.

⁵²¹ Saffel 14.

on a variety of superhero alter-egos like Ant-Man, Giant-Man, and Yellowjacket (see fig. 75). Initially presented as a mad scientist spurned by his colleagues, he creates a serum that allows him to shrink to the size of an insect, and later becomes a foundational member of the superhero team, the Avengers, directly linking these monster stories with the Marvel Universe. In this respect, we can see the transition from one genre to the next as a kind of natural evolution within the comic book form, where the giant monster movies of the 1950s inspired the creation of the science fiction-based superheroes that were introduced throughout the following decade.⁵²²

Indeed, many scholars have largely ignored the link between these “giant monster” stories and Marvel’s superheroes, although it has gained significant attention and traction within the fan community. For years, the *Overstreet Price Guide*, viewed by many to be a definitive reference for information about the medium, has noted the presence of “prototype” characters in these books. Further, fan-based publications like the *Jack Kirby Collector*, which are dedicated to analyzing and appreciating the work of the singular artist, have regularly featured articles about this connection in their pages, often interrogating the legitimacy of this argument.⁵²³ Charles Hatfield, author of the first scholarly work devoted to Kirby, uses this as the base of his argument, suggesting, “Marvel’s superhero comics during this period remained close to the monster comics in style and tone; the debt was obvious. Villains and storylines blatantly echoed Kirby’s many monster and alien-

⁵²² In addition to Fin Fang Foom and Hank Pym, the character Groot, one of the most prominent members of the Guardians of the Galaxy, was also introduced in the thirteenth issue of *Tales To Astonish*, presented as an alien with the appearance of a tree that sought to conduct experiments on human beings.

⁵²³ Seybert 37; Gartland 41.

invader tales. [...] More importantly, the superhero strips shared the monster comics' penchant for the chunky and grotesque, and conjured the same drive-in movie atmosphere of general dread."⁵²⁴ Even the "Marvel Method," a term for the production technique in which multiple individuals worked on a single story in assembly line fashion, was developed during the "giant monster" era, and marked the point at which Lee began trusting his artists to incorporate their ideas into stories without his direct prior approval.⁵²⁵

Many of Marvel's superheroes originate from the same source: the uncontrollable power unleashed by meddling with the forces of nature, specifically nuclear technology, and the influence of the military industrial complex on American society. Often in these stories, as with the science fiction films of the 1950s, humans gained monstrous, inhuman powers as a result of either committing some kind of taboo—taking the form of traversing into forbidden territory—or attempting to violate the natural order and play God in the pursuit of technologically advanced weaponry. For example, the Fantastic Four gain their powers as a result of exposure to cosmic radiation, which occurs during a test flight undertaken in their rush to beat the Russians into space. Bruce Banner transforms into the Hulk after being bombarded by the fallout from a gamma bomb that he helped to create. Peter Parker becomes Spider-Man when a radioactive arachnid bites him after an experiment at a high school science fair. Industrialist Tony Stark builds his Iron Man armor after being taken captive by the Viet Kong, while delivering sophisticated weaponry to the American military in Vietnam. Matt Murdock becomes Daredevil

⁵²⁴ Hatfield 102.

⁵²⁵ Raphael and Spurgeon 63; Lopes 64; McLaughlin 123.

after he is blinded by radioactive waste while saving an elderly man on the streets of New York. Captain America, created decades earlier, is rooted in this narrative as well, for he gets his powers from the “Super Soldier” serum, which was designed to help the American military triumph over the Nazis. The X-Men, who are born as mutants, derive their powers from their parents’ exposure to the atomic bomb, while working in or around nuclear facilities.⁵²⁶ Even Marvel’s version of the Norse god Thor was originally designed to be a Cold War hero defending the United States from Russian spies.⁵²⁷

Like Godzilla, many of these characters were transformed and empowered by radiation. They were no longer simply human, but they weren’t entirely different either. As Grant Morrison notes, “In the Marvel U, radiation was a kind of pixie dust: sprinkle it on a scientist, and voila! A superhero was born. Radiation was responsible for the origins of the Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, the Hulk, the X-Men, Daredevil, and several other early Marvel superheroes, transforming the isotopes of fear into fuel rods of wonder and possibility.”⁵²⁸ Echoing this perspective is Jeffrey Kripal, who writes, “The radiation, then, was not simply radiation. It was also a kind of spiritual power or mystical energy. In the end, these guys didn’t get cancer. They got superpowers.”⁵²⁹ Indeed, the cumulative effect of Marvel’s success was to transform the kinds of protagonists that could be introduced in comic books. No longer were heroes required to be handsome, upstanding, flawless individuals, but instead they could be well intentioned but imperfect citizens, “down-on-their-luck”

⁵²⁶ Fingerroth 116.

⁵²⁷ DiPaolo 27.

⁵²⁸ Morrison 96-97.

⁵²⁹ Kripal 125.

nobodies, social outcasts, or even misunderstood monsters. The use of radiation to explain the presence of superheroes made for a convincing, science fiction-based rationale that helped readers to identify with these characters that had all started out as ordinary people.

This is particularly true for the X-Men, individuals born with special powers who are hated and feared by those they were sworn to protect. Interestingly, the concept of a mutant was derived from classic works of science fiction, including Wilmar Shiras' novel *Children of the Atom*, which focused on psychologist Peter Welles and his school for super-intelligent children. Out of the many X-Men that have been created since the early 1960s, perhaps the one most relevant to this study is Yoshida Shiro, more popularly known as Sunfire (see fig. 76). First introduced in 1970, the character was created by Roy Thomas, and inspired by the idea of incorporating a Japanese mutant into the team whose parents had been exposed to radiation at Hiroshima. As Thomas noted, "I had tried to persuade [Stan Lee] to let me introduce a *sixth* X-Man, a young Japanese or Japanese-American whose mother had been affected by A-bomb blasts in 1945; to me, this complimented the notion that The X-Men's parents had worked on the Manhattan Project."⁵³⁰ In many of the early stories, Sunfire was stereotypically Japanese—honor-bound and frequently expressing his disdain for the United States—as his mother had died from exposure to the radiation released by the atomic bomb, a point that obviously resonated with the plight of the *hibakusha*. However, when the series was revived in 1975, the character was brought back as part of an "international" team, consisting of many of

⁵³⁰ Thomas, "I'm Proud of Both My Runs On the X-Men" 8.

the most popular X-men today, including Storm, Colossus, Nightcrawler, and Wolverine.⁵³¹ While he was quickly dropped from the roster soon thereafter, Sunfire is important because his creation speaks to the link that exists between the atomic bomb and the idea of transformative radioactivity that is central to the understanding of the Japanese in American popular culture.

Further, it is worth recognizing that Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and their collaborators saw comic books as a way to engage important political issues through the genres of science fiction and fantasy. This is one of the main reasons why Marvel adopted a “torn from the headlines” approach to storytelling, and unlike D.C. Comics, firmly grounded their heroes in the real world, setting many of their stories in New York City.⁵³² In a 1970 radio interview, Lee stated, “The thing I’ve learned is that you got to make your comic magazines or your television shows or your movies relate to the real world because unless they do, you have meaningless cardboard characters, and that’s not really what people are into today. They want stories that tell them something about the world they are living in now.”⁵³³ It not only increased sales by making the subject matter relevant to readers, but also had the effect of allowing these creators to comment on many of the most important social issues of the 1960s. While he publicly denied taking on a role of advocate, Lee, as quoted by Sean Howe, recognized the didactic nature of comic books, even going so far as to remark,

You fellas think of comics in terms of comic books, but you’re wrong. I think you fellas should think of comics in terms of drugs, in terms of journalism, in

⁵³¹ Claremont, et al. 1: 9.

⁵³² McLaughlin 29; B. Wright 184, 204-205.

⁵³³ McLaughlin 29.

terms of selling, in terms of business. And if you have a viewpoint on drugs, or if you have a viewpoint on war, or if you have a viewpoint on the economy, I think you can tell it more effectively in comics than you can in words. I think nobody is doing it. Comics is journalism.⁵³⁴

This penchant for realism and relevance dates back to the earliest issues of *The Fantastic Four*, and by extension the era of “giant monster” comics, as the superhero team was originally introduced as “plainclothes” individuals, “normal” people who happened to have to have powers but looked just like anyone else on the street, an approach designed to make the heroes as relatable as possible.⁵³⁵

Throughout the decade, Marvel’s titles were decidedly activist in nature, presenting positions on issues ranging from the Civil Rights and feminist movements to drug abuse and the Vietnam War. While they were rarely as preachy or propagandistic as earlier titles had been, they often incorporated didactic elements into their narratives to comment on contemporary social debates. For instance, the X-Men have frequently been interpreted as a commentary on racial equality and the Civil Rights Movement, with mutants allegorically functioning as people of color and their leaders, the pacifist Charles Xavier and the militant Magneto, cast in the mold of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X.⁵³⁶ Further, Marvel was among the first to incorporate African American superheroes into their universe, beginning with T’Challa, the Black Panther, in the fifty-second issue of *The Fantastic Four* in 1966 (see fig. 77). Three years earlier, Lee and Kirby also introduced an African American G.I. named Gabe Jones into the multiracial platoon

⁵³⁴ Howe 103.

⁵³⁵ Lopes 64.

⁵³⁶ Howe 48.

commanded by Sgt. Nick Fury, The Howling Commandos, which still exists today and was featured in the film, *Captain America: The First Avenger* (see fig. 78).⁵³⁷

This move toward diversity, albeit an essentialized and somewhat stereotypical version of it, was reinforced within other narratives and titles as well. For example, the twenty-first issue of *The Fantastic Four* introduced the Hate-Monger, a supervillain dressed in a purple Klu Klux Klan robe, who used his “hate ray” to create division among likeminded people (see fig. 79). At the end of the story, the character was revealed to be a clone of Adolf Hitler, operating in secret in the United States, an obvious throwback to the superhero stories featured throughout World War II. Recalling the issue, Lee noted,

Every so often I would try to get some important moral point in our stories. I remember I did one story called “The Hate Monger.” It was really a take-off on, I guess, the KKK. [...] I sort of hope that it would give our readers the idea that it just isn’t right to hate any other group because they’re of a different religion or a different race or a different nationality, because all people should be treated the same. We tried to get that point across in all of the Marvel books.⁵³⁸

This drive toward producing politically oriented stories is a major factor that separated the company from its competitors. While publishers like D.C. Comics still largely designed their books around fantastic conflicts between heroes and villains in imaginary locales, like Gotham City and Metropolis, Marvel explored the implications of superheroes in the real world.

The success of Marvel, then, was built on an unconventional combination of fantasy and realism that evolved from the “giant monster” comics of the 1950s. It is largely due to the influence of those series that the publisher’s artistic style,

⁵³⁷ Wells 137.

⁵³⁸ Lee, Interview 15.

narrative themes, and methods of production grew more sophisticated, helping them to introduce a new kind of superhero to readers. Further, this approach was built upon a foundation of science fiction, influenced by both literature and film. From warnings about uncontrolled technological development to the inclusion of commentary about hot-button social issues, Marvel utilized the tropes of the genre to much success, creating a line of modern superheroes—many of them literal children of the atom—that were essentially heroic monsters. Like the way that Japanese filmmakers used *Gojira* and monster movies to level a critique of American military policy, the writers and artists of Marvel Comics used these characters to interrogate the anxieties of the 1960s, from a changing social and cultural landscape to fears about nuclear proliferation.

In many respects, however, the idea of the superhero as a kind of monster was not a new invention, nor was it unique to Marvel Comics. After all, since the inception of the medium, such protagonists had come in any and all forms imaginable, from aliens to robots to biological science experiments, all of which were cast in the mold of heroic characters, regardless of their origin. Additionally, their identities were always firmly situated between the diametrically opposed poles of self and other, as they were often strange beings that were able to fit in or assimilate into civil society through the use of a civilian alter-ego or secret identity. Perhaps one of the best early examples of this is Superman. By all accounts, the character is monstrous, from his unparalleled strength to his birth on the alien planet of Krypton, he clearly exists beyond the limits of humanity, and yet is a figure that readers not only relate to but also admire as a champion of the people. Framing

it in terms of science and the classification of the natural and the unnatural, Noel Carroll reaches a similar conclusion, stating,

If monsters are beings whose existence is denied by contemporary science, then isn't the comic book character Superman a monster? This seems not only ungrateful, given everything that Superman has done for us, but also wrong if we think of monster as beings so ugly as to frighten us, i.e., as beings somehow grotesque. [...] But, of course, the sense of "monster" that I am using does not necessarily involve notions of ugliness but rather the notion that the monster is a being in violation of the natural order, where the perimeter of the natural order is determined by contemporary science. Superman is not compatible with what is known of the natural order by science.⁵³⁹

Early narratives featuring Superman reinforce this idea of the character as a heroic monster, as he was initially presented as a vigilante, who worked outside the law, often fighting against a corrupt system and fleeing from the authorities. In fact, an early prototype of the hero from the 1930s introduced him as an evil, monstrous villain, similar in appearance to a mad scientist, who gained his powers from exposure to a meteorite.⁵⁴⁰ This argument could functionally be extended to other Golden Age heroes as well.

Finally, it is worth noting that skeptics may contend that the argument presented in this section is a blatant misreading of the history of Marvel Comics, and that the company's titles as a whole were not inherently subversive, but rather intensely conservative and reinforced many of the dominant social norms of the 1960s. It is certainly true, that many comics produced during the decade contained strong anti-communist overtones. One only needs to look at Iron Man's rogues gallery to see a veritable pantheon of negative Communist stereotypes, from the

⁵³⁹ Carroll 40.

⁵⁴⁰ Daniels, *Superman* 14-15.

Chinese Mandarin to the Soviet Crimson Dynamo, Titanium Man, and Black Widow (see fig. 80). Further, Marvel was home to a small contingent of intensely conservative creators, most notably Steve Ditko, whose strong objectivist beliefs and adherence to Ayn Rand, led to a number of disputes, particularly over narrative differences and royalties, that ended his creative partnership with Stan Lee.⁵⁴¹

However, I would argue that there are equally compelling factors that work in favor of my interpretation, many of which have already been presented throughout this chapter. Additionally, we should note that one of Marvel Comics' strongest markets throughout the 1960s consisted of college-aged readers, and that Stan Lee gave many radio and print interviews promoting the company to various campus media outlets in New York and other states.⁵⁴² This considerable interest in the company's line among young adults resulted in the production of stories that catered to their interests, which were solicited through the use of fan mail and the publication of letters pages at the end of each issue.⁵⁴³ Through these, writers and artists were able to craft narratives that fit the mood of their readers, and as the decade progressed, this business model allowed for the production of increasingly activist, liberal narratives, that strongly critiqued the status quo in the United States.⁵⁴⁴ By the early 1970s, many writers, like Roy Thomas, Steve Englehart, and

⁵⁴¹ Bell 86-89.

⁵⁴² McLaughlin 207-208.

⁵⁴³ Ibid. 72.

⁵⁴⁴ Stan Lee was one of the first editors to challenge the guidelines of the Comics Code Authority, after he defied the organization and published a "drug awareness" story in the ninety-sixth issue of *The Amazing Spider-Man*, in which the hero's friend, Harry Osborn, becomes addicted to pills. This move, along with subsequent challenges by Marvel and D.C. resulted in the Code's first revision in 1971, relaxing restrictions on depictions of drug use, and also the use of monsters.

others, were explicitly criticizing the Vietnam War, promoting countercultural ideals, and challenging the establishment by using nationalistic icons like Captain America, essentially fulfilling the initial promise of Marvel's subversive potential.⁵⁴⁵

At the core of every superhero is a character that is like us, but different. While they may be humanoid, they are not human. In some ways they are better than us, in others, not. They can often do things that we are unable to, and yet frequently yearn for a normal existence. For all their powers and abilities, they do not stand above us, but among us, serving as symbols and metaphors that reveal something about the human condition. These kinds of characters are not distinctly American in their constitution, for they also appear in other formats, like Japanese manga. In the next section, we examine the parallels between the protagonists found in these two mediums in order to better understand the origins and meanings behind the contemporary superheroes that are prevalent in popular culture. For their existence is largely due to a series of dynamic transnational exchanges, where both American and Japanese print culture have been influenced by one another.

III. The “Superheroes” of Postwar Japanese Manga and Anime

For many Americans, the popularity of manga is a recent phenomenon, emerging from Japan within the last two decades, having been imported into the United States after the success of a series of animated television shows in the late 1990s, like *Pokémon*, *Dragon Ball Z*, *Gundam Wing*, and *Sailor Moon*. In this context, the medium has largely been defined by its differences from Western comic books

⁵⁴⁵ Steve Englehart is well known for his run on *Captain America*, in which the hero becomes disillusioned by the corruption of American ideals, including the country's involvement in Vietnam and the crimes of the Nixon Administration, and abandons his identity to temporarily become the superhero, Nomad.

and animation.⁵⁴⁶ Observers often point to the aesthetics of manga, citing the fact that many characters, particularly women or young girls, have large eyes, or highlighting the different approaches to serialized storytelling, as narratives within the medium are constructed around multiple complex storylines. While this particular section will touch on these points to an extent, as they are reflective of how manga and anime culture have shaped the image of Japan in the United States, here, we are more concerned with the kinds of characters that appear within the earliest years of the manga industry, particularly from 1952 to 1963, and their relationship not only to texts produced by the American comic book industry, but also to other Japanese cultural materials, like *Gojira*, that utilize ideas about monstrosity to interrogate contentious social and cultural issues. Specifically, we focus on popular *shonen*, or boy's series, including Tezuka Osamu's *Tetsuwan Atomu*, or *Astro Boy*, and Mizuki Shigeru's *GeGeGe no Kitaro*, primarily because of the genre's strong influence in the American cultural marketplace.⁵⁴⁷

Before we begin this discussion, it is important to define what exactly manga is, especially since this has long been a point of contention among scholars of the medium. Put into the simplest of terms, manga can be understood as Japanese comics, which utilize the interplay of text and images to present a narrative to the reader. The term itself was coined by the artist Hokusai in 1814, and literally means

⁵⁴⁶ Allison 158.

⁵⁴⁷ While other genres of manga have a significant fan base within the United States, particularly *shojo*, or girl's comics, with the popular series *Sailor Moon*, *Ranma ½* and *Urusei Yatsura*, in America, *shonen* accounts for the majority of manga and anime available for consumption by consumers, either through purchase or broadcast on television.

“whimsical” or “playful sketches.”⁵⁴⁸ Similarly, anime refers to the animated television series that are derived and directly adapted from the narratives found in manga, often presented in weekly thirty-minute episodes. Unlike American comic books, which read from left to right, manga is designed to be consumed from right to left, following with the conventions of other Japanese printed publications, like newspapers and novels. They are primarily serialized in chapter form, with new installments available in anthologies, like the popular *Weekly Shonen Jump*, a magazine that features multiple series and is geared toward adolescent boys. The published material from successful properties is often reprinted in digest-sized collected editions, which are sold at bookstores and newsstands throughout the country.

While many scholars view manga as an ancient form, dating back centuries to some of the first written and artistic Japanese works, others contend that it is a much more contemporary phenomenon that has little to do with Japan’s artistic tradition. For example, Natsu Onoda Power asserts that the *Choju Giga*, or *Animal Scrolls*, produced around the twelfth century, are some of the oldest surviving examples of comic art, and argues that manga itself has a long developmental history, as its presentation is informed by the aesthetics of classical Japanese art (see fig. 81).⁵⁴⁹ This is affirmed by Susan Napier, one of the leading American scholars of anime and manga, who notes,

Although it would be impossible to say for certain how much today’s animators are consciously influenced by the visual trove of their traditional culture, it seems safe to say that their culture’s tradition of pictocentrism is

⁵⁴⁸ Schodt, *Manga, Manga!* 18.

⁵⁴⁹ Power 19; Ito 26.

definitely an influence behind the ubiquitousness of anime and manga. Certainly some images from earlier periods would not seem out of place in contemporary anime or manga.⁵⁵⁰

Likewise, Frederik Schodt maintains that early works of classical artistry, defined in part by their playfulness and incorporation of strong religious themes, are reminiscent of the presentational style of contemporary manga.⁵⁵¹ Zilla Papp points directly to the aesthetics of the *Hyakki Yakko*, mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, as an artistic and cultural influence for some of today's most popular series.⁵⁵² Similarly, Antonia Levy notes that many anime rely heavily on Japanese literary traditions in the construction of their narratives.⁵⁵³

However, Sharon Kinsella contends that the form is a “strikingly contemporary cultural phenomenon,” noting that the term “manga” was not incorporated into the everyday Japanese lexicon until the 1930s.⁵⁵⁴ Similarly, Jaqueline Berndt rejects the idea that there is a direct relationship between works like the *Choju Giga* and today's manga, noting that the dissimilarities between the two are far more pronounced and significant than any resemblances or overlapping qualities.⁵⁵⁵ Further, she maintains that while arguments about traditional artistic influences in manga are popular among foreign scholars, Japanese experts like Miyamoto Hirohito and Natsume Fusanosuke point to three qualities that distinguish the two from one another: the concept of the “panel” or “frame” which was imported from European comics, the way that manga functions as a modern

⁵⁵⁰ Napier, *Anime: From Akira to Howl's Moving Castle* 21.

⁵⁵¹ Schodt 29.

⁵⁵² Papp 66.

⁵⁵³ Levy 27.

⁵⁵⁴ Kinsella 19-20.

⁵⁵⁵ Berndt 306.

mass media similar to newspapers and magazines rather than art, and finally, the fact that the medium is reflective of Westernized culture, adopted through the process of modernization.⁵⁵⁶

Additionally, there are a number of aesthetic and presentational differences between Japanese manga and American comic books that affect the form of storytelling. It has often been remarked that there is a greater sense of flow in manga than in comic books, as in the former the reader's attention is meant to quickly shift from panel-to-panel, following the narrative action. In some respects, this is due to the extended length of stories in the medium, as it provides the opportunity to establish the environment and setting.⁵⁵⁷ However, this difference also allows manga to be highly cinematic, replicating the flow of film on the printed page by doing away with captions and by extending narrative-based sequences with dialogue over multiple panels, resulting in a presentation that is more akin to storyboards for a film rather than a traditional comic book. Commenting on this difference, writer and artist Frank Miller notes, "Manga's too quick for me, but American comics are so constipated, so slow. There are too many word balloons and so many panels."⁵⁵⁸ He continued, stressing the point that, "Manga really do try to be movies on paper."⁵⁵⁹ Further, Scott McCloud theorizes that the dynamism of manga has the effect of enhancing the process of immersion, and that the medium effectively allows the reader to participate in the construction of the narrative.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid. 308

⁵⁵⁷ McCloud, *Understanding Comics* 78-82.

⁵⁵⁸ Eisner and Miller 49.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid. 87.

⁵⁶⁰ McCloud, *Making Comics* 217-223

These differences may be some of the reasons why the form has caught on with American audiences, despite the long cultural relationship with comic books in the United States.

While determining the exact nature of manga is outside the parameters of this study, I would like to highlight the recent developmental history of the medium, as it reflects on the kinds of characters and narratives that emerged throughout the earliest years of the industry. The introduction of comics to Japan dates back to 1863, when Charles Wirgman, a correspondent and cartoonist with the *Illustrated London News*, founded the country's first magazine, *Japan Punch*.⁵⁶¹ His work, which utilized traditional Western conventions like word balloons and multi-panel sequential art, is credited along with French artist George Bigot for leading to the development of contemporary manga in Japan.⁵⁶² Kitazawa Rakuten, a manga artist for the American magazine, *A Box of Curios*, is considered to be one of the first Japanese cartoonists.⁵⁶³ Along with his contemporary, Okamoto Ippei, who is notable for incorporating a cinematic style into comics, the two are attributed with promoting the idea of a "cartoon journalist."⁵⁶⁴ From there, manga was popularized as a children's medium throughout the early part of the twentieth century, particularly around 1914 with the inception of Kodansha's *Shonen Club*, a monthly magazine for boys, and its counterpart for girls, *Shojo Club*, in 1923.⁵⁶⁵ Despite the

⁵⁶¹ Kelts 126; Kinko Ito 29.

⁵⁶² Kinko Ito 30; Power 25.

⁵⁶³ Power 25.

⁵⁶⁴ Schodt 43.

⁵⁶⁵ Power 27.

popularity of these publications, however, these early magazines never reached the astronomical sales of their postwar equivalents.

Indeed, much of this can be attributed to the constraints placed on those within the industry following the start of World War II. In fact, between 1937 and 1942, the number of printed publications in Japan fell dramatically from 16,788 to 942.⁵⁶⁶ By 1942, paper shortages and the breakdown of distribution channels forced publishers to cut back on the size of their magazines, and in the following year, all paper distribution was placed under government control.⁵⁶⁷ Further, by the middle of 1944, comic strips were banned entirely from appearing in newspapers and magazines, as media outlets were ordered to use their platforms for the reporting of “essential” news.⁵⁶⁸ These policies not only had the effect of limiting the availability of printed materials, but they also resulted in the near-collapse of the entire manga industry, as writers and artists found themselves creating family dramas, war cartoons, or more often, state propaganda.⁵⁶⁹ As Fredrik Schodt notes, “Many cartoonists were drafted and sent to war zones where they created reports for the public back home, propaganda leaflets for the local populace, and leaflets to be dropped over enemy lines.”⁵⁷⁰ Still, manga created during the war featured interesting series, particularly those in *Shonen Club*, like *Norakuro*, about a stray

⁵⁶⁶ Kelts 131.

⁵⁶⁷ Kinsella 23.

⁵⁶⁸ Kelts 131.

⁵⁶⁹ Schodt, *Manga, Manga!* 56.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 57-58.

black dog that joins the imperial army, and *Boken Dankichi*, which featured a young boy who becomes the king of a Pacific island.⁵⁷¹

It is important to note that while there were many manga produced domestically in Japan throughout the early twentieth century, the presence of American comics was also prevalent before and after World War II. In fact, many Western comic strips like *Mutt and Jeff*, *Happy Hooligan*, and *Felix the Cat* were reprinted in Japanese newspapers during the 1920s.⁵⁷² The importation of American print and animated culture had a tremendous impact in Japan, as many of the nation's top artists, including Tezuka Osamu, were strongly influenced by Walt Disney and his contemporaries.⁵⁷³ This changed in the years leading up to the war, as the Japanese government grew concerned over the influence that imported American culture was having on its citizens, at which point, it was banned entirely, along with *akahon*, literally translated as "red books" that frequently featured manga and were considered to be vehicles for "poor quality" or "harmful" culture.⁵⁷⁴ It was not until the postwar era that American comics re-entered Japan, due in part to their importation by military G.I.s and their incorporation into newly created Japanese magazines, like *VAN*.⁵⁷⁵ As Ito Kinko notes, "Popular American cartoons like Blondie, Crazy Cat, Popeye, Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, and Superman were translated and introduced to Japanese audiences. The people longed for the

⁵⁷¹ Kinko Ito 31-32.

⁵⁷² Kinsella 20; Schodt, *Manga Manga!* 45.

⁵⁷³ Schodt, *Manga, Manga!* 63; Kelts 176; Holmberg; Schodt, *Astro Boy Essays* 43

⁵⁷⁴ McCarthy 20.

⁵⁷⁵ Power 34.

rich American lifestyle that was blessed with material goods and electronic appliances.”⁵⁷⁶

However, as alluded to earlier, the roots of the modern manga industry are firmly grounded in the postwar era, particularly the Allied Occupation of Japan, which lasted from the end of the war until April of 1952.⁵⁷⁷ While the Occupational Authority was not nearly as restrictive as the Imperial Government had been, in that it allowed controlled, sanctioned forms of artistic expression and primarily forbid anything that could be interpreted as nationalistic, the publishing industry still faced many of the same obstacles that stymied production throughout the war, like shortages of paper and labor. Still, Jennifer Prough notes that

The print industry was one of the first commercial sectors to recover after the war. Because books and magazines could be started with minimal labor power and materials and could be purchased or rented cheaply, providing light entertainment in the harsh conditions of the early postwar era, publishing companies proliferated.⁵⁷⁸

Indeed, some of the most popular and long-running manga series, like *Sazae-San*, created by Hasegawa Machiko in 1946, began as newspaper strips during this era.⁵⁷⁹

More specifically, however, the resurgence of the manga industry was due in part to

⁵⁷⁶ Kinko Ito 36.

⁵⁷⁷ Manga scholars and professionals within the industry point to different works that signaled the start of the postwar boom. For the purposes of this study, I have chosen to cite American scholarship and utilize the creation of *Astro Boy* in 1952 as the entry point for this discussion. However, I would like to point out that others, like Nakazawa Keiji, the creator of *Hadashi no Gen*, trace it back even further to 1947 and the publication of Tezuka Osamu’s debut work, *Shin Takarajima*, or *New Treasure Island*. Nakazawa 108.

⁵⁷⁸ Prough 30.

⁵⁷⁹ Schodt, *Manga, Manga!* 61.

the popularity of *kashi honya*, or lending libraries, that flourished in the postwar era, since many people lacked the ability to buy their own copies, and *kamishibai*, literally translated as “paper theater,” a public form of entertainment that utilized a series of illustrations to tell a story. For many young people, particularly in Osaka and later Tokyo, *kamishibai* represented a kind of cheap and accessible entertainment, with estimates suggesting that from 1945 to 1953 more than ten thousand artists throughout Japan made a living as paper theater narrators, entertaining approximately five million people every single day.⁵⁸⁰ Additionally, the onset of the Korean War in 1950 generated tremendous demand for Japanese goods and infused the economy with capital, resulting in the resurgence of many industries, including the publishing sector.⁵⁸¹ These four factors: the end of the occupation and official censorship, the proliferation of lending libraries, the popularity of *kamishibai*, and economic growth brought about by the Korean War, account for the tremendous spike in manga production that began in the early 1950s and continued well into the 1960s.

It is here, then, that our analysis of manga’s “superheroes” begins, coinciding with the creation of *Tesuwan Atomu* in 1952, extending until 1963 with the debut of the character’s anime series, which marks the beginning of the “media-mix” economy within the industry, as we shall discuss shortly.⁵⁸² Before we start, however, it’s important to note that the term “superhero” is a bit of a misnomer, as we are not talking about genre characters in the traditional sense, like the larger-

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid. 62.

⁵⁸¹ Kinko Ito 35.

⁵⁸² A prototype for *Tetsuwan Atomu* appeared in the April 1951 series, *Atomu Taishi*.

than-life figures dressed in costumes and spandex that appear in comic books. Rather, when speaking of Japanese superheroes, I'm referring to the heroic protagonists, who are often depicted as somewhat ordinary individuals in manga. While they share certain qualities with their American counterparts, particularly in their role as outsiders and their easy relatability with readers, there are many differences between the two. The earliest critics of manga, like Fredric Schodt, recognized this, writing,

In America, almost every comic book hero is a "superhero"—with bulging biceps (or breasts, as the case may be), a face and physique that rigidly adhere to classical traditions, invincibility accompanied by superpowers, and a cloying, moralistic personality. In Japan, heroes of many genres of comics are rather ordinary in appearance and self-effacing in manner. Even the *supahiro* is very down to earth. He may be handsome, but he is not likely to fly (unless he is a jet powered android robot), nor is he likely to preach. And he is almost always mortal.⁵⁸³

In this sense, then, the protagonists found in manga have much more in common with the heroes created by Marvel Comics in the 1960s than those produced before and during World War II, like Superman. Japanese characters speak to some of the same cultural anxieties as those in the United States, and help to illuminate the role that the production and reception of manga has played in shaping the image of Japan within the Western consciousness. Additionally, like their American brethren, the identities of these characters are rooted in monstrosity, for they, too, deviate from the "normal" and fail to adhere to established categories. As Anne Alison explains, "Whether they are cyborgs, droids, robots, or host spirits [...] superheroes

⁵⁸³ Schodt, *Manga, Manga!* 77-78

are as strange a species as the kaiju—mixtures of machinery, electricity, and bestiality.”⁵⁸⁴

IV. Science, Technology, and Post-Humanism in Tezuka Osamu’s *Tetsuwan Atomu*

Characters like *Tetsuwan Atomu* are some of the most familiar and recognizable in all of manga (see fig. 82). Despite being one of the earliest creations of the post-WWII boom and being featured in a finite series that ended in 1968, the character has taken on an iconic dimension, as his stories have been interpreted, adapted, and re-inscribed in other mediums, like animated shows, video games, and computer-animated feature films, produced both in Japan and the United States. Further, a wide-ranging array of merchandise, from apparel to toys to stationery, bear his visage, making him a familiar sight for many young people who were born decades after his creation, who only know of him from reprinted collections. In fact, the *Atomu* brand was so ubiquitous following the debut of his anime series in 1963 that he became the official mascot of the Japanese baseball team the Sankei Atoms, whose uniforms proudly display his image on their sleeve.⁵⁸⁵ While some of the character’s resonant popularity can be attributed to the aforementioned media-mix economy that has given him an infinite shelf life, the core of his appeal lies in his origin as a creation of the 1950s.

Much like *Godzilla*, *Tetsuwan Atomu* was created to interrogate the lingering social, cultural, and political issues following the end of World War II.⁵⁸⁶ His creator, Tezuka Osamu frequently mentioned that his experiences during the war were the

⁵⁸⁴ Alison 96.

⁵⁸⁵ Schodt, *Astro Boy Essays* 75.

⁵⁸⁶ Palmer 185

primary inspiration for his work.⁵⁸⁷ It is well known that he had a very contentious and conflicted relationship with the United States, for while he often admired America for its popular culture and as a symbol of modernity and progress, he was unsure whether or not the scientific advances made by Western nations, particularly the development of nuclear weapons, were in the best interests of the entire world, especially after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.⁵⁸⁸ Further, many of the main themes in *Tetsuwan Atomu* are clearly drawn from policies instituted throughout the Allied Occupation, particularly *gijutsu rikkoku*, or “building the state through technology,” a national imperative that identified technological progress as the means of regaining industrial might.⁵⁸⁹

Tezuka was also a vocal critic of America’s aggressive foreign policy throughout much of Asia. For example, in an introduction to a story serialized in *Shonen Magazine* from September to December of 1960, entitled, “His Highness Deadcross,” Tezuka directly commented on the hypocritical attitude toward violence within American culture. To do so, he utilized the cartoon avatar of himself that frequently served as his narrative voice within the series (see fig. 83). In this particular episode, he recounts American criticism of the violence within the series, writing,

Actually, when we sold the Astro Boy series in America, one American saw Astro destroying an evil robot and declared he was a ‘murderer.’ In other words, to him both Astro and the robot seemed too human-like and having a robot destroy another robot was just like having a human kill another human. Americans were so sensitive about scenes of violence in fantasy then, but at

⁵⁸⁷ Power 36.

⁵⁸⁸ Phillips 74.

⁵⁸⁹ Allison 55-56.

the same time they didn't have much trouble going over to Southeast Asia and killing people.⁵⁹⁰

This critical sensibility appears in his later works as well, like *Black Jack*, a series that depicts the adventures of the world's best surgeon. In one story, the character is called on to extend the life of a painter dying of radiation sickness after being caught in the fallout of atomic testing in the Pacific conducted by the militant "Nation K."⁵⁹¹ While much of the criticism within *Tetsuwan Atomu* may come off as being somewhat subdued, it is important to remember that Tezuka was producing many of these stories immediately following the end of the Allied Occupation, so while it is clear that the desire to strongly critique such policies exists in the material, his approach was still somewhat veiled and measured.

More than anything else, what comes across in *Tetsuwan Atomu* and Tezuka's other manga is a strong moral concern about the relationship between technology and militarism. As Fredric Schodt notes, Tezuka was a devoted pacifist who took an unequivocally anti-war stance in his work. Commenting on the creator's experiences, he writes, "As a teenager during World War II he was heavily indoctrinated in nationalist propaganda. Too young to be drafted, he was mobilized in factories to support the war effort. [...] From this Tezuka developed a permanent loathing of militarism."⁵⁹² Likewise, Helen McCarthy notes that the artist's anti-war convictions were hardened after he witnessed the firebombing of Osaka while working in an asbestos slate factory in 1945.⁵⁹³ This sensibility shines through in the character of

⁵⁹⁰ Tezuka, *Astro Boy* 2: 9.

⁵⁹¹ Tezuka, *Black Jack* 1: 138-142.

⁵⁹² Schodt, *Dreamland Japan* 251.

⁵⁹³ McCarthy 24; Schodt, *Astro Boy Essays* 28-29.

Atomu, who uses his power not for his own ends or to achieve a grander sense of justice, but rather to defend the peace of his futuristic society from those who would disrupt it to forward their own corrupt ends.⁵⁹⁴ Further, while the hero always defeated the threat posed by villains, stories often echoed the idea that scientific development would continue, potentially placing the world into great peril, should the wrong person gain possession of the next dangerous technology.⁵⁹⁵

Atomu himself stands in for humanity itself at times, struggling with his own powers in the same way that human beings have difficulty making the right choices about emergent technologies. As stronger enemies appear to challenge him, he gains new abilities and upgrades that enhance his fighting prowess, but he sometimes loses control when the power he wields becomes too great for his body to handle. Consider that in addition to a computerized brain and being powered by nuclear technology, the android also has the ability to fly, possesses super strength, has enhanced hearing, and is equipped with robotic abilities like built-in lights and sensors.⁵⁹⁶ As Alicia Gibson notes, “Atomu’s control over his capacities is not complete: he has the strength of a superhuman, but only a boy’s control of his awesome powers. [...] The boy’s overwhelming strength becomes a liability and exposes his imperfection. Behind the comedy lies a serious message: we must learn to control the atomic power we have awakened.”⁵⁹⁷

The dangerous potential of an uncontrolled Atomu is embodied by a series of antagonistic robots the hero faces in battle, like Pluto, a giant android created by the

⁵⁹⁴ Schodt, *Dreamland Japan* 245.

⁵⁹⁵ Phillips 72.

⁵⁹⁶ Schodt, *Astro Boy Essays* 37.

⁵⁹⁷ Steiff and Tamplin 183.

war-like Sultan to destroy all others and become “King of the World” (see fig. 84). Throughout his encounters with Atomu in one of the most popular storylines in the series, the reader discovers that Pluto is not without conscience, but must fulfill the purpose for which he was created, forcing him to fight the world’s most powerful robots to the death.⁵⁹⁸ Eventually, he breaks free from his programming, but is killed protecting Atomu and innocent civilians from an even more powerful robot. Perhaps an even more interesting figure is Atlas, a robot created by the Incan Dr. Ram for the purpose of exacting revenge against whites for the oppression of his people in Latin America (see fig. 85).⁵⁹⁹ The android is equipped with the Omega Factor, a circuit that inspires evil actions within him, and allows him to bypass the normal limits that prevent robots from hurting humans.⁶⁰⁰ In the end, Atlas rebels against his creator, and is only defeated when Atomu hurls him into a powerful electromagnet, destroying his body.

Tetsuwan Atomu is also an attempt to interrogate what it means to be human in a post-industrial world, while examining the line that divides us from posthumanity, a condition that challenges boundaries and redefines existence, usually through the integration of the organic and artificial, functioning much like Donna Harraway’s notion of the “cyborg.”⁶⁰¹ In the original manga, Atomu is an artificial humanoid created by Dr. Temna, the head of the Ministry of Science, who

⁵⁹⁸ Tezuka, *Astro Boy* 3: 11.

⁵⁹⁹ Dr. Ram is an example of a racial caricature in Tezuka’s work. The character is stereotypically represented through the use of blackface, and despite the story’s anti-colonial tone and critical perspective toward the act of revenge, Tezuka has long come under fire for the use of such artistic techniques.

⁶⁰⁰ Tezuka, *Astro Boy* 18: 175.

⁶⁰¹ Poitras 50; Harraway 149-150.

utilizes advances in technology, including a nuclear-powered mini computer and artificial skin, to create a replicate of his son, Tobio, who is killed in a car accident. While he is initially accepted by his new “father,” his robotic inability to grow and age results in his being cast out as an abomination, and he works as a performer at the “robot circus” until he is discovered and taken in by the kindly Dr. Ochanomizu. Interestingly, one of the primary influences for the character of Atomu was the story of Pinocchio, both in literary and animated form, as Tezuka was enthralled by the possibility of technology enabling the creation of sentient life from inorganic material.⁶⁰² The first story, which features the origin of the character, depicts his creation by utilizing imagery reminiscent of the birth of Frankenstein, as the android lays on an operating table, is assembled from various parts, then given life through electrical wires connected to his body (see fig. 86).⁶⁰³

Further, there is a constant tension between humanity and robot-kind throughout the series. As Helen McCarthy observes, “Atom was born as a mediator between warring factions, but Tezuka also used him as a means of exploring darker issues. Astro Boy is not a hymn to technology, but a warning that science alone cannot solve the problems humanity creates.”⁶⁰⁴ While much of Tezuka’s manga output presented futuristic urban cityscapes to readers, his stories focus on the human drama created by the large-scale social changes produced by technology. Atomu is at the center of this tension, being a robotic humanoid that looks much more like a normal boy than many of the other androids who appear throughout the

⁶⁰² McCarthy 114.

⁶⁰³ Tezuka, *Astro Boy* 1: 22-25.

⁶⁰⁴ McCarthy 123.

series. He even attends school and is socialized by Dr. Ochanomizu to understand proper etiquette and behavior. Thus, Atomu is the one character that traverses between these two worlds and even belongs to each of them to an extent. Much like the superheroes in American comics, this categorical ambiguity and liminality defines him as fundamentally monstrous, for he is both normal and different at the same time.

One of the main reasons why *Tetsuwan Atomu* is important is because the series established the framework for the science fiction storytelling that is found in many popular *shonen* anime and manga series today. It is no coincidence that in the 1980s and early 1990s, one of the first genres to gain traction in the United States was the technohumanistic science fiction that had been inspired by *Tetsuwan Atomu*, including films like Otomo Katsuhiro's *Akira* (1988) and later Shirow Masamune's *Kokaku Kidotai* (1995), more popularly known as *Ghost In The Shell*. While Japanese culture, particularly anime, had been imported to the United States and adapted for American audiences since the early 1960s, it was not until this period that these works were presented unedited in their original language. For many who grew up during these years, both anime and manga were closely associated with futuristic visions of extreme technological advancement, giant robots, and cybernetic beings.

Indeed, we have seen how this overwhelming concern about the future of humanity and the ethical dilemmas attendant with advances in technology in Japanese society was largely an outgrowth of World War II, and it continues to shape the production of contemporary anime and manga culture to a significant degree. Susan Napier affirms this postulation, observing that the apocalyptic, rather

than merely dystopian—along with the elegiac and the festive—is a primary representational mode of these mediums. She writes,

The end of the world is an important element in postwar Japanese visual and print culture. [...] While some of these apocalyptic anime, such as the films of Miyazaki, contain visions of hope and rebirth, most of anime's apocalyptic fare is much darker, centering on the destruction of society and the planet itself. Clearly, the most obvious reason behind the high incidence of apocalyptic scenarios is the atomic bomb and its horrific aftereffects.⁶⁰⁵

In this sense, then, *Tetsuwan Atomu* and the issues that inspired its creation live on as a central thematic within anime and manga. Some of the most popular and influential series to date, including *Tetsujin 28 Go* (1956), *Cyborg 009* (1964), *Mazinger Z* (1972), *Space Battleship Yamato* (1974), *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979), *Macross* (1982), *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1994), and *Attack on Titan* (2009), just to name a few, all bear the genetic traces of Atomu's legacy. Additionally, many of the most prominent individuals in the Japanese anime and manga industries, like Miyazaki Hayao, the co-founder of Studio Ghibli and the director of the Academy Award-winning feature *Spirited Away* (2001), cite Tezuka as a significant inspiration for their work.⁶⁰⁶

V. Using "Traditional" Monstrosity to Understand the Present in *GeGeGe no Kitaro*

Another major influence on contemporary anime and manga production, albeit on the other side of the thematic spectrum, is Mizuki Shigeru's *GeGeGe no Kitaro* (see fig. 87). While *Tetsuwan Atomu* is incredibly modern and futuristic in its tone and content, *GeGeGe no Kitaro* is deeply "traditional," utilizing the subject matter of yokai as the focus of its storytelling. Dating back to 1959, the series

⁶⁰⁵ Napier, *Anime: From Akira to Howl's Moving Castle* 29.

⁶⁰⁶ Miyazaki 193.

maintains the dubious distinction of being the most popular franchise that most American readers have never heard of. Long considered “too Japanese” to be imported to the United States, the manga began as a revival of a once-popular horror *kamishibai* series, *Hakaba Kitaro*, or *Kitaro of the Graveyard*.⁶⁰⁷ However, due to the fact that it featured supernatural elements, it initially struggled to find an audience, cycling through multiple publishers. It wasn’t until the mid-1960s that it caught on with readers, after being featured in *Weekly Shonen Magazine*, and re-titled *GeGeGe no Kitaro*, mimicking a sound frequently associated with the uncanny.⁶⁰⁸ Further, while *Tetsuwan Atomu* subtly incorporates the idea of monstrosity and difference into its stories, *Kitaro* explicitly utilizes yokai and elements of early modern Japanese culture to ground the protagonist’s extraordinary abilities in a folkloric tradition in order to interrogate postwar anxieties about Japanese national and cultural identity.

As with American characters from this era, Kitaro himself is literally a heroic monster. Although he appears to be an ordinary young boy at first glance, usually dressed in a striped vest, collared shirt, shorts, and wearing *geta*, or wooden sandals, in actuality, he is the last surviving member of the *yurei zoku*, or ghost clan, and possesses an intimate connection to the supernatural world, which grants him his extraordinary spiritual powers. Although his outward appearance allows him to blend in with humans, much like an alter-ego, allowing him to traverse between worlds, he is always treated like an outsider, more comfortable around other yokai, for they are his own kind. Throughout the series, he is accompanied, advised, and

⁶⁰⁷ Alt 6.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid. 6-7.

assisted by Medama Oyaji, the reanimated eyeball of his late father, and befriended by Nezumi Otoko, or Rat Man, a yokai with questionable motives that acts as both his friend and sometimes rival (see fig. 88). These stories have didactic elements similar to American horror comics published in the 1950s, in that villains are punished for their misdeeds by supernatural forces.

As a character, Kitaro often uses his abilities to defend the weak and punish the wicked, acting as a champion for oppressed yokai and humans alike. At times, he is cast as a kind of “ghost buster” dealing with supernatural problems faced by humans, while in other stories he confronts criminals and the wicked that abuse the weak. Indeed, in many cases, conflicts arise when elements of the spiritual world come into contact with those of the modern world. For example, in a story entitled, “Ghost Train,” Kitaro teaches two drunken men who bully him at a restaurant a lesson by luring them onto a haunted drain bound for the afterlife. At the end of the story, they are forced to jump from the moving vehicle to save their own lives and are injured as they roll down the steep hill nearby. As they come to a stop, Kitaro is there to meet them, and states, “You’ve just been shown a sample of my spirit power. Feel the bumps on your heads! They’re the same size as the one you gave me, aren’t they?”⁶⁰⁹ Terrified, they run off, as the narration reads, “All violence is powerless in the face of Kitaro’s spirit power.”

Despite his function as a super powered hero, much of *GeGeGe no Kitaro* can be interpreted as a critique of violence, particularly war, with yokai largely being cast as victims of human oppression. As Zilla Papp observes, “While until 1945 yokai

⁶⁰⁹ Mizuki 154.

were equated with the foreign enemy in popular visual representation, Mizuki, for the first time, equates yokai with the horrors of war itself, from the standpoint of the victims and the fallen soldiers. In this sense, Mizuki uses yokai to help process the trauma that soldiers lived through at the front lines to propagate a pacifist message through yokai characters.”⁶¹⁰ Indeed, within the pages of *GeGeGe no Kitaro*, yokai are frequently misunderstood, mistreated, and abused creatures, characterized more like victims of humanity than inherently evil entities. While truly monstrous beings exist in the series, there are just as many villainous human antagonists. The back story for the title also supports this thematic, stating that for centuries before the dawn of mankind, yokai lived in a state of peace and tranquility, even developing their own society, until humans appeared and forced them to hide in secluded areas like forests and mountains.⁶¹¹ In this way, *GeGeGe no Kitaro* essentially casts yokai as diasporic or displaced beings, forced from their homeland by the territorial expansion of humanity.

Additionally, there are times when war itself is utilized by the narrative for the purpose for political critique. For example, in a story entitled, “The Great Yokai War,” Kitaro comes to the rescue of the residents of the island of Kikai, which has been taken over by an invasion of Western monsters. Presented in terms of a nationalist struggle, in which the monsters of Europe have come to Asia to conquer human lands and create a “yokai nation,” the battle is squarely framed in terms of East versus West, with Kitaro and a small group of yokai fighting off monsters like Dracula, Frankenstein, and the Wolfman. However, the dialogue used by the

⁶¹⁰ Papp 122.

⁶¹¹ Mizuki 30-32.

European monsters is designed to echo sentiments about ethnic and racial superiority that had circulated in Japanese culture throughout World War II. As the conflict begins, Dracula questions Kitaro's identity as a monster, claiming that he is more concerned about humans than his own kind. Then the Wolfman exclaims, "If all of us yokai joined forces, we could rule the world!"⁶¹² Interestingly, by casting European monsters as an invasive force, the sequence preserves the Japanese cultural ideal of World War II as a victim's narrative, while simultaneously critiquing much of the logic behind the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, which advocated that Asian nations unite under Japan in order to fend off colonization by Western powers. In doing so, it manages to subtly promote a critique of Japan's own wartime policies, while not explicitly condemning the nation itself. Throughout the narrative, there are also sequences that utilize imagery from World War II, particularly the mushroom cloud created by the atomic bomb, as the story ends with Kitaro setting the island on fire, creating a "Brigadoon effect," which results in the containment of the evil monsters' spirits.

In another story, Mizuki directly appropriates the *kaiju* genre, critiquing the idea of progress through technology and highlighting the importance of tradition in Japanese cultural identity. In "Creature From the Deep," a jealous scientist, Yamada, injects Kitaro with zeuglodon blood, transforming the boy into a giant, hairy whale monster that wreaks havoc on Tokyo (see fig. 89). Throughout the story, Kitaro, representing the traditional, and the scientist, symbolizing the modern, repeatedly come into conflict with one another, as the latter tries to gain sole credit for what

⁶¹² Ibid. 172.

they discover about the extinct whale in New Guinea. Interestingly, by having Kitaro transform into a giant monster, Mizuki humanizes the beast that audiences have come to recognize as a threat, showing that the destruction Kitaro causes only occurs out of frustration, as he is attacked by the Japanese Self-Defense Force, presumably a military contingent, while trying to communicate and explain his situation to them. In this way, the alien is made familiar, prompting audiences to identify with the misunderstood creature.⁶¹³ When that is unsuccessful, the scientist builds a giant robot—the Zeuglodon Exterminator-Bot—to defeat Kitaro, pitting the power of science against the spiritual, but when even that fails, the Self-Defense Force drops an atomic bomb on the *kaiju* in an attempt to kill him. Yet, all modern weapons fail to destroy it. In the end, the scientist develops a cure, and Kitaro is restored to his normal form. Learning his lesson, Yamada states, “I should never have tried to use science for my own personal gain,” echoing larger themes from the filmic genre and earlier works like *Tetsuwan Atomu*.⁶¹⁴ As Susan Napier notes, the process of transformation or metamorphosis seen within this narrative is one of the key elements of contemporary manga and anime, literally destabilizing and deconstructing established ways of understanding the world, thematically aligning the medium with a major theoretical tenet of monstrosity.⁶¹⁵

We see that many stories featured in *GeGeGe no Kitaro* are an attempt to come to terms with the recent past by utilizing “traditional” forms of Japanese culture. By incorporating the subject matter of yokai into his work, Mizuki is able to

⁶¹³ Papp 127.

⁶¹⁴ Mizuki 309.

⁶¹⁵ Napier, *Anime: From Akira to Howl's Moving Castle* 36.

delicately explore issues that are otherwise untouchable within Japanese society, particularly those surrounding the nation's culpability for wartime atrocities. While much of this discussion is buried under layers of plot and fictional conflicts between yokai and humans, the fantastic nature of the narrative, much like *Gojira*, allows for the presentation of critiques in subversive, yet non-threatening ways. These stories represent an attempt to mediate both trauma and guilt in the Japanese cultural consciousness, laying the groundwork for a larger, open discussion about the future of the nation and what it means to be Japanese. Although the content matter of *GeGeGe no Kitaro* appears deeply "traditional," its narratives are firmly grounded in the climate of the postwar era and represent an attempt to not only come to terms with the past, but to also define Japan's place in the world and its future.

VI. The Rise of Anime and the Construction of Japan Within the American Consciousness

This function, in which manga—and Japanese postwar cultural production in general—were largely founded to interrogate the lasting effects and lingering trauma of World War II, also extends to the medium of anime, which first debuted in 1963. While Japanese media producers had dabbled in animation prior to this period, most notably with filmic adaptations of traditional legends, like *Momotaro Umi no Shinpei*, or *Momotaro's Divine Sea Warriors*, a classic propaganda film from 1945, by and large, the Japanese animation industry did not come into being until the early 1960s when Tezuka Osamu founded Mushi Productions and first adapted *Tetsuwan Atomu* for television.⁶¹⁶ Unlike American cartoons however, which are largely produced as original material based on a pre-existing source, most anime

⁶¹⁶ Steinberg ix.

series in Japan are direct adaptations of popular manga, and very rarely depart from the published material. Thus, many of the themes present in manga find their way into their accompanying anime, and across different forms of media, from print to television to film, and more recently, video games.

This is largely due to the media-mix economy around which the anime industry was created. This business model, conceived of and introduced by Tezuka, places royalties from licensing and merchandising at the center of the creative economy, using the profits generated from such sales to subsidize the production of manga and anime, both of which are largely unprofitable.⁶¹⁷ Rather, within this economic model, the two exist in order to generate publicity and exposure for popular characters and series, which in turn drives up demand within youth culture for everything from toys to apparel to video games and consumable goods like candy and food products. Thus, the more penetration a particular property has in various forms of media, the more profitable it becomes overall. As Marc Steinberg writes,

Character merchandising works through two complimentary tendencies: the attractive force of the character as immaterial entity that transforms its surrounding ecology of things and media into character-products [...] and the tendency toward the diffusion of the character in material form (as sticker, chocolate, etc.) that enables the material expansion of this character image throughout the consumer's environment. The character's material expansion intensifies its attractive force, multiplying the number of media and commodities offering the Atomu image. The intensity of the character's attraction as a kind of immaterial force is thus indexed to, and amplified by, the degree of material circulation of the character image.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁷ Steinberg 40; Prough 13.

⁶¹⁸ Steinberg 82.

Through this media-mix economy, the character itself gains value as intellectual property, and generates far more money than either the manga or anime it is featured in. The inception of this system in 1963 largely transformed the way that such culture was produced, as others adopted Tezuka's formula and turned their eye toward profits from licensing and royalties rather than sales of manga or television advertising. Additionally, it resulted in the uniformity of a particular character and series across media, so as to maintain its integrity as part of a single franchise.

This is important because within the United States, anime has become the primary gateway through which many young people are exposed to Japanese culture. As such, we find that familiarity with the adventures of a particular can come in a variety of forms, whether one reads the manga or watches the anime when it is broadcast on television. Interestingly, the recent critical acclaim of manga and anime in the West has bestowed these materials with an air of legitimacy among Japanese officials, who now view the successful exportation of the medium as a form of soft power.⁶¹⁹ As Michael Auslin notes,

Tokyo's public diplomacy organs, primarily within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, saw the resurgent global interest in Japan's popular culture as a new tool for promoting Japan's image abroad. [...] Fascination with anime and manga could be used not only to strengthen American involvement with Japan, so the argument went but also to strengthen Japan's role around the globe, particularly Europe and Asia, where a large consumer class was snapping up pop culture-related goods.⁶²⁰

As a result, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has classified manga and anime as part of a "creative industry," even going so far as to print a promotional pamphlet in 2007

⁶¹⁹ Alison 10; Kinsella 97; Prough 145.

⁶²⁰ Auslin 270.

entitled, *Creative Japan*, which cites these mediums as “part of a creative tradition with unbroken links to the past.”⁶²¹ Further, this document details the history and global reach of everything from Japanese games, fashion, food, art, literature, technology, and even architecture as a way of legitimizing Japanese cultural production in the larger global context.

However, it is likely that American audiences have misinterpreted the intended meaning of manga and anime, primarily because these materials have historically been produced with only Japanese readers in mind.⁶²² Rather than being understood on their own terms, American consumers interpret and evaluate these cultural products through established discourses about Japan within the United States, particularly that of monstrosity. When taken outside of their specific cultural context, series like *Tetsuwan Atomu*, featuring futuristic androids and giant robots, suddenly paint a picture of a technologically-obsessed society, concerned with scientific progress and the spectacle of physics-defying combat. Likewise, without a functional understanding of *yokai* or the role that they have played in Japanese culture and history, *GeGeGe no Kitaro* is seen as a depiction of an intensely spiritual and mysterious society, along the lines of what Lafcadio Hearn presents in *Kwaidan*, whose true identity lies beneath the surface, rather than a critical piece aimed at interrogating postwar anxieties. As with *Gojira*, when exported and adapted for other markets, the meaning of these texts is essentially rewritten and reconfigured to adhere to existing European and American conceptions of what Japan should be, rather than what it actually is.

⁶²¹ *Creative Japan* 3.

⁶²² Levy 16; Prough 142.

Here, we see that although the characters in both comic books and manga are grounded in the same origins, echo familiar themes, address overlapping anxieties, and even share similar modes of presentation through the comic form, the reception of domestic superheroes by American audiences is very different from those found in manga and anime. For consumers, these mediums are not reflective of the cultural production of the Japanese, but of Japan itself, constructing it as a kind of fantasy space to be desired. As Anne Alison notes,

“Japan” signifies something here, but the signifier is shifting: it is a marker of phantasm and difference, yet one that is anchored in a reality of sorts—a country Americans can study and visit. [...] Numerous fans of Japanese anime, manga, card games, and toys I have talked with in the States voice their attraction in similar terms: their imaginations are piqued by the complexity and strangeness of an alternate fantasy world that they also strive to become fluent in and at home with.⁶²³

Ethnographic surveys of these fan cultures provide similar results, as individuals frequently explain their attraction to anime and manga through the appeal of difference, comparing these materials to their American equivalents.⁶²⁴

Without the localization and adaptation that significantly alters names and narrative details, manga and anime appear exceedingly foreign to many Americans, with characters and stories that are characterized as “weird” and “strange.” Antonia Levy elaborates on how this process of misrecognition occurs, writing, “[The Japanese] are retelling their ancient myths and legends in modern form, retailoring their old religious and heroic traditions to conform to modern ideas about who and what they are. The reason their creations seem so bizarre to Americans is because

⁶²³ Alison 275.

⁶²⁴ Cooper-Chen 80.

they are drawing their material from an entirely different cultural tradition.”⁶²⁵

Rather than making the effort to understand more about Japanese culture, many consumers have instead made the mistake of assuming that the content of these mediums is reflective of Japan itself, providing an “authentic” anthropological lens into the “true” nature of Japanese culture and society. For them, these materials are not just about entertainment, but they also serve a pedagogical function. In short, the tropes of anime have become signifiers of Japanese identity.

Furthermore, these fans are not mere observers, but instead are active participants whose agency is manifested through the exercise of their purchasing power, largely as a result of the media-mix economic model that has dominated the industry since 1963. As Marc Steinberg notes, “Consumption was not merely the passive spectating of the fashionably new—it was also a form of participating in networks of communicating media-things.”⁶²⁶ Thus, consumerism is a method of displaying affiliation with a particular property or character, but even more importantly, it allows individuals to become active agents within that series’ real world economy. Essentially, toys, cards, video games, stationary, apparel, and consumables were—and still are— “the medium of participation” within the industry, as Steinberg calls it.⁶²⁷ When American fans appreciate manga and anime with little to no knowledge of their intended cultural context, they not only misinterpret what they consume, but as agents within this process, they also alter the intended meaning of these texts. They are literally consuming an image of Japan

⁶²⁵ Levy 34.

⁶²⁶ Steinberg 114.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.* 200.

that has been marketed to them, while simultaneously shaping the way that the country is viewed within American culture.

This image of Japan within the United States, developed in part by the contact and consumption of manga and anime, is defined by duality and extremes. On the one hand, the nation is constructed as an industrialized modern state, even futuristic, shaped by these mediums' embrace of androids and giant robots. On the other hand, Japan is also seen as ancient, traditional, and mysterious, steeped in a culture that privileges pre-modern, almost medieval beliefs and practices, making it foreign, yet alluring, to Western audiences. In this respect, both manga and anime play into this idea of Japan as deeply conflicted, constructed through fantasy, and defined by its historical relationship with the United States, particularly key moments like World War II and the dropping of the atomic bombs. While the content of these mediums is not solely responsible for creating these beliefs, it is obvious that Americans' contact with it has contributed immensely in affirming its accuracy for those individuals whose knowledge of Japan is derived solely from popular culture.

As we have seen, there are many important similarities between the superheroes that appear in American comic books and those within Japanese manga. Interestingly, these characters share many of the same origins, as literal children of the atom, whose creation and abilities were linked specifically to the dawn of the nuclear age. They are also directly connected to monsters, particularly Godzilla, whose role as part of the *kaiju*, or giant monster genre, influenced the creation of both Marvel Comics and many early characters in manga. Further, these series often

commented on similar issues, including nuclear proliferation, concerns about the development of technology, militarism, and basic human rights. They did all of this through the comic medium, utilizing text and images to reach the broadest, most diverse audience possible, and as a result, many of these characters still exist today as icons of both American and Japanese popular culture.

Yet, despite these similarities, the protagonists of manga and anime are continually cast as radically different from their American brethren, a classification based almost entirely on their country of origin. Superheroes in general are heroic monsters, individuals with abilities that exceed the limits of normal individuals, who defy established classificatory schemas and extend the boundaries of the possible. American comic book heroes, like those created by Marvel Comics have understandably been accepted as familiar icons, whose exploits as superheroes are balanced by the daily struggles faced by their civilian alter-egos. Many Japanese characters share this duality, existing as outsiders who possess the ability to blend into civil society, yet these creations have still been labeled as foreign, strange, and different. They do not appear overtly Japanese, which is one of the key elements of their successful incorporation into American culture, but at the same time, readers of manga and viewers of anime still recognize their aesthetic as distinctly Japanese products. Despite the complex network of transnational cultural influences and exchanges between the creators of comic books and manga, the continued association of monstrosity with Japan shapes the way we understand familiar archetypal characters. Despite the fact that all superheroes are monsters to some extent, we easily associate and connect with characters like Iron Man, while

distancing ourselves from others, like Tetsuwan Atomu, produced by a foreign culture that Americans still deem to be monstrous.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the discourse of monstrosity plays a significant role in shaping the image of the Japanese in the American cultural imagination. From the introduction of Asia as a land of monstrous races and treasure to the wartime construction of the Japanese as enemies of the state, our understanding of Japan and its people is founded on a constellation of established theoretical, literary, and historical knowledge, which defines them as liminal beings with contradictory attributes that challenge the established norms of American society. Understood as a complex mixture of self and other, being simultaneously threatening and desirable, the Japanese have historically problematized notions of race and gender in the United States, showing us alternate modes of understanding and existence that go beyond simple cultural binaries.

This dissertation has demonstrated how comic books play into this discourse, both in reflecting dominant narratives and subverting them entirely through the use of monsters and monstrosity. As one of the most popular forms of visual culture throughout the twentieth century, they have consistently and explicitly engaged in this narrative tradition, incorporating elements like the archetypal Oriental villain patterned after Fu Manchu, the practice of defining foreign locations outside the

familiar as exotic and dangerous, utilizing monstrosity as a metaphor to identify deviance, and building on established genres in fantasy and science fiction, among many others. As a cultural medium that often reflects dominant tastes, the ubiquitous presence of monsters demonstrates the centrality of these figures to both the medium and society-at-large. Indeed, monstrosity is a key constituent element of the comic book form, and the two are so closely aligned that mainstream archetypes like the superhero are constructed around it. As such, it is impossible to truly understand the history of comic books without understanding and examining monstrosity, and the role that it has played in the development of characters, narratives, and genres within the medium.

Further, the Japanese have not only been shaped by this discourse of monstrosity, but they have also been active agents within it. Through the exercise of cultural agency and the use of dynamic transpacific flows, they have both subverted and reinforced the dominant frames that are used to define them in the United States, particularly through filmic and manga production. Films like *Gojira* effectively challenged American foreign policy and exorcised lingering anxieties from World War II, and despite the fact that the meaning of the film was largely altered upon its importation to the United States, it played a significant role in influencing the creation of new kinds of superheroes throughout the Silver Age. Similarly, many of the famous characters in manga, like Tetsuwan Atomu and GeGeGe no Kitaro, have come to define Japan in the contemporary American imagination, as an intensely futuristic, technologically-obsessed society that is simultaneously traditional and steeped in mystery. The impact that these cultural

products have had on American perceptions should not be understated, as these series were incredibly influential within the Japanese manga industry and spawned a host of imitators, a pattern that extends into the present with more contemporary fan favorite manga and anime, like *Attack on Titan*, *Appleseed*, *Psycho-Pass*, *Ghost In the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*, and others that bear the generic traces of earlier series. This is particularly important to note at this moment when American consumers have almost universal access to manga and anime through the Internet and publishers like VIZ that regularly translate and reprint content. Older series are also being revived for modern audiences, but absent their historical and cultural context they inadvertently reinforce the stereotypes and misperceptions that current consumers of manga have about Japan.

As such, this project effectively serves as the first transpacific history of comic books ever written, illustrating how dynamic cultural flows and exchanges have affected production within the medium. By taking the study of this material beyond the American context, we see how the form is emblematic of a kind of global culture. While comic books and manga both retain culturally specific elements derived from their countries of origin, they also draw inspiration for character archetypes, narratives, and genres from one another, often adapting, localizing, and synthesizing existing elements for the tastes of their respective audiences. Within the last few decades, this process has extended far beyond the medium itself, as comics have become one part of a global multimedia economy, particularly in the present where American superhero films are marketed to an international audience

and the classic stories from comic books are rewritten and amalgamated, transmitted to new audiences in fresh and more accessible ways.

There are still many avenues of inquiry and cultural analysis relating to this subject that have yet to be fully explored. For example, the endpoint of this study prohibited the examination of comic book material from the 1970s, where traditional monsters re-emerge within comics—in the form of characters like Morbius, the Living Vampire, Frankenstein, the Zombie, Werewolf By Night, Man-Thing, and others—alongside mature themes—exploring death and drug abuse—and racialized genres, like blaxploitation and kung-fu comics. Interrogating what relationship, if any, exists between these three elements would make for a fascinating extension to this project.

On the Japanese side, much work still has to be done on the use of monstrosity in manga, anime, film, and video games. Of particular interest is the evolution of Godzilla from a movie monster into a superhero, particularly as other, more dangerous threats emerge, like Rhodan, King Ghidora, and Mechagodzilla. Like Superman in the 1950s, the character is effectively domesticated with the introduction of family elements into the franchise, particularly the presence of Godzilla's infant son, Manilla. Additionally, very few works have adequately studied the relationship between monstrosity in manga and anime and the culture of "kawaii," or feminine cute, typically associated with characters like Sanrio's Hello Kitty. As some scholars have noted, there is a fine line that separates the two, and if adapted into real-life, even a character like Hello Kitty—a cat with no mouth, beady

eyes, and human-like mannerisms—would be considered monstrous by any neutral observer.⁶²⁸

Monstrosity is also notoriously present in Japanese print and animated pornography, particularly the genre of “tentacle porn” pioneered by artist Maeda Toshio. While typically centering around narratives of conquest and invasion—usually in the form of medieval fantasy or science fiction—this genre purposely utilizes monstrosity as a subversive tool to circumvent censorship in the Japanese media, substituting tentacles as a replacement for the phallus, the depiction of which is designated as obscene in Japanese culture. This practice is complicated by traditional Japanese art forms, like *shunga*—viewed by many as the precursor to today’s genre—woodblock prints that depicted exaggerated pornographic scenarios, including the presence of octopi, famously seen in Hokusai’s *The Dream of the Fisherman’s Wife*. What makes this form so important is that it is one of the primary cultural products that defines Japan within the American imagination, frequently referenced in everything from television shows to Internet memes. By and large, it has been a significant factor in shaping the contemporary image of the Japanese as bizarre fetishists with strange sexual proclivities, whose culture has produced artifacts whose allure cannot be comprehended by the Western mind. Taken wholly out of the context of media censorship, this genre of pornography has instead been used to designate Japanese sexuality as monstrous in both taste and appetite—so much in fact that conservative Japanese politicians have cracked down on the genre out of the fear that it is negatively affecting the country’s global reputation.

⁶²⁸ Brzozwska 216-217.

Perhaps most importantly, significant work still needs to be done to interrogate the role of monstrosity in the multimedia franchise known as *Pokémon*, or *Pocket Monsters*. No other series so perfectly embodies the media-mix economy of the Japanese anime industry as this one, producing everything from manga, anime, video games, and toys to apparel, consumables, stuffed animals, and stationary. It has inspired a host of imitators—including series like *Digimon*—but at the heart of the franchise are two things: monsters and capitalist principles. No matter what medium one chooses as an inception point to the series, they are exposed to the same narrative. Young children, designated as trainers, tame, capture, and raise monsters known as Pokémon, and embark on a journey, engaging in battles and trading the creatures to become stronger in the hopes of one day competing for the title of Pokémon League Champion. Famously marketing the phrase “Gotta Catch Em’ All” in the United States, the series now boasts more than seven hundred different monsters for users to catch and trade with one another, either through digital exchanges in games or the physical trading of collectible cards. The video games are known for introducing “trading” as a mandatory social element in the experience, as no one player is able to capture every Pokémon on their own with a single copy of the game, because each version is purposely coded to only include certain types of monsters and not others. The entire world of *Pokémon* has its own economy—including everything from in-game stores that operate via virtual currency to rarity tiers for different types of Pokémon—which seductively introduce children to the core principles of free market capitalism.

Further, it is arguable that the *Pokémon* model, with its focus on controllable monsters and individualized play is at the heart of the billion dollar “toys-to-life” phenomenon that currently dominates the American video game industry. No longer about simply managing a virtual economy between games, players now purchase a series of toys—for games ranging from Activision’s *Skylanders* series to Disney Interactive’s *Infinity*—for use in-game. Placing these physical figures onto an interface known as a “portal” brings them to “life” within the game itself, allowing the player to utilize these characters and access previously locked content. Each toy retains its own stats and specialized moveset through the use of a built-in NFC chipset, allowing for multiplatform use at any location, so long as there is an accessible interface and a copy of the software. It is no coincidence that the first of these games, *Spyro’s Adventure: Skylanders*, featured controllable, heroic monsters, much like *Pokémon*, that the player uses to navigate through the various stages of the in-game world. Since then, the focus on monsters has given way to more recognizable characters, most recently with the introduction of Nintendo’s Amiibo series of toys, which feature classic characters like Super Mario, Link, Zelda, and Donkey Kong, but much of the business model from these ever successive product lines in the “toys-to-life” fad have been derived from the model pioneered in *Pokémon*.

There are many facets of monstrosity in visual culture left to explore on both the American and Japanese sides. While much of this work is currently focused on interactive media like video games, there is an untapped wealth of potential scholarship that exists in print media that I was unable to include in this project,

primarily due to space constraints. My hope is that future researchers recognize the promise of this material and give it the attention that it so richly deserves.



Fig 1. The World Map. *Psalter Mappamundi*. c.1265. British Library, London.

Wiefacht sich an gar ein graussem
 liche erschrockenliche hystorien von dem wilden rütrich.
 Dracole wayde. Wie er die leut gespist hat. vnd gepraten.
 vnd mit den haüßtern yn einem kessel gesoten. vñ wie er die
 leüt geschunden hat vñ zerhacken lassen als ein kraut. Jtez
 er hat auch den mütern ire kind gepiatē vnd sy habēs müs-
 sen selber essen. Vnd vil andere erschrockenliche ding die in
 diesem Tractat geschriben stend. Vnd in welchem land er
 geregiret hat.



Fig. 2. Frontispiece of a Dracula pamphlet. Huber, Ambrosius. c.1499. Library of the Academy of the Romanian Socialist Republic, Bucharest.



Fig. 3. Monstrous races, including the blemmyae, sciopod, and cyclops. Polo, Marco. c.14th century. Bibliotheque Nationale de France, Paris.



Fig. 4. First issue of Yellow Claw. *Yellow Claw* 1 (New York: Atlas, 1956).



NATIONS KATHOLIKES!
 DÉFENDEZ VOS DIEUX SACRÉS!

*Haltet standhaft
 auf euer heiligen Glauben!*

NATIONS OF EUROPE!
 JOIN IN THE DEFENCE OF YOUR FAITH AND YOUR HOMES!

THE YELLOW PERIL.

"ARTS: A SKETCH BY HIS MAJESTY BRUCEUS WILHELM II. OF GERMANY, KING OF PRUSSIA, EXECUTED BY H. KNACKFUSS, 1898."

Fig. 5. Knackfuss, Herman. "The Yellow Peril." *Harper's Weekly* 22 January 1898: 74.



Fig. 6. Keller, George Frederick. "What Shall We Do With Our Boys?" *The Wasp* 3 March 1882.

NEW SERIAL STORY BY JOHN KENDRICK BANGS

HARPER'S WEEKLY

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NEW YORK, SATURDAY, AUGUST 5, 1899

TEN CENTS A COPY
FOUR DOLLARS A YEAR



Fig. 7. Rogers, W.A. "Open Door." *Harper's Weekly* 5 August 1899.

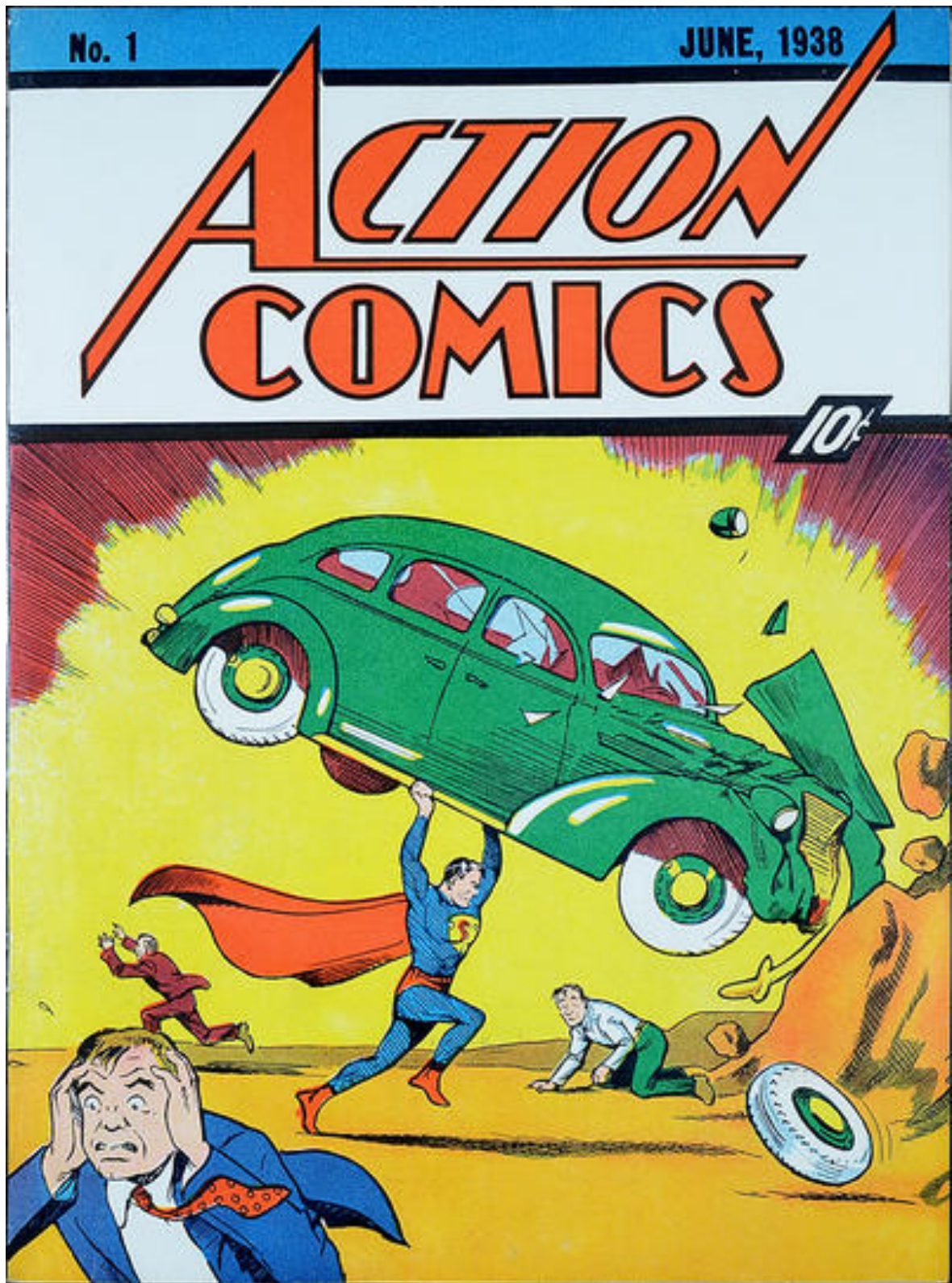


Fig. 8. First appearance of Superman. *Action Comics* 1 (New York: D.C. Comics, 1938).



Fig. 9. Captain America punches a demonic Japanese soldier on the cover of the first post-Pearl Harbor issue of the series. *Captain America Comics 13* (New York: Timely, 1942).

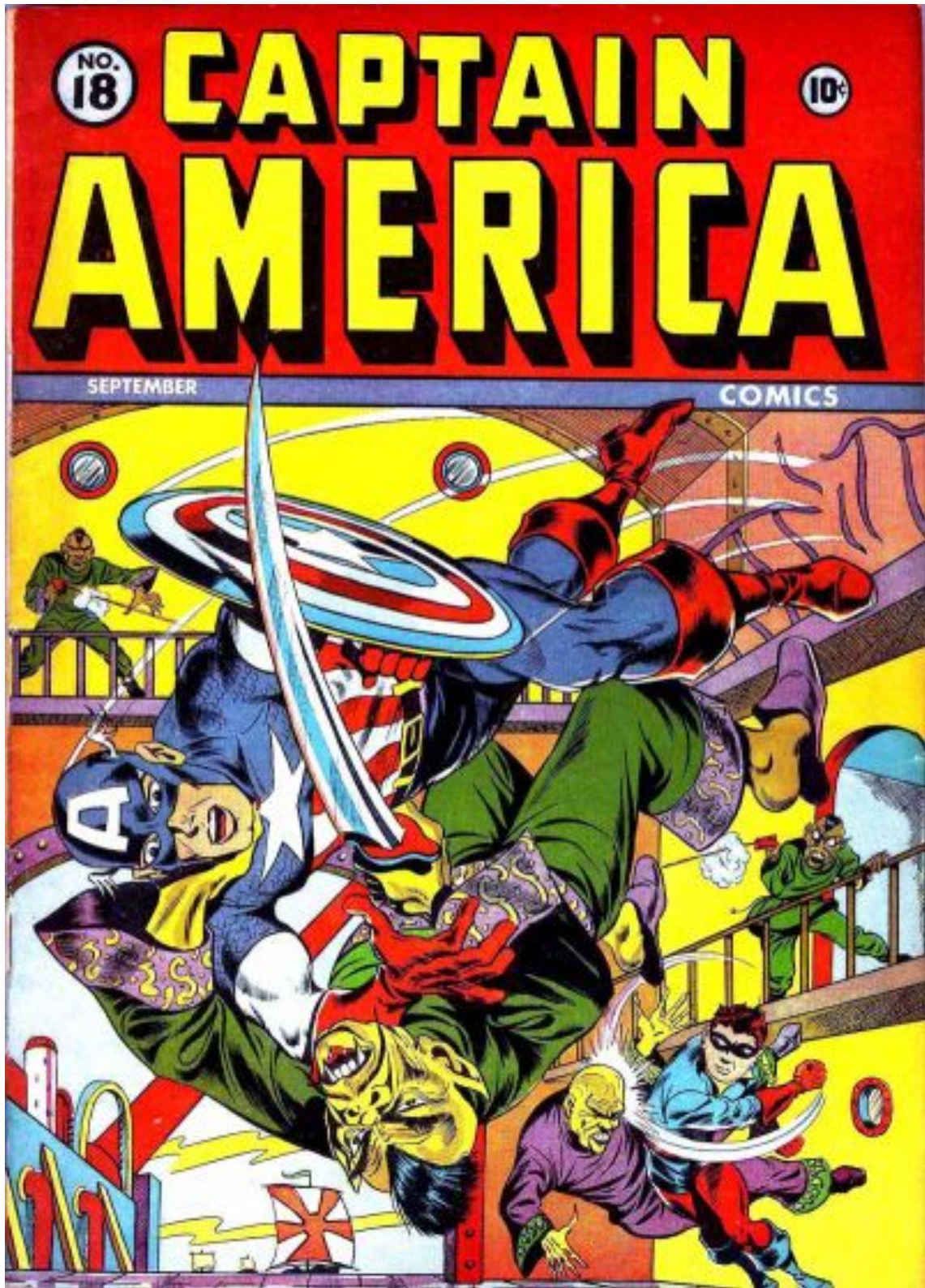


Fig. 10. Captain America battles Japanese soldiers. *Captain America Comics* 18 (New York: Timely, 1942).



Fig. 11. Timely superheroes battle the Japanese navy. *All-Winners Comics* 13 (New York: Timely, 1944).



Fig. 12. The leader of the Black Dragon Society declares that the Japanese cannot invent, so they must resort to theft and sabotage instead. Rpt. in Fox, Garder, et al. *All-Star Comics Archives*. New York: D.C. Comics, 1997. 3: 69.



Fig. 13. Superman stops a Japanese saboteur. *Japoteurs*. Dir. Seymour Kneitel. Paramount, 1942.

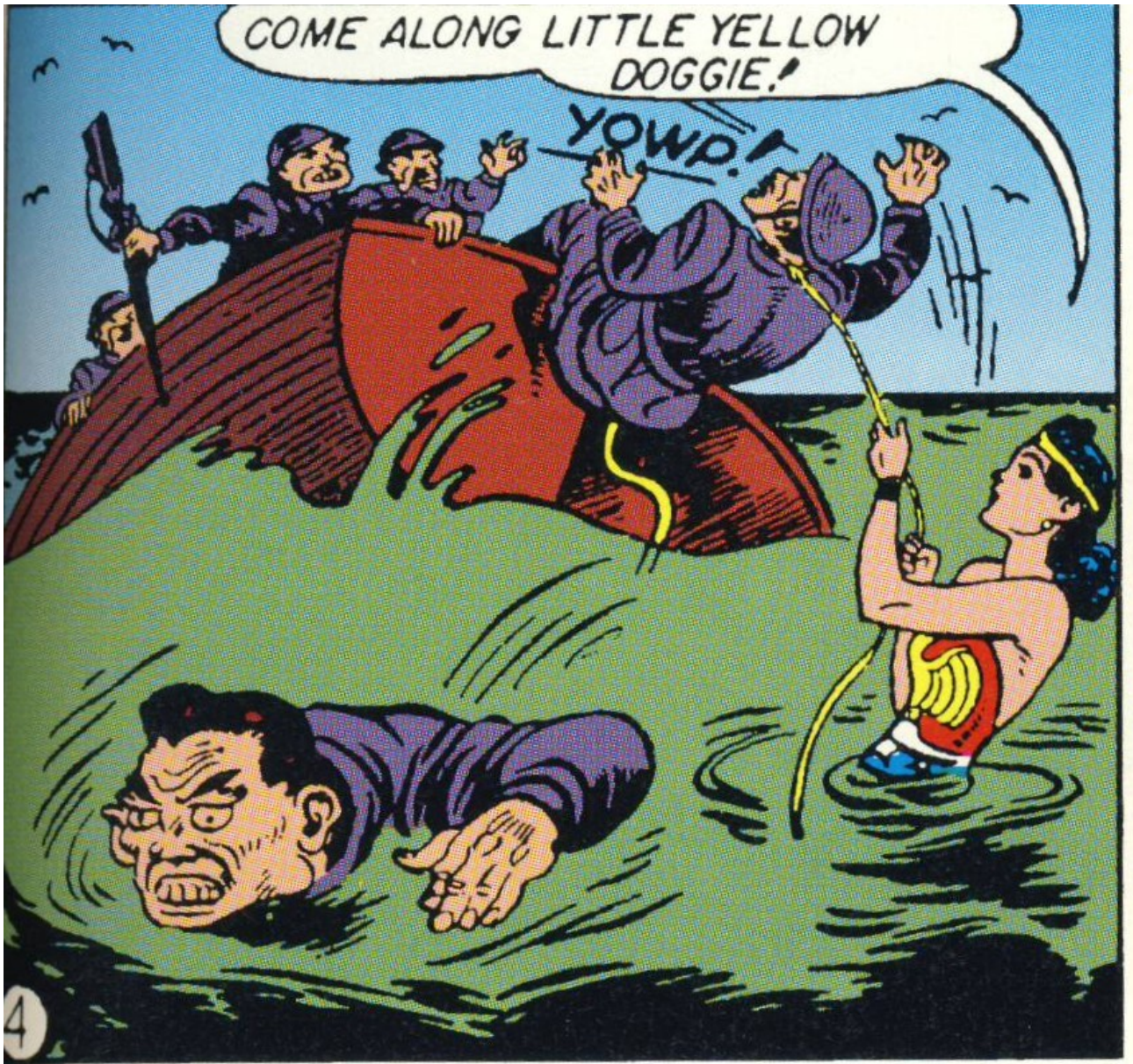


Fig. 14. Wonder Woman uses animalistic terms while fighting Japanese soldiers. Rpt. in Fox, Garder, et. al. *All-Star Comics Archives*. New York: D.C. Comics, 1997. 3: 25.

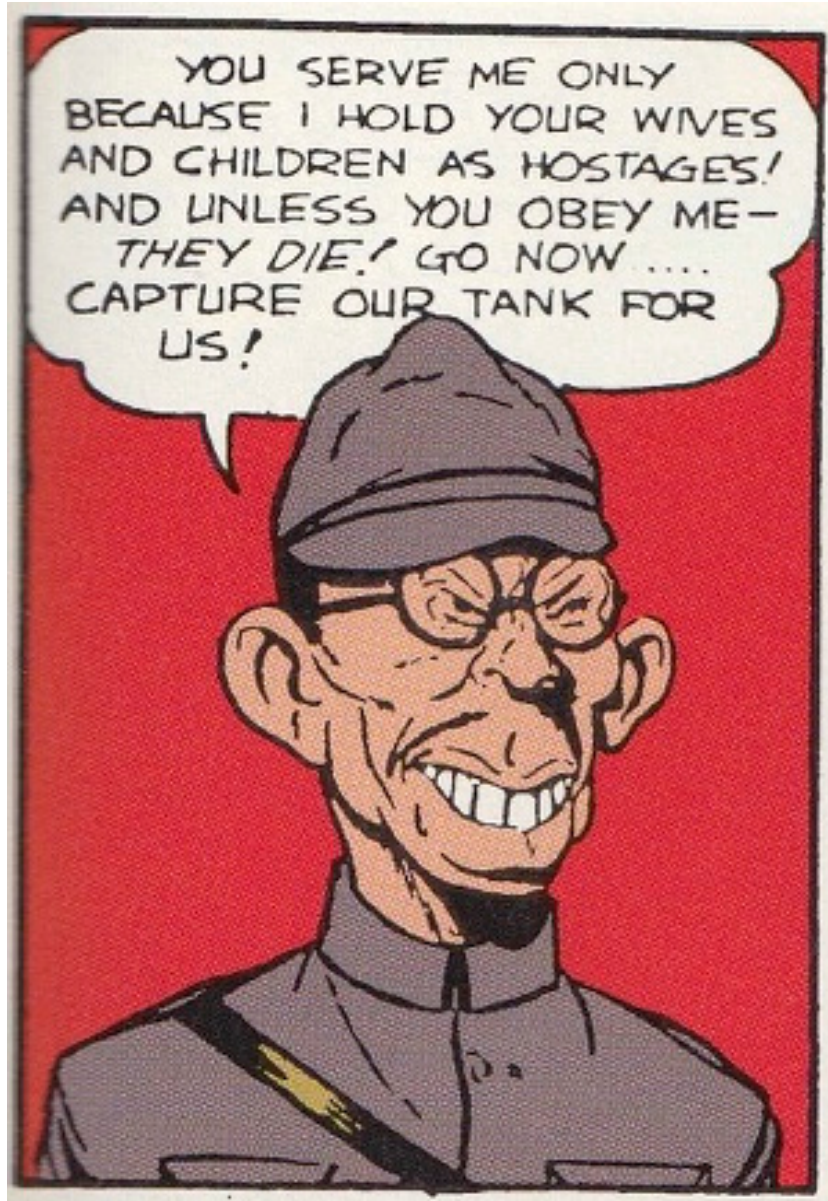


Fig. 15. Japanese soldier threatens Native American. Rpt. in Fox, Garder, et al. *All-Star Comics Archives*. New York: D.C. Comics, 1997. 3: 69.



Fig. 16. Chinese villain. *Detective Comics* 1 (New York: D.C. Comics, 1937).

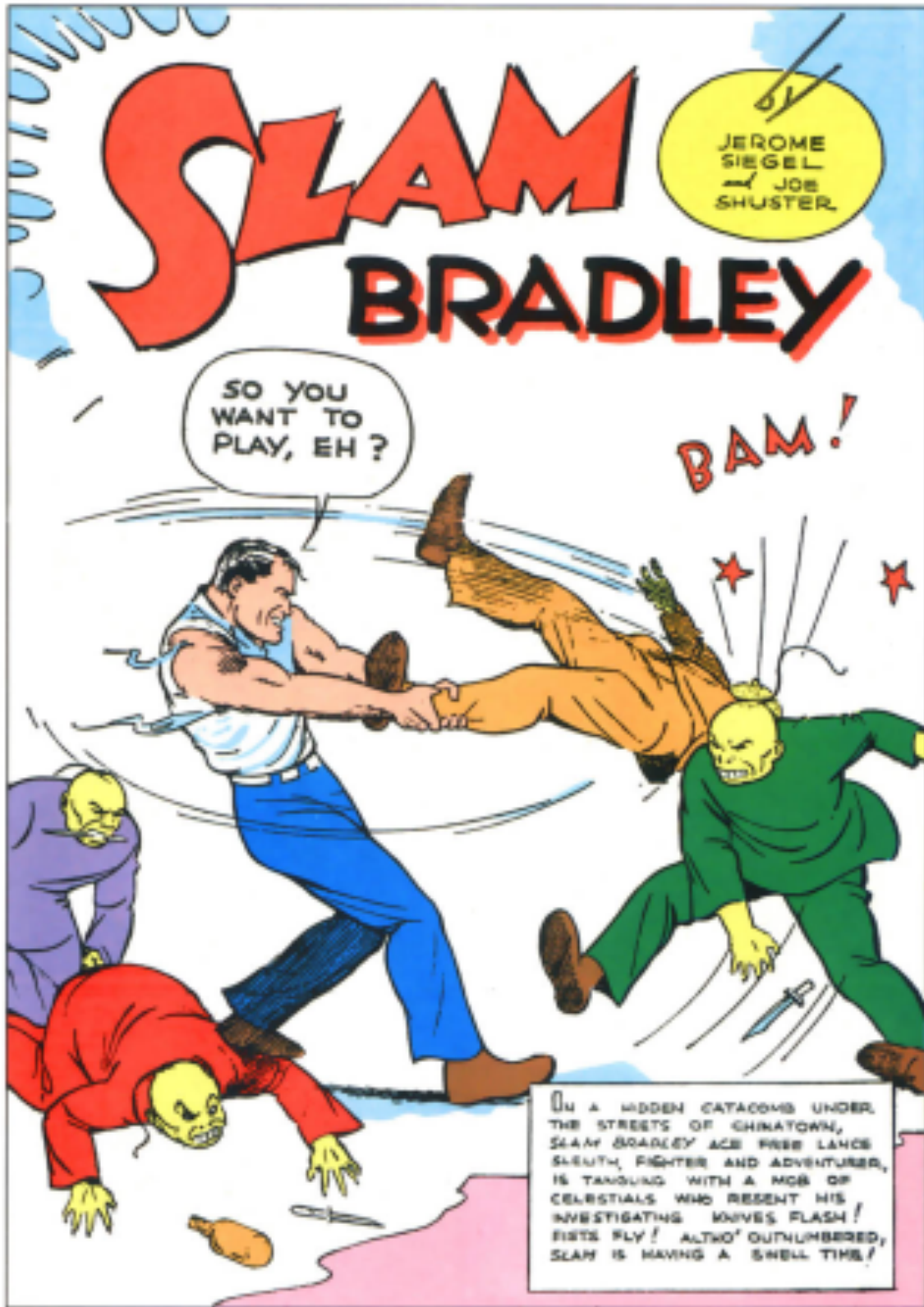


Fig. 17. Superman prototype Slam Bradley battles Chinese criminals. Rpt. in Siegel, Jerry, et al. *Millennium Edition: Detective Comics*. New York: D.C. Comics, 2000.



Fig. 18. The Claw appears as a green demon, commanding Chinese to attack his enemy. *Silver Streak Comics* 1 (New York: Lev Gleason, 1939).

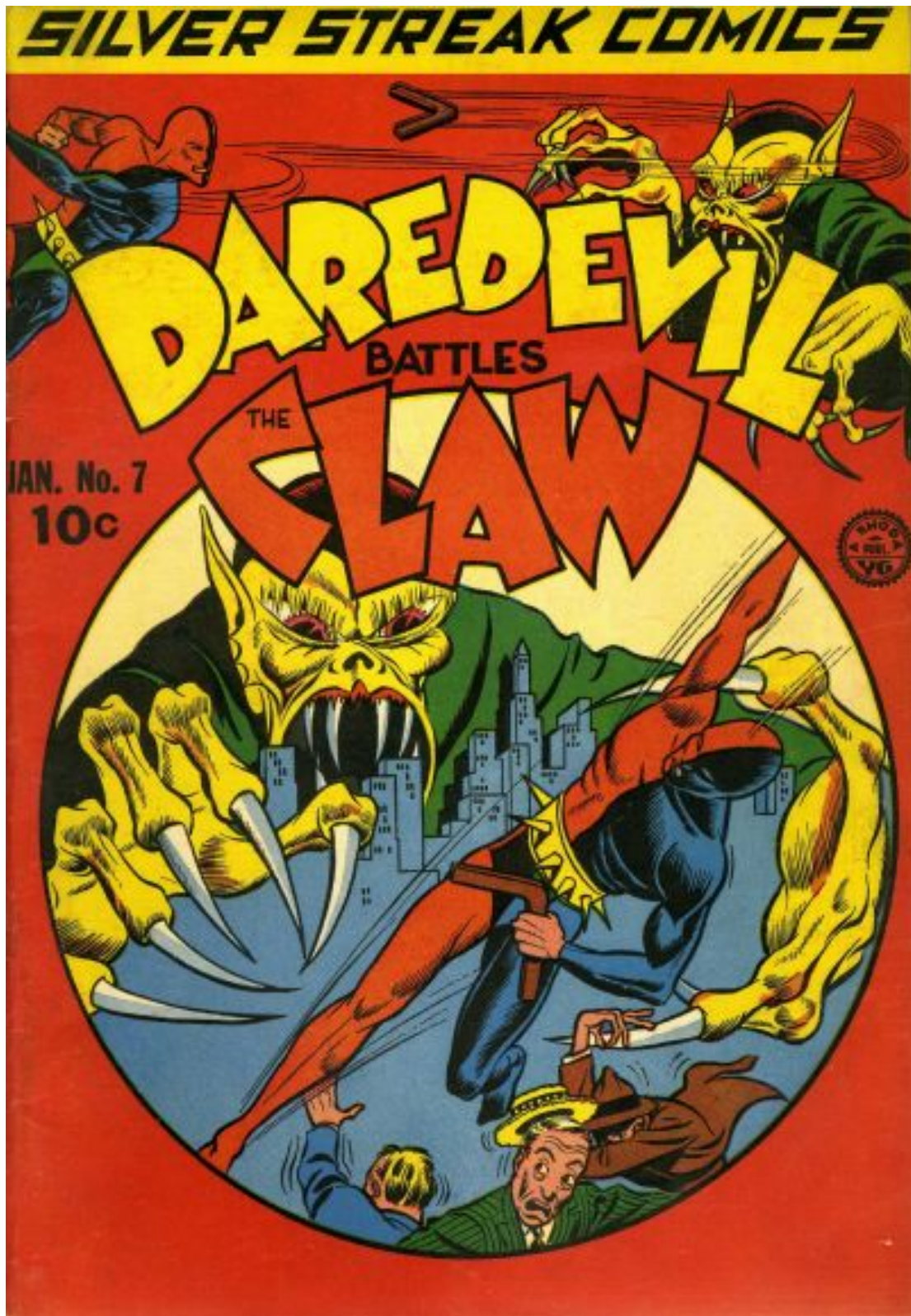


Fig. 19. Cover appearance of The Claw and Daredevil. *Silver Streak Comics* 7 (New York: Lev Gleason, 1941).



Fig. 20. Captain America punches Hitler. *Captain America Comics* 1 (New York: Timely, 1941).



Fig. 21. Daredevil Battles Hitler. *Daredevil Comics* 1 (New York: Lev Gleason, 1941).

HOW TO SPOT A JAP

HERE ARE TWO MEN JUST PICKED UP BY A PATROL... THE FIRST THING TO CONSIDER IS APPEARANCE... THE CHINESE IS "C"...THE JAP IS "J"... NOTICE THAT C IS ABOUT THE SIZE OF AN AVERAGE AMERICAN: J IS SHORTER... -AND LOOKS AS IF HIS LEGS ARE JOINED DIRECTLY TO HIS CHEST!..

C IS DULL BRONZE IN COLOR - WHILE J IS LIGHTER - MORE ON THE LEMON-YELLOW SIDE. C'S EYES ARE SET LIKE ANY EUROPEAN'S OR AMERICAN'S - BUT HAVE A MARKED SQUINT.... J HAS EYES SLANTED TOWARD HIS NOSE...

THE CHINESE HAS A SMOOTH FACE...THE JAP RUNS TO HAIR....LOOK AT THEIR PROFILES AND TEETH... C USUALLY HAS EVENLY SET CHOPPERS - J HAS BUCK TEETH...THE CHINESE SMILES EASILY - THE JAP USUALLY EXPECTS TO BE SHOT... AND IS VERY UNHAPPY ABOUT THE WHOLE THING...ESPECIALLY IF HE IS AN OFFICER!

YOU MAY FIND JAPS AMONG ANY ORIENTAL CIVILIAN GROUP... THAT IS A FAVORITE INFILTRATION TRICK... MAKE YOUR MAN WALK...THE CHINESE STRIDES...THE JAP SHUFFLES (BUT HE MAY BE CLEVER ENOUGH TO FAKE THE STRIDE)...MAKE HIM REMOVE HIS SOCKS AND SHOES, IF ANY...

THE CHINESE AND OTHER ASIATICS HAVE FAIRLY NORMAL FEET...THE JAP WORE A WOODEN SANDAL ("GETA") BEFORE HE WAS ISSUED ARMY SHOES... HE WILL USUALLY HAVE A WIDE SPACE BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND TOES... OFTEN CALLOUSED FROM THE LEATHER STRAP THAT HELD THE "GETA" TO HIS FOOT...

TO SUM IT UP, SPOTTING A JAP DEPENDS UPON THREE THINGS: ① APPEARANCE ② FEET ③ PRONUNCIATION

WE CAN'T PRONOUNCE OUR LIQUID "L"... HISSES ON ANY "S" SOUND

SHORT, SQUAT, FAIRLY HEAVY BEARD...LEMON-YELLOW SKIN SLANTED EYES

ALMOST NO WAIST-LINE

STOCKY BUILD

G-STRING

WIDE SPACE BETWEEN FIRST AND SECOND TOES...CALLOUS ON THE WEB

Fig. 22. Caniff, Milton. "How to Spot a Jap." Rpt. in Inada, Lawson Fusao. *Only What We Could Carry* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2000) 21.



Fig. 23. Capt. Fujiyama gives orders to the Singapore Stranglers while sitting in front of a bust of Genghis Khan. Rpt in Fox, Garder, et al. *The Golden Age Starman Archives*. New York: D.C. Comics, 2000. 1: 123.

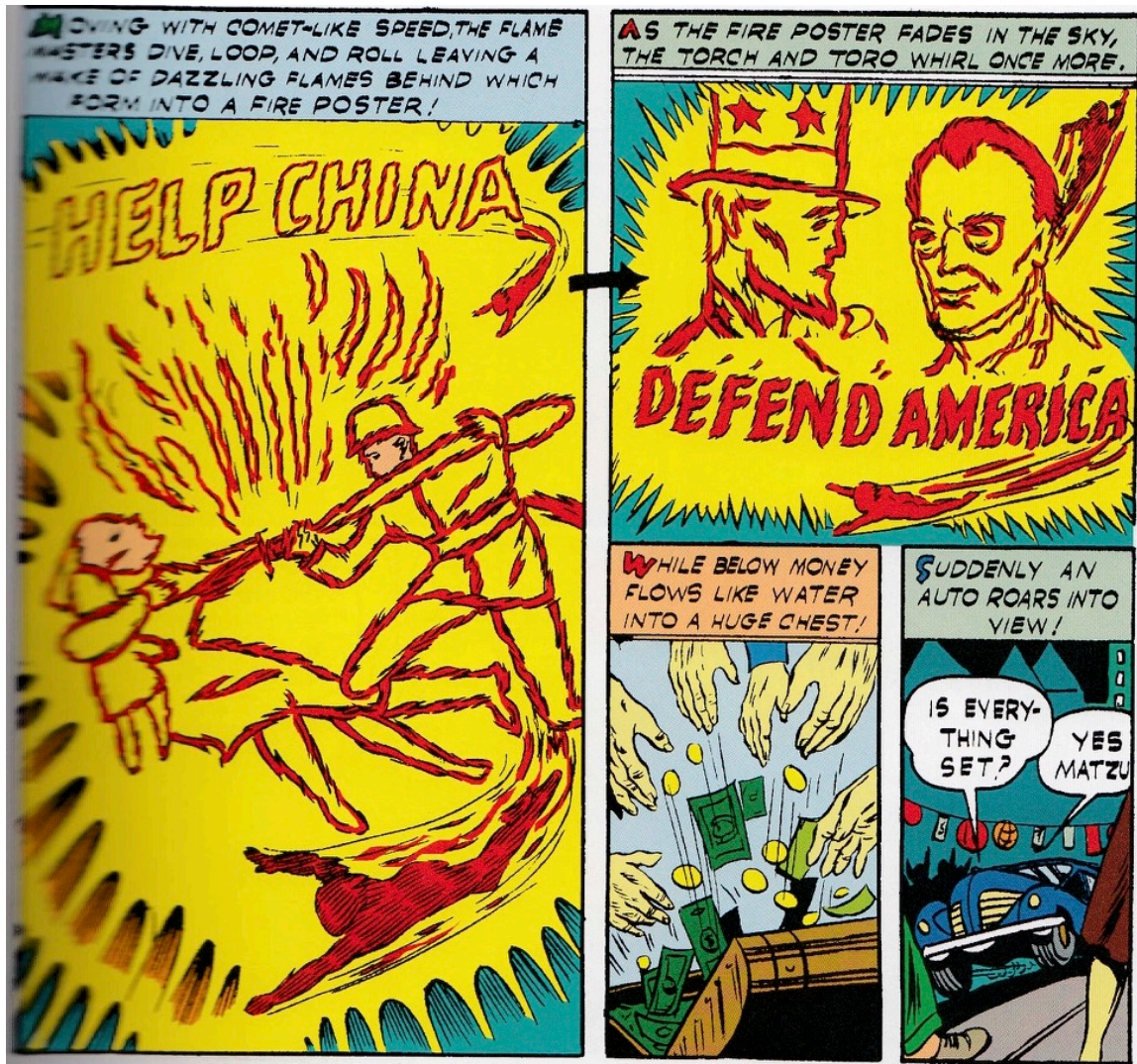
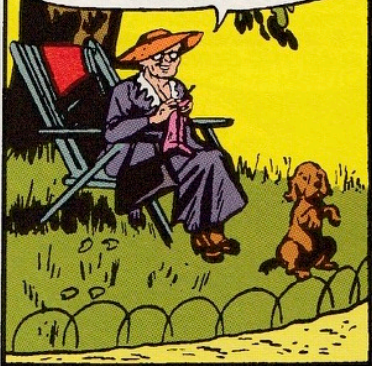


Fig. 24. The Human Torch and Toro create a propagandistic fireworks display during a fundraiser for Chinese aid. Rpt. in Simon, Joe, et al. *All-Winners Masterworks*. New York: Marvel, 2006. 1: 7.



Figs. 25-26. African Americans, women, the elderly, children, and working class Americans call for unity and cooperation during World War II. Rpt. in Fox, Garder, et al. *All-Star Comics Archives*. New York: D.C. Comics, 1998. 4: 121-122.

I'M AN OLD GRANNY, WITH THREE GRANDSONS IN SERVICE--I KNOW THREE SOLDIERS WHO ARE GOING TO BE MIGHTY WARM WITH THESE SWEATERS!



YEAH, AN' US KIDS ARE HELPIN' TOO! WE COLLECT THE OLD RUBBER, IRON AN' COPPER THAT NOBODY NEEDS! THAT SCRAP WILL WIN THIS SCRAP!



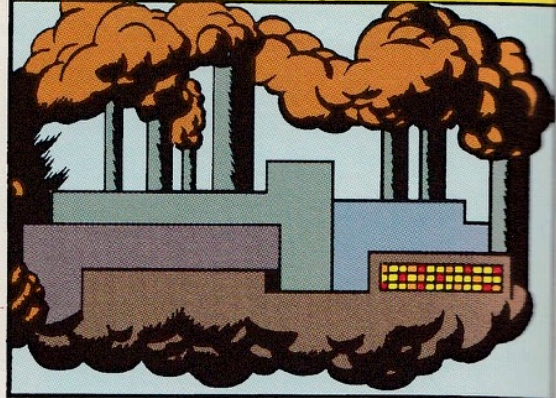
OVER THREE MILLION OF US AMERICANS HAVE RECEIVED FIRST AID CERTIFICATES SINCE PEARL HARBOR! WE ARE READY IF THEY SEND THEIR BOMBERS OVER HERE!



"YES, ON DECEMBER 7, 1941, JAPAN PERPETRATED A TREACHEROUS, BLOODY DEED WHILE HER TWO-FACED EMISSARIES CRIED 'PEACE'! - AMERICA WILL NOT FORGET, HIROHITO!"



"FOR FROM THAT FLAMING BATTLE PYRE AROSE A NEW AMERICA, STRONG, DEFIANT, A NATION UNIFIED - ITS QUARRELS WITHIN ITSELF FORGOTTEN -"



WE ARE ALL AMERICANS, REGARDLESS OF RACE OR RELIGION! SOME OF US WERE BORN IN AMERICA - SOME IN EUROPE - SOME IN ASIA - SOME IN AFRICA - BUT NOW WE'RE HERE AND WE SHALL FIGHT ON, UNTIL THE EVIL FORCES THAT HAVE DISRUPTED OUR HOMES AND LIVES, AND SPREAD A PALL OF SMOKE AND FLAME AND BLOOD ACROSS THE LANDS OF THE UNITED NATIONS, SHALL PERISH FOREVER FROM THIS EARTH!



2+





Fig. 27. Superheroes and youths pledge allegiance to the American flag and reaffirms notions about equality. Rpt. in Fox, Garder, et al. *All-Star Comics Archives*. New York: D.C. Comics, 1999. 5: 184.



Fig. 28. The Blackhawks and Chop-Chop. *Military Comics* 33 (New York: Quality, 1944).



Fig. 29. Page featuring Wing How's uniform. Rpt. in Meskin, Mort, at al. *Seven Soldiers of Victory Archives*. New York: D.C. Comics, 2007. 2: 38.



Fig. 30. Wing declares that the Japanese are ancient enemies of China. Rpt. in Meskin, Mort. *Seven Solders of Victory Archives*. New York: D.C. Comics, 2007. 2: 192.

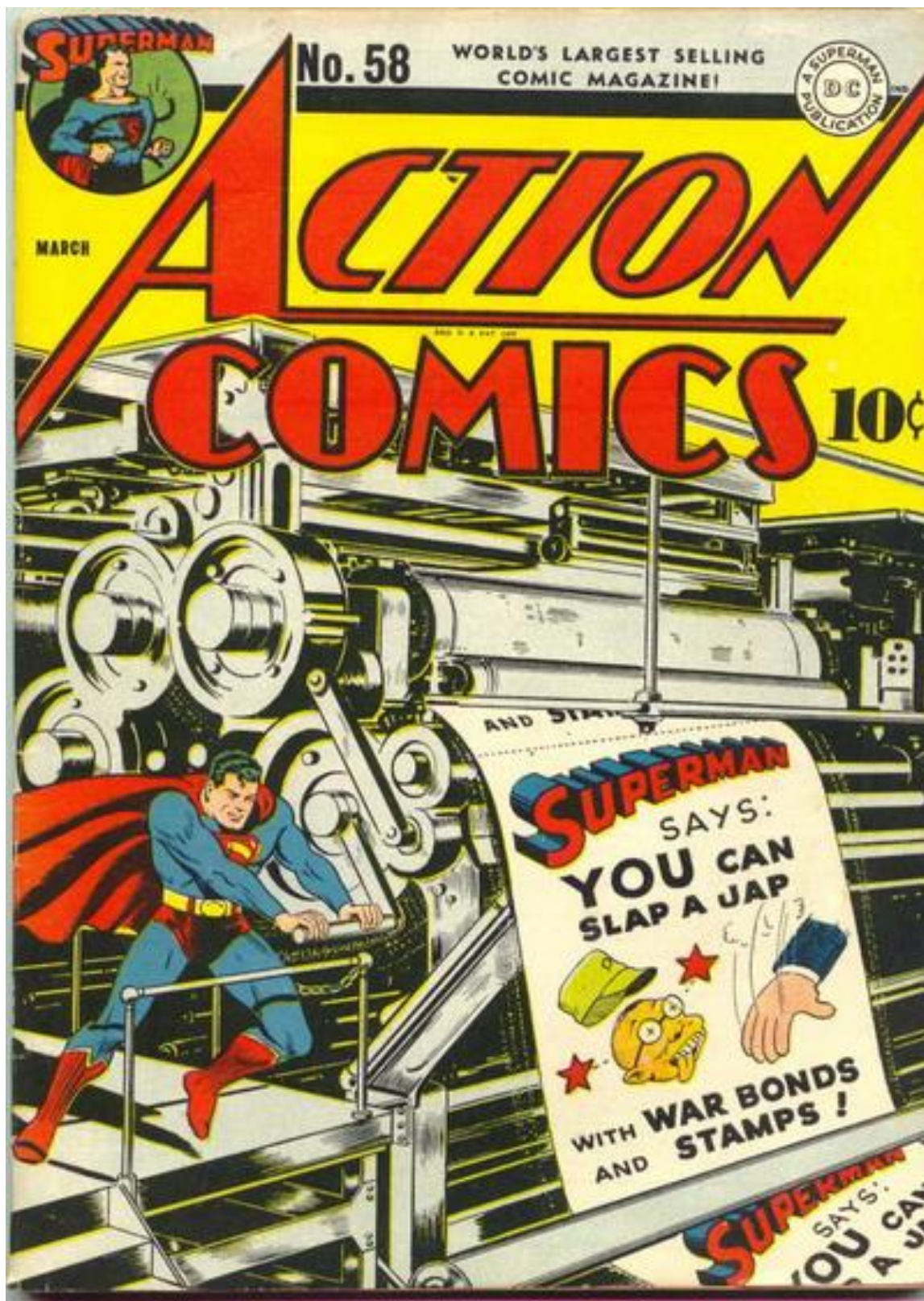


Fig. 31. Superman operates wartime printing press. *Action Comics* 58 (New York: D.C. Comics, 1943).

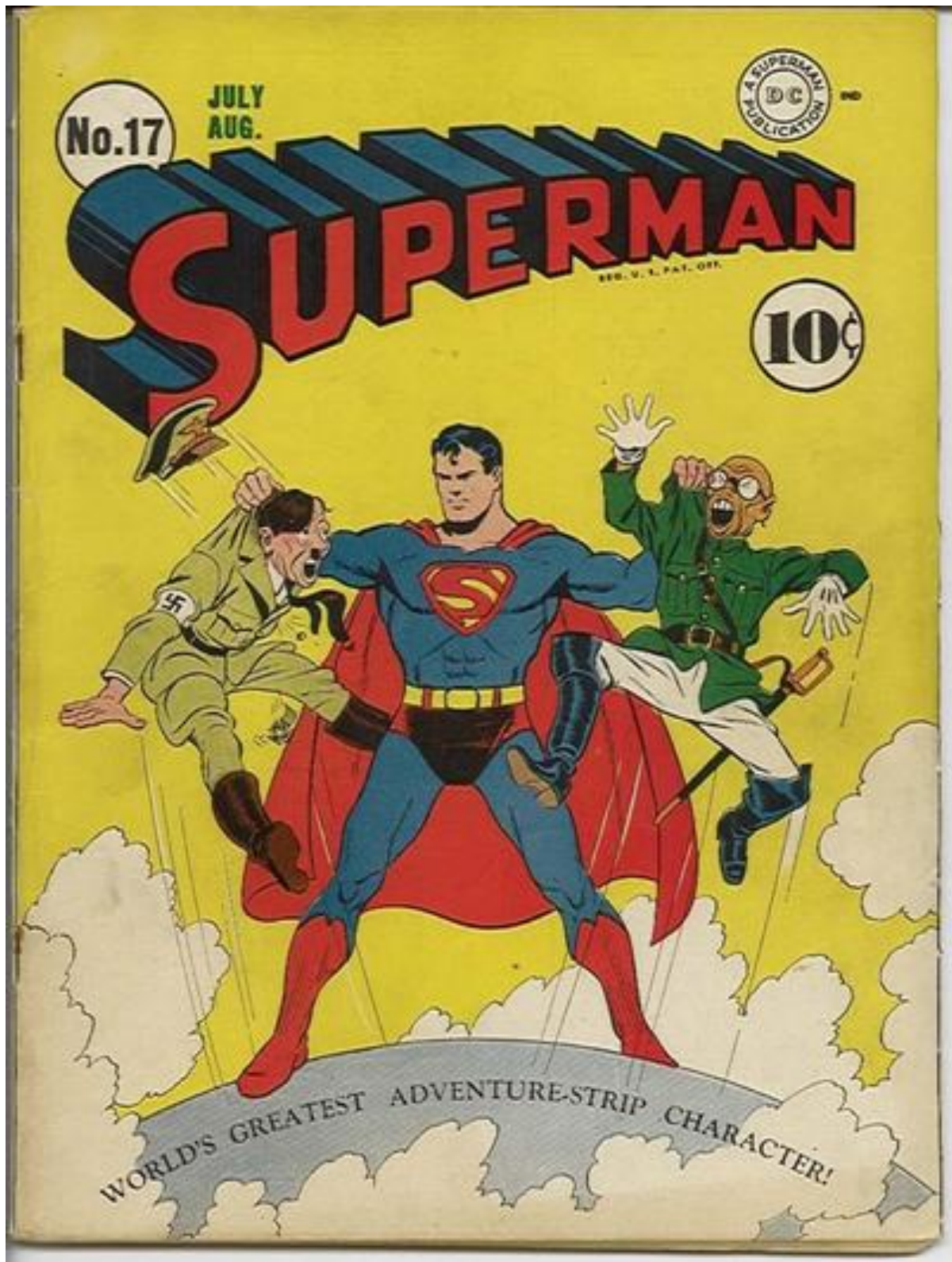


Fig. 32. Superman hoists Hitler and Hirohito. *Superman* 17 (New York: D.C. Comics, 1942).

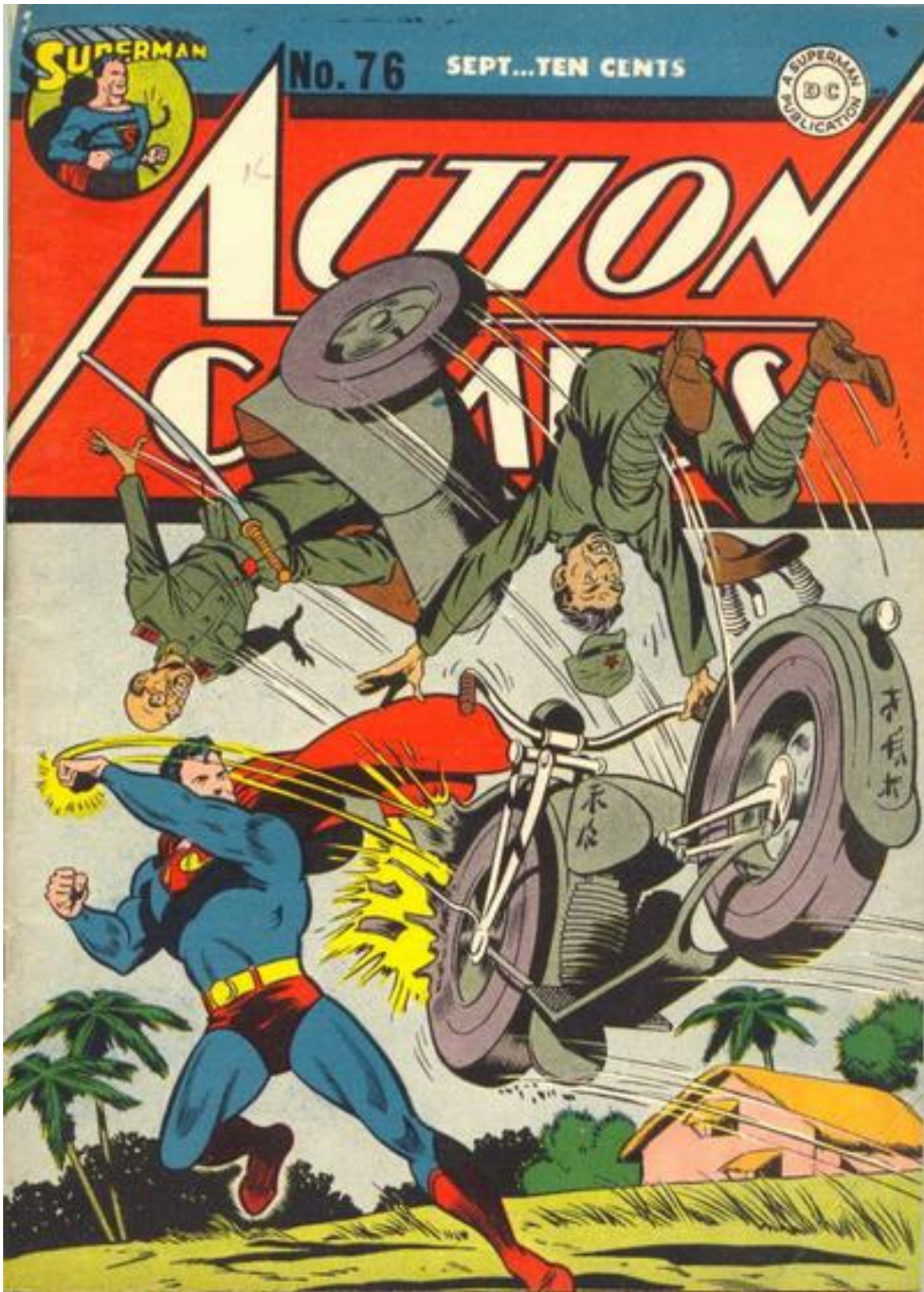


Fig. 33. Superman attacks Japanese soldiers on motorbike. *Action Comics* 76 (New York: D.C. Comics, 1944).

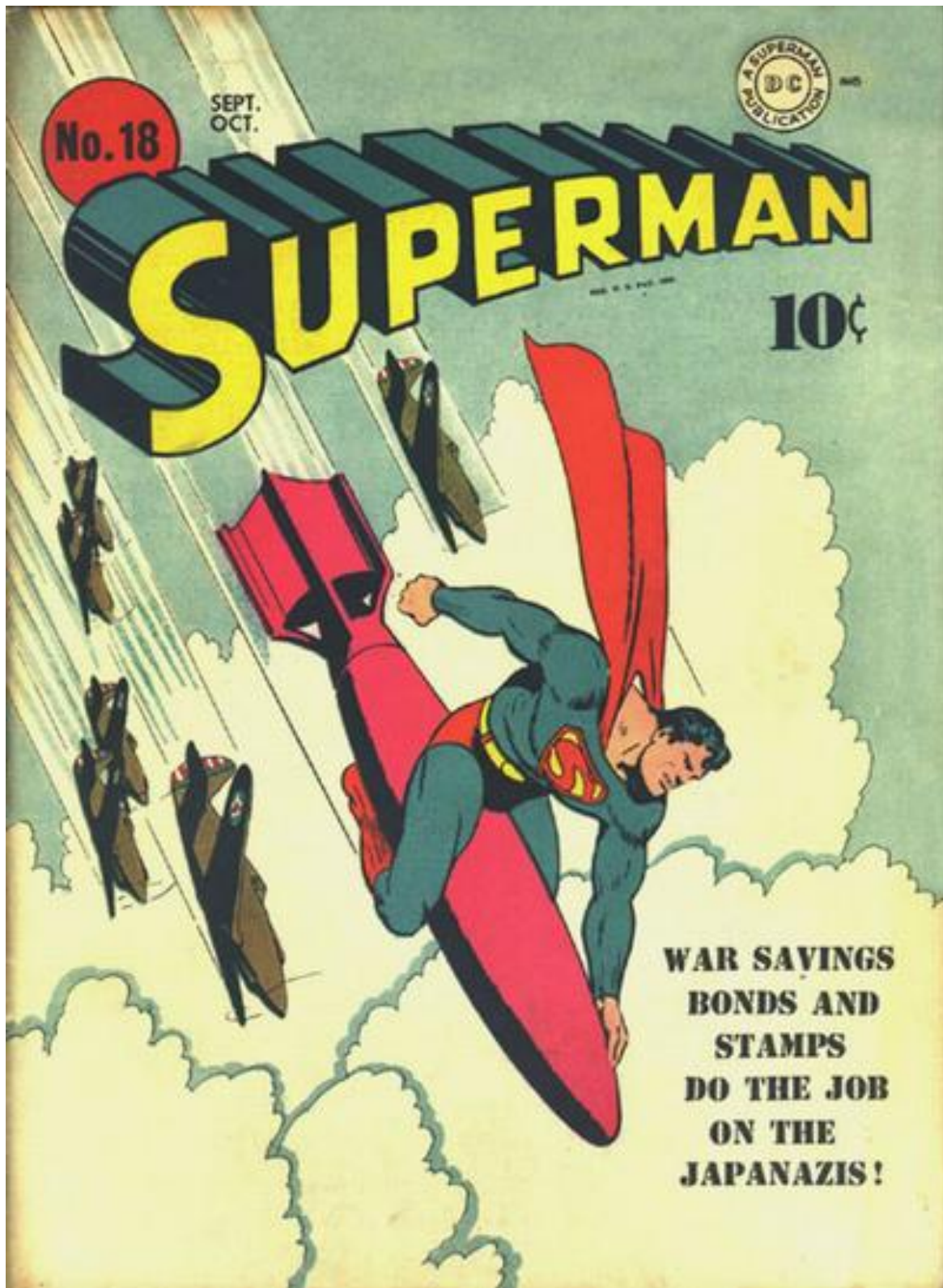


Fig. 34. Superman rides a bomb into battle. *Superman* 18 (New York: D.C. Comics, 1942).



Fig. 35. Captain Midnight foils a breakout at a Japanese internment camp. *Captain Midnight* 23 (New York: Fawcett, 1944).



Fig. 36. The Green Hornet battles Japanese saboteurs near Tule Lake. *Green Hornet Comics* 19 (New York: Harvey, 1944).



Fig. 37. Stewart, Francis. Four young evacuees from Sacramento, California, read comic books at the newsstand in the Tule Lake Relocation Center, in Newell, California. 1942. Photograph. National Archives and Records Administration.

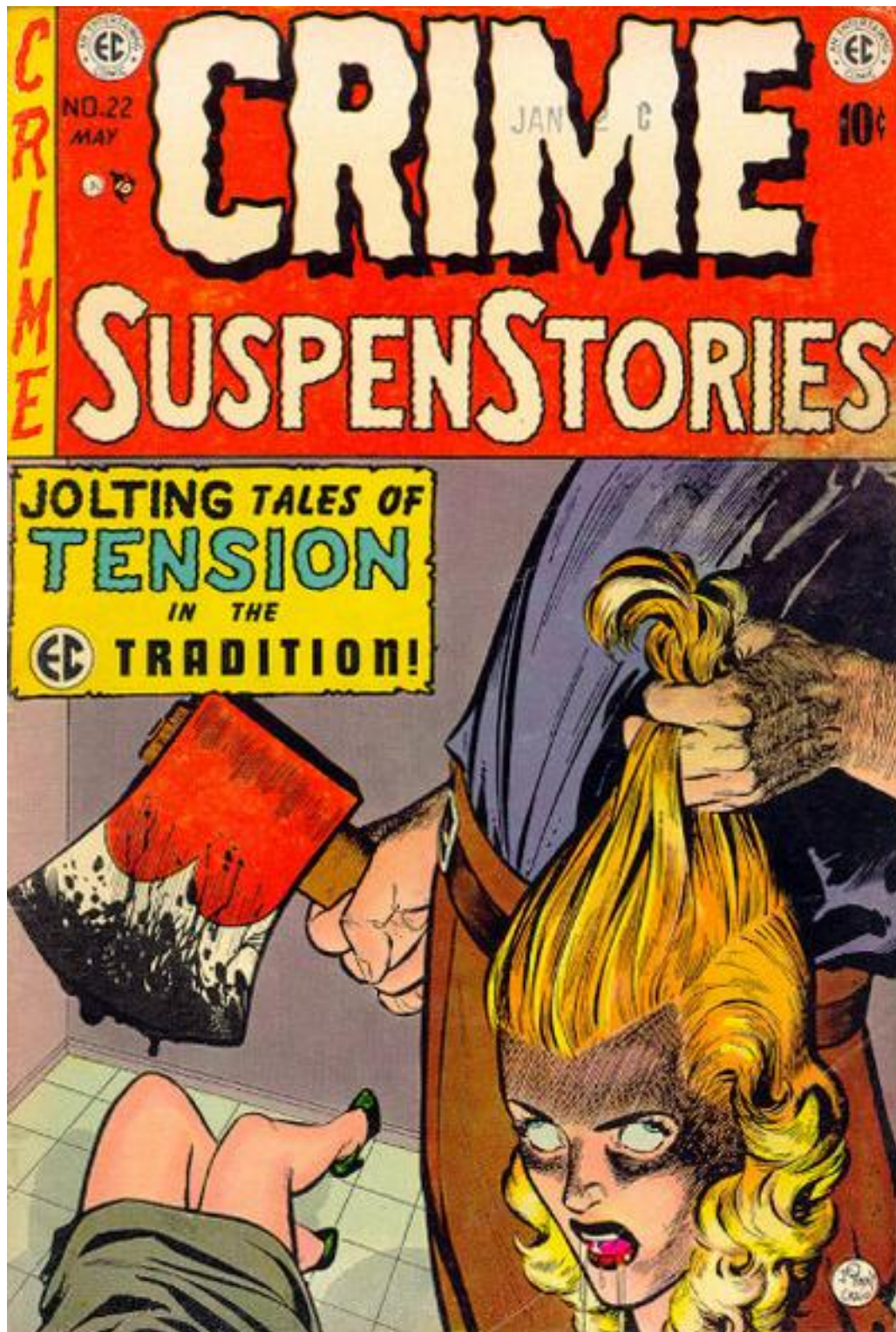


Fig. 38. Cover of beheaded woman used as an example of indecency during the Senate Subcommittee Hearing on Juvenile Delinquency. Crime Suspense Stories 22 (New York: E.C. Comics, 1954).

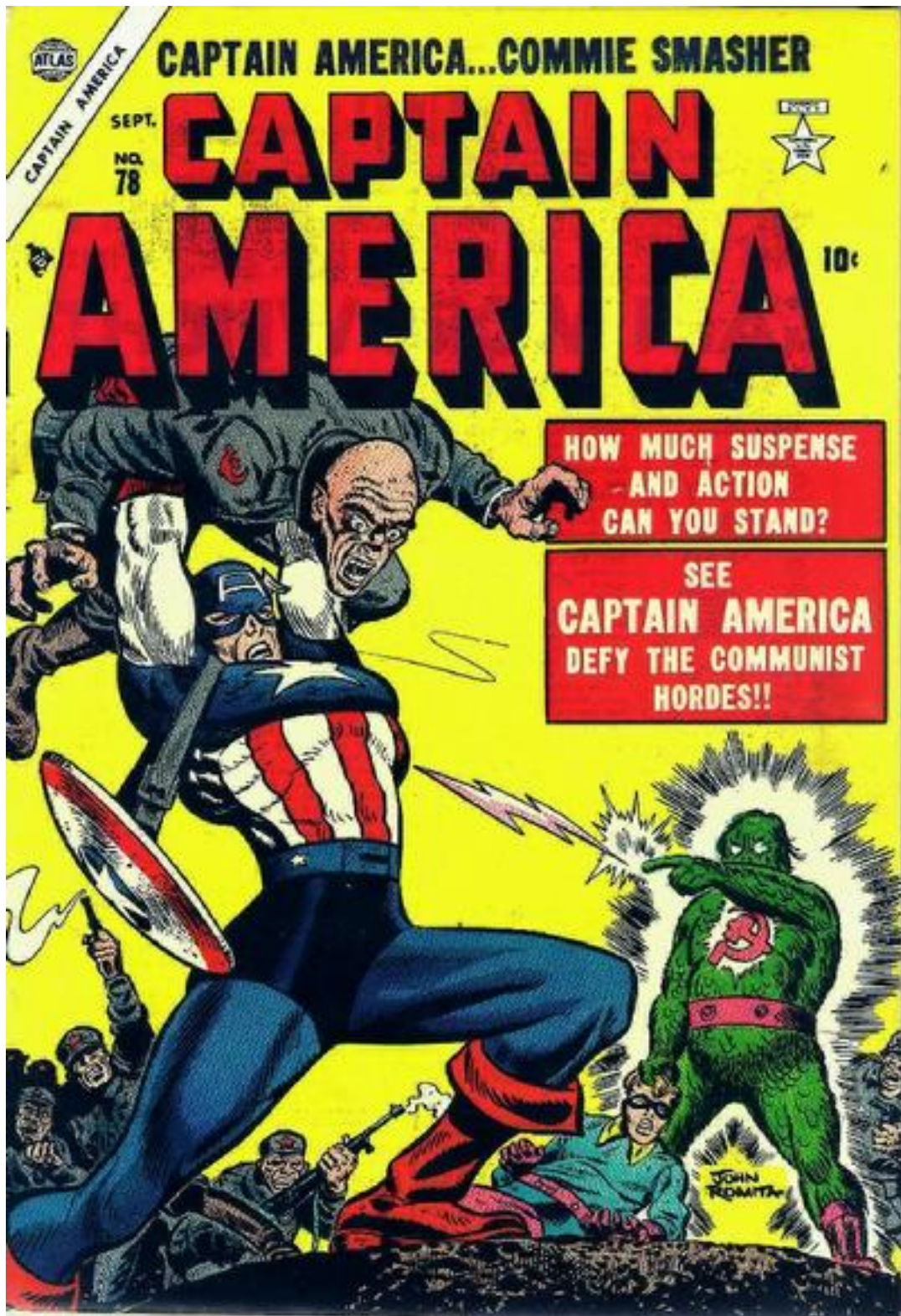


Fig. 39. Captain America, Commie Smasher. *Captain America* 78 (New York: Atlas, 1954).



Fig. 40. *Captain America* transitions into a horror comic. *Captain America's Weird Tales* 75 (New York: Timely, 1950).



Fig. 41. The return of Captain America during the Silver Age. *Avengers* 4 (New York: Marvel, 1964).



Fig. 42. Captain America discovered floating in the ocean. *Avengers 4* (New York: Marvel, 1964) 4.

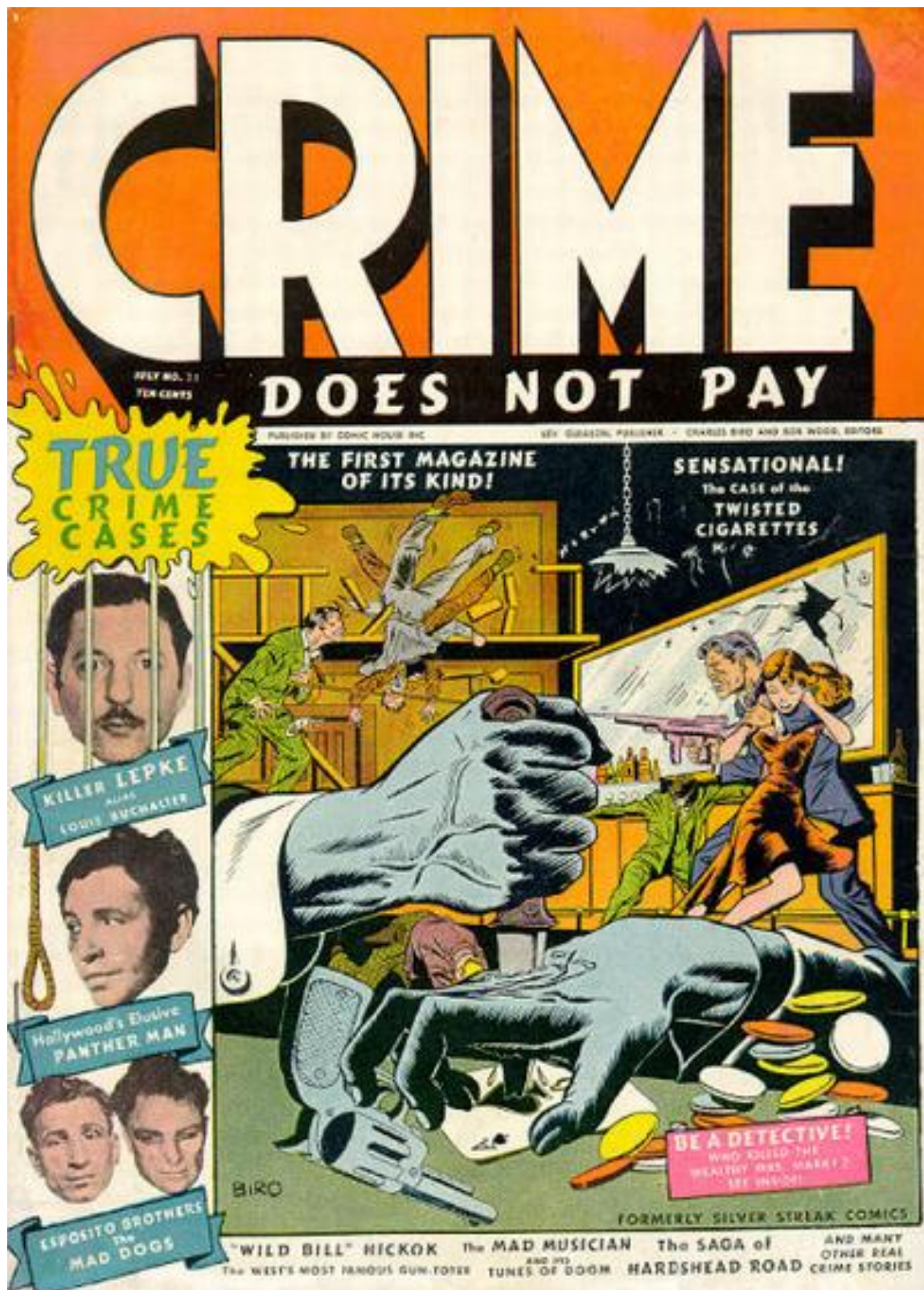


Fig. 43. Cover of the first issue of *Crime Does Not Pay*. *Crime Does Not Pay* 22 (New York: Lev Gleason, 1942).

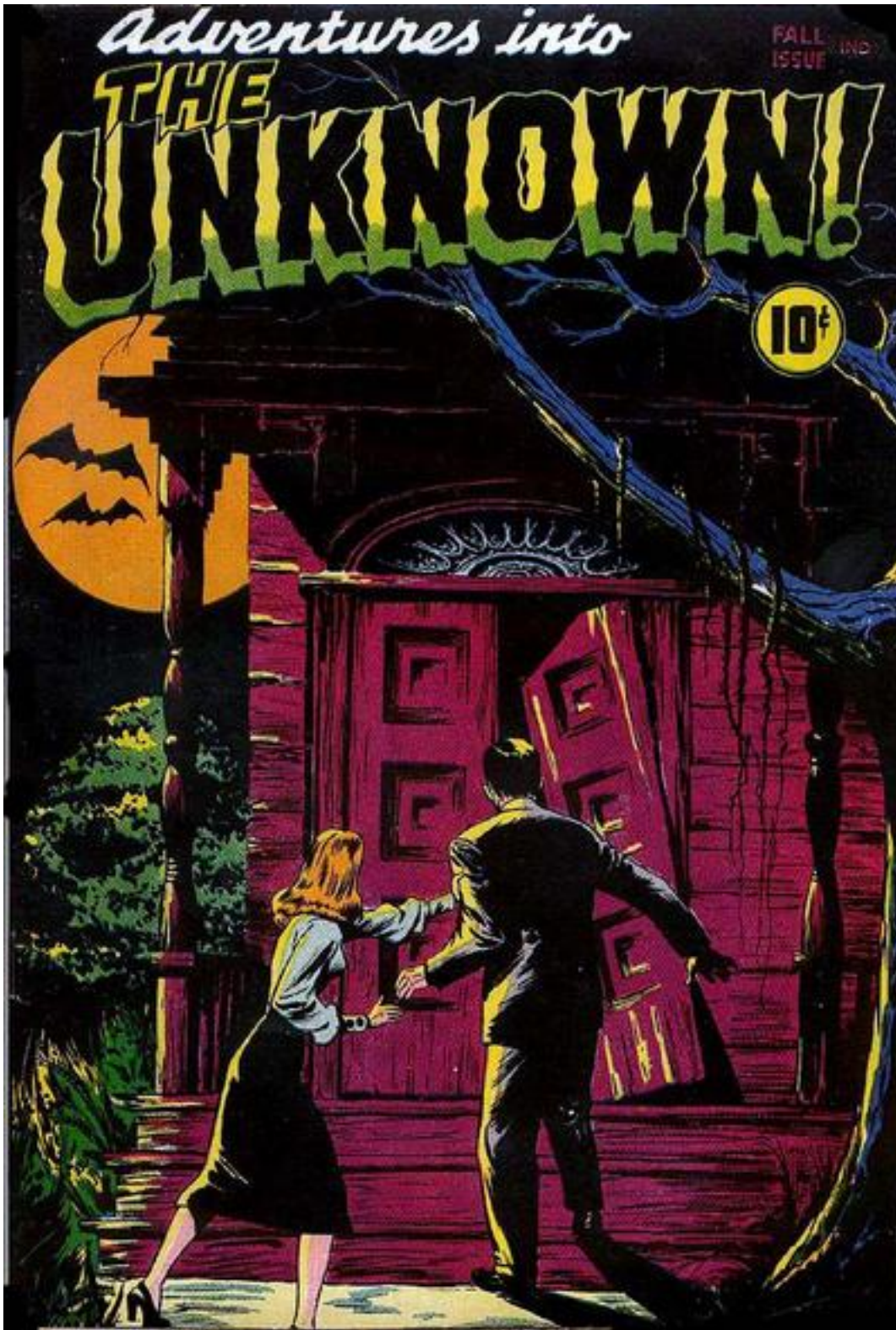


Fig. 44. Cover of *Adventures Into the Unknown*. *Adventures Into the Unknown* 1 (New York: American Comics Group, 1948).

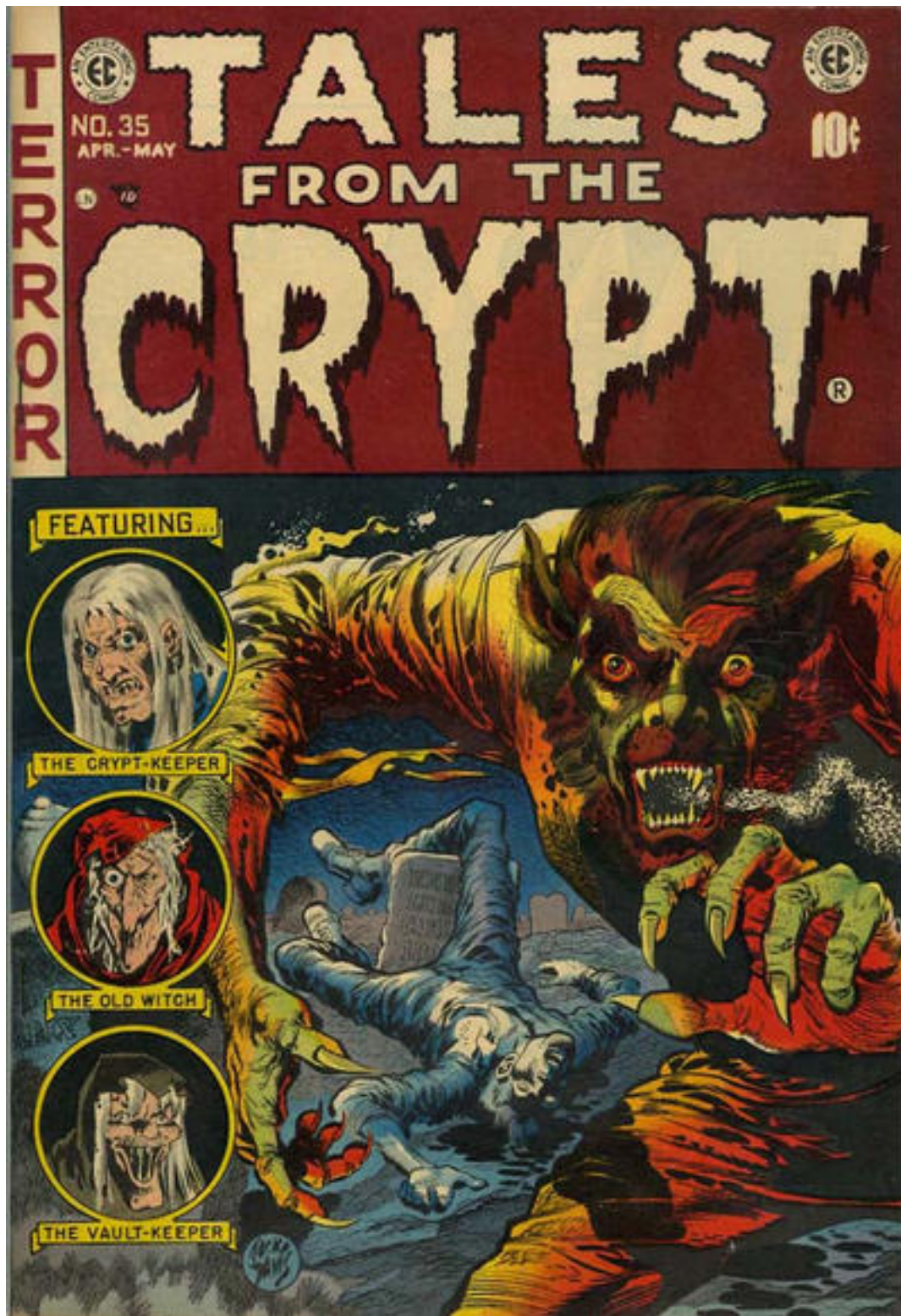


Fig. 45. Horror comic featuring a werewolf cover by Jack Davis. Tales From the Crypt 35 (New York: E.C. Comics, 1953).

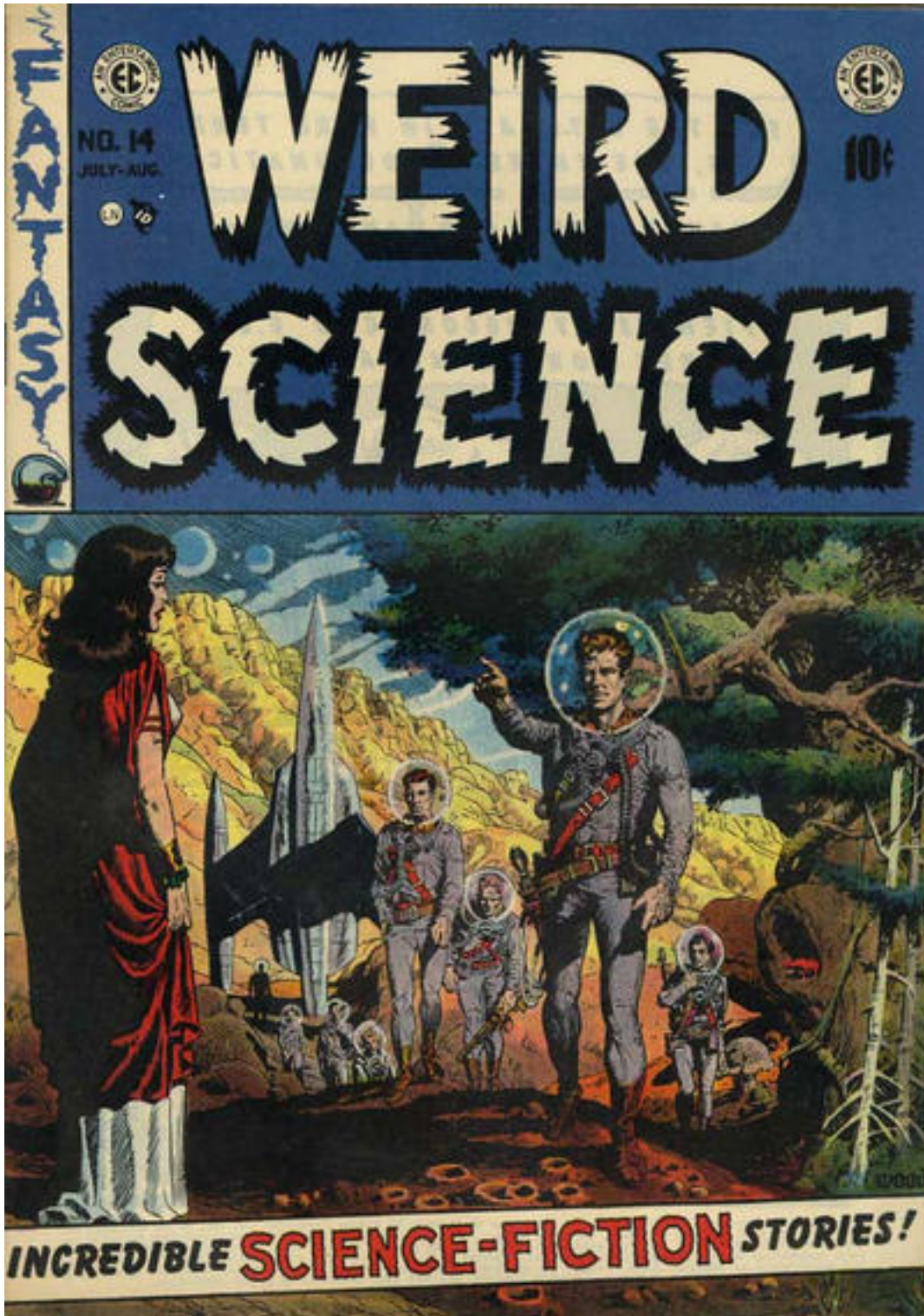


Fig. 46. Science fiction cover by Wally Wood. *Weird Science* 14 (New York: E.C. Comics, 1952).

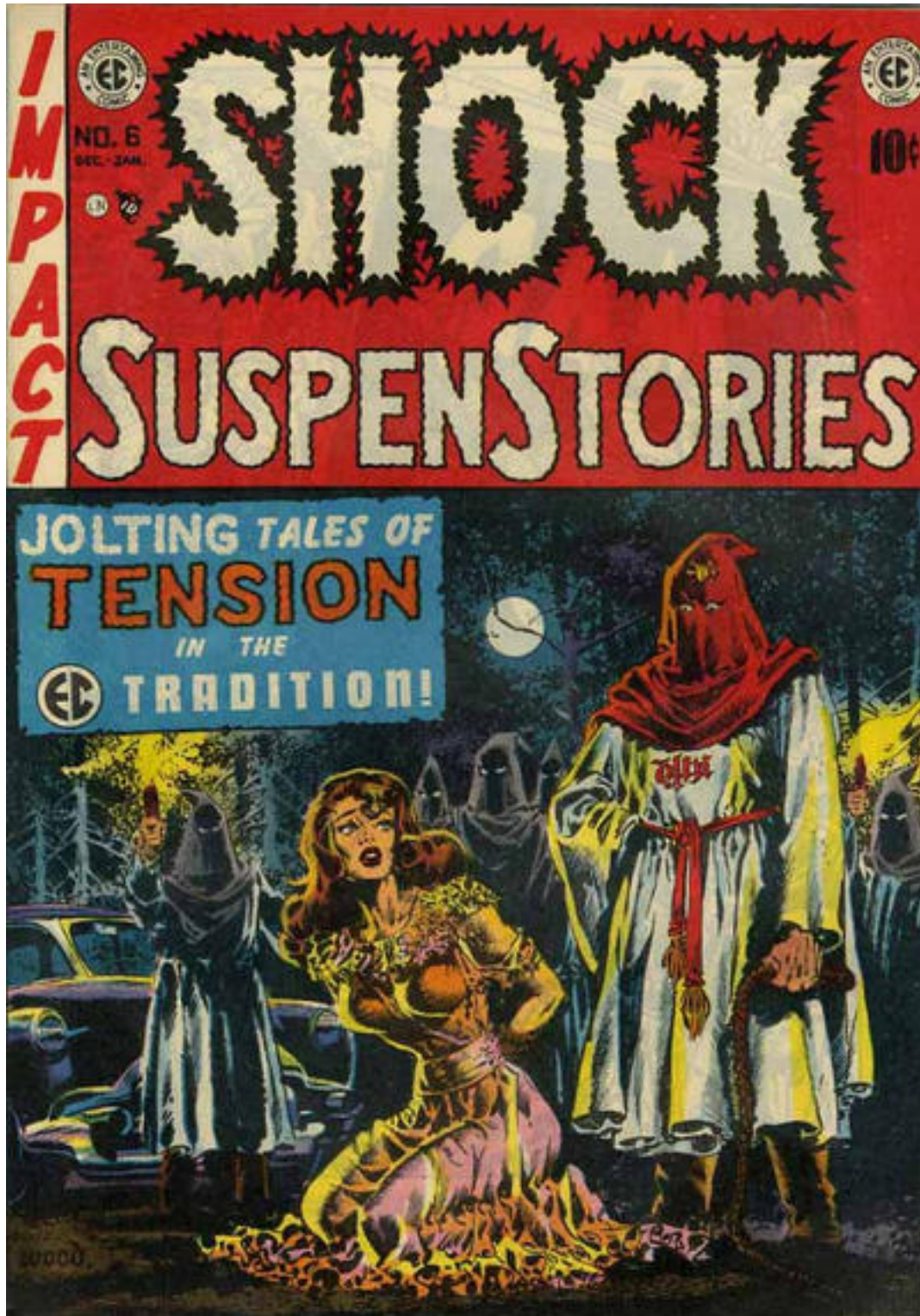


Fig. 47. Suspense comic featuring KKK-like villains on the cover. Shock Suspensstories 6 (New York: E.C. Comics, 1952).

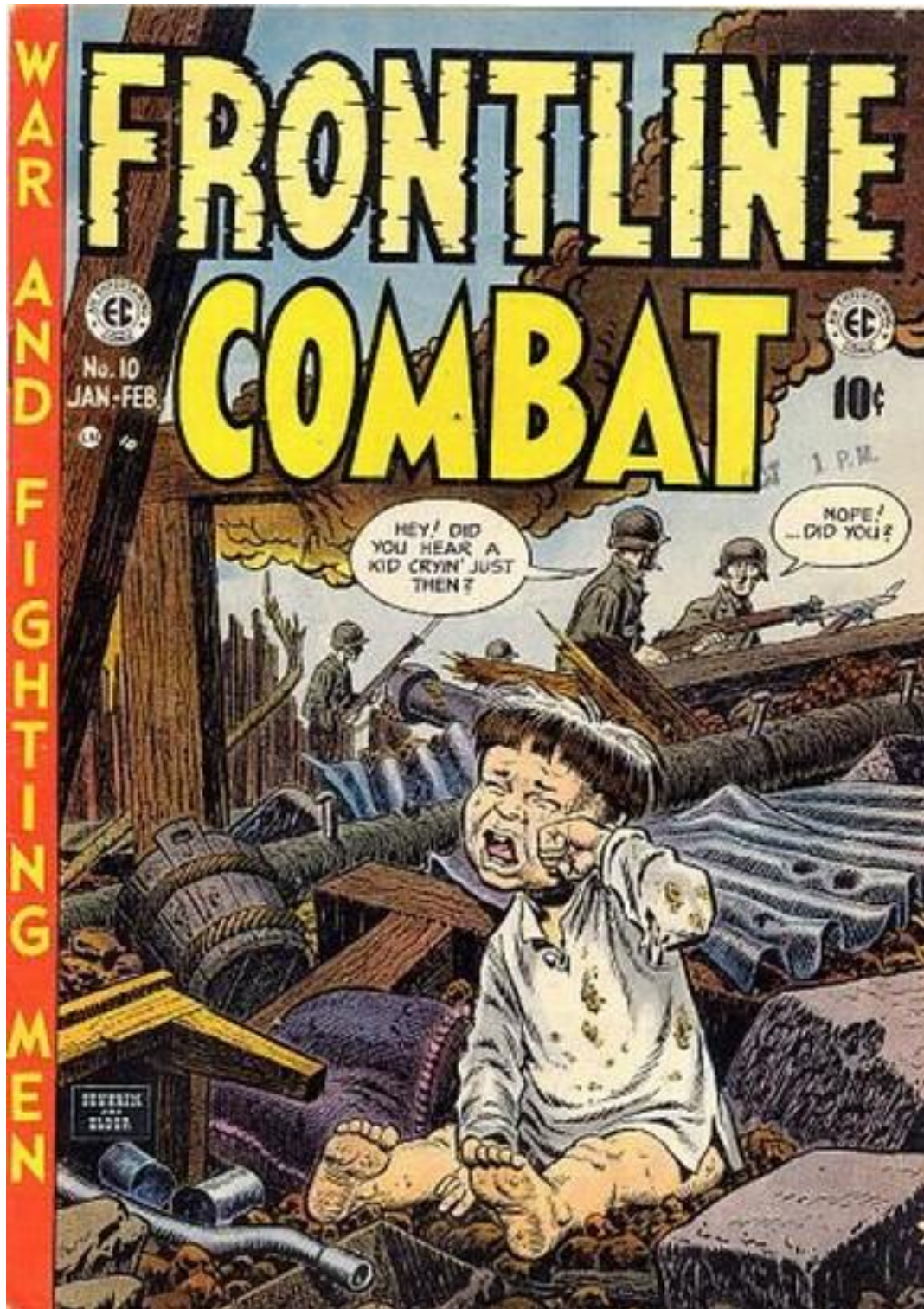


Fig. 48. War comic cover. Frontline Combat 10 (New York: E.C. Comics, 1953).

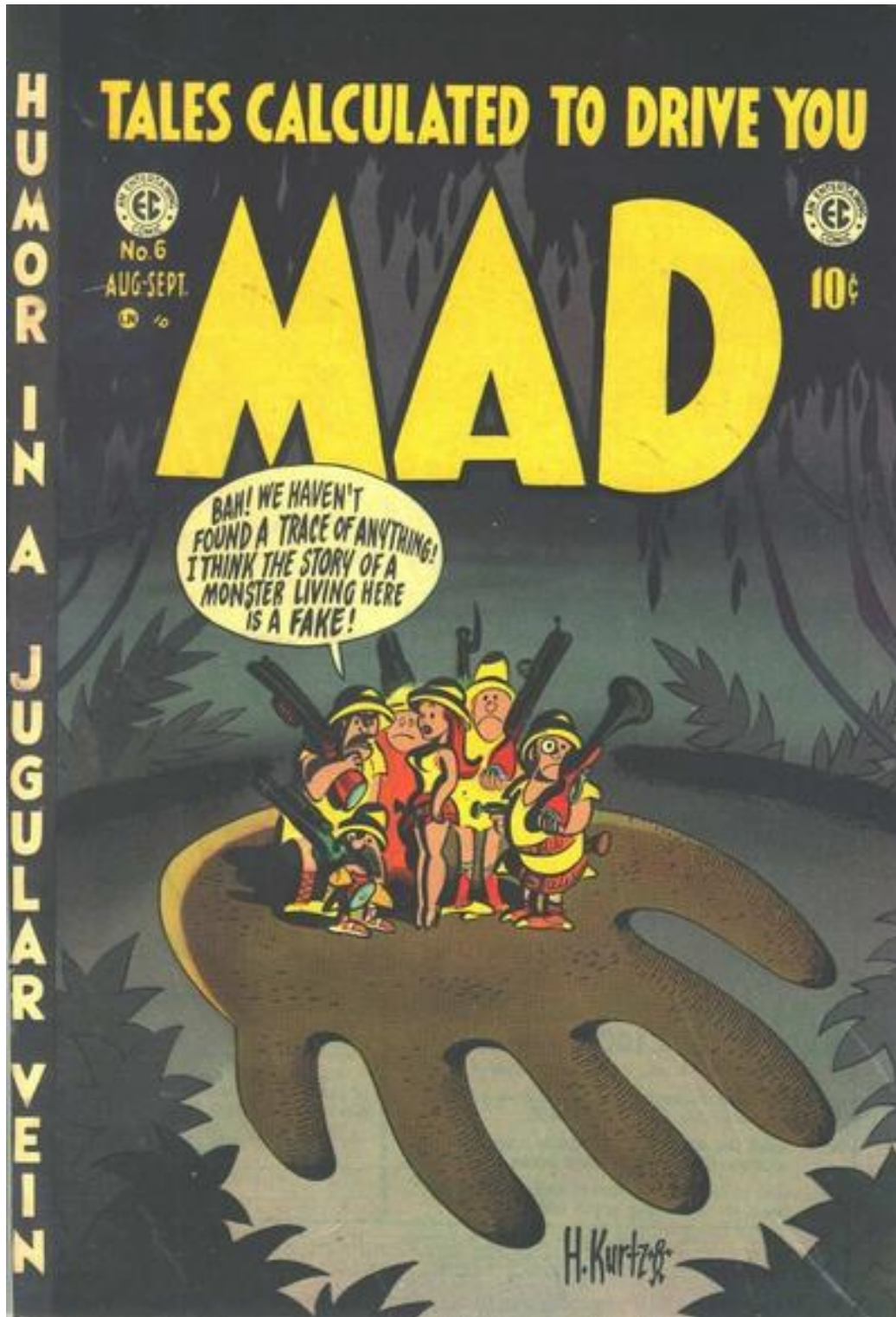


Fig. 49. Early issue of E.C.'s MAD comic book. MAD 6 (New York: E.C. Comics, 1953).

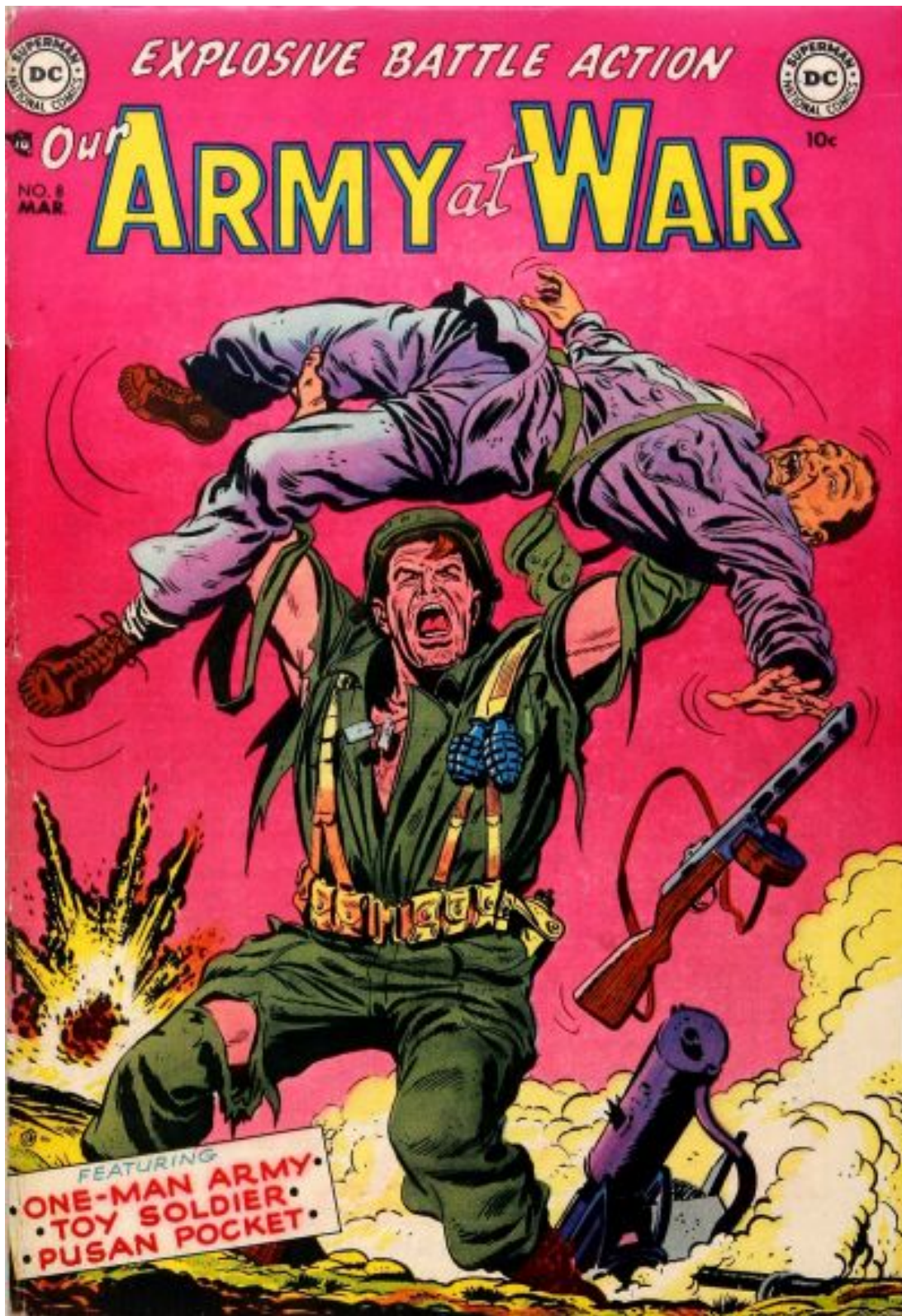


Fig. 50. Korean War cover. Our Army At War 8 (New York: D.C. Comics, 1953).



Fig. 51. Korean War cover. All American Men of War 2 (New York: D.C. Comics, 1953).



Fig. 52. Recent depiction of Chinese American secret agent Jimmy Woo. *Agents of Atlas* 1 (New York: Marvel, 2006).

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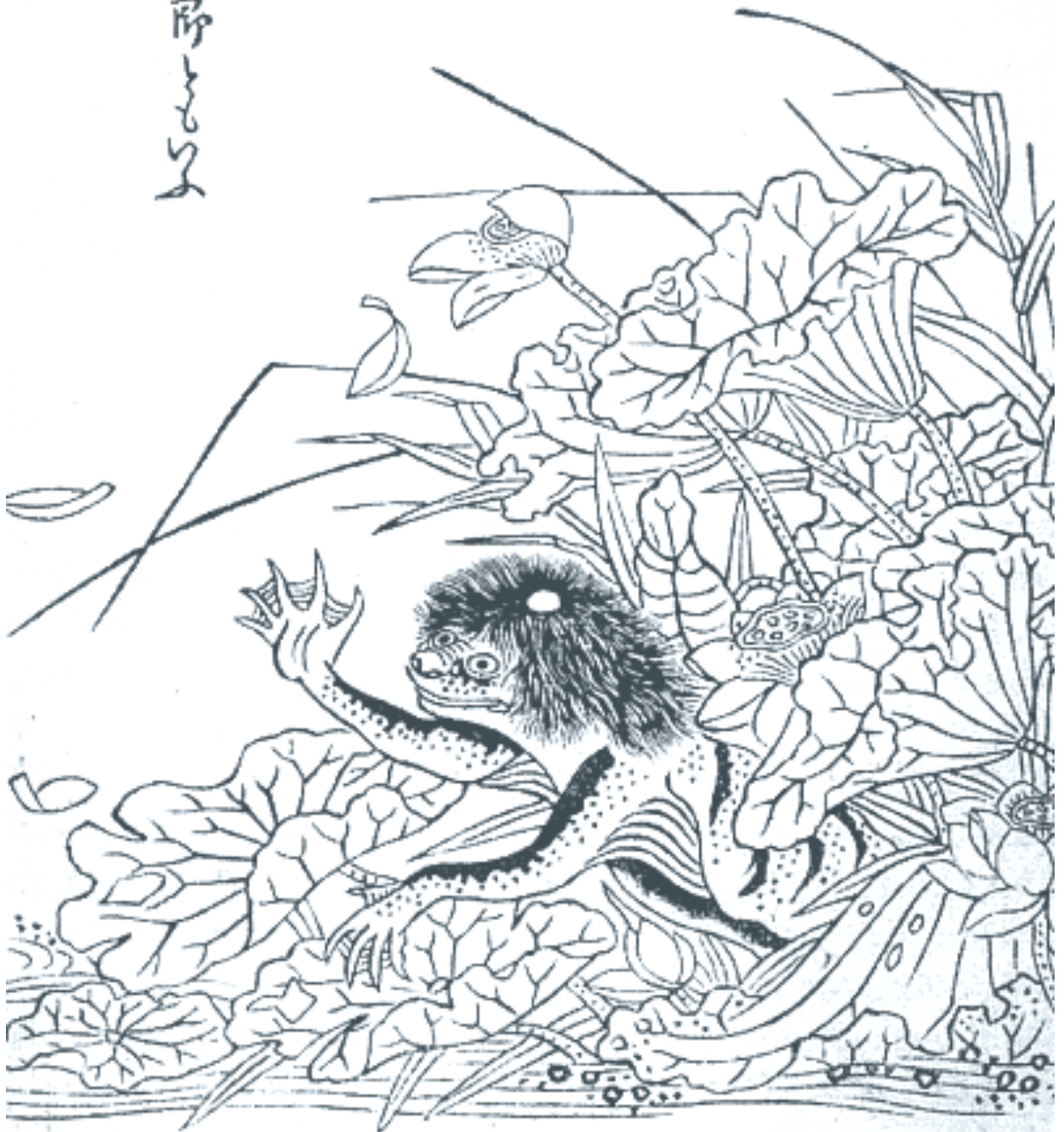


Fig. 53. Toriyama, Sekien. *Kappa*. c. 1780. *Gazu Hyakki Yagyo*. Kawasaki City Museum.



Fig. 54. Toriyama, Sekien. *Tengu*. c. 1780. *Gazu Hyakki Yagyo*. Kawasaki City Museum.



Fig. 55. Artistic interpretation of the Night Parade of 100 Demons. Kawanabe, Kyosai. *Hyakkiyagyo-zu*. c. 1879. The British Museum.



Fig. 56. Nike. *Godzilla vs. Charles Barkley*. Advertisement. 1992.



Fig. 57. *Godzilla* (2014). Advertisement. 2014.



Fig. 58. "People Are People," a D.C. Public Service announcement by Jack Schiff and Win Mortimer advocating against racial prejudice. *Adventure Comics* 187 (New York: D.C. Comics, 1953).



Fig. 59. The introduction of Barry Allen, the second Flash, marks the beginning of the Silver Age of American comic books. *Showcase 4* (New York: D.C. Comics, 1956).



Fig. 60. The success of the Flash resulted in the revival of other superheroes, like Green Lantern. *Showcase* 22 (New York: D.C. Comics, 1959).

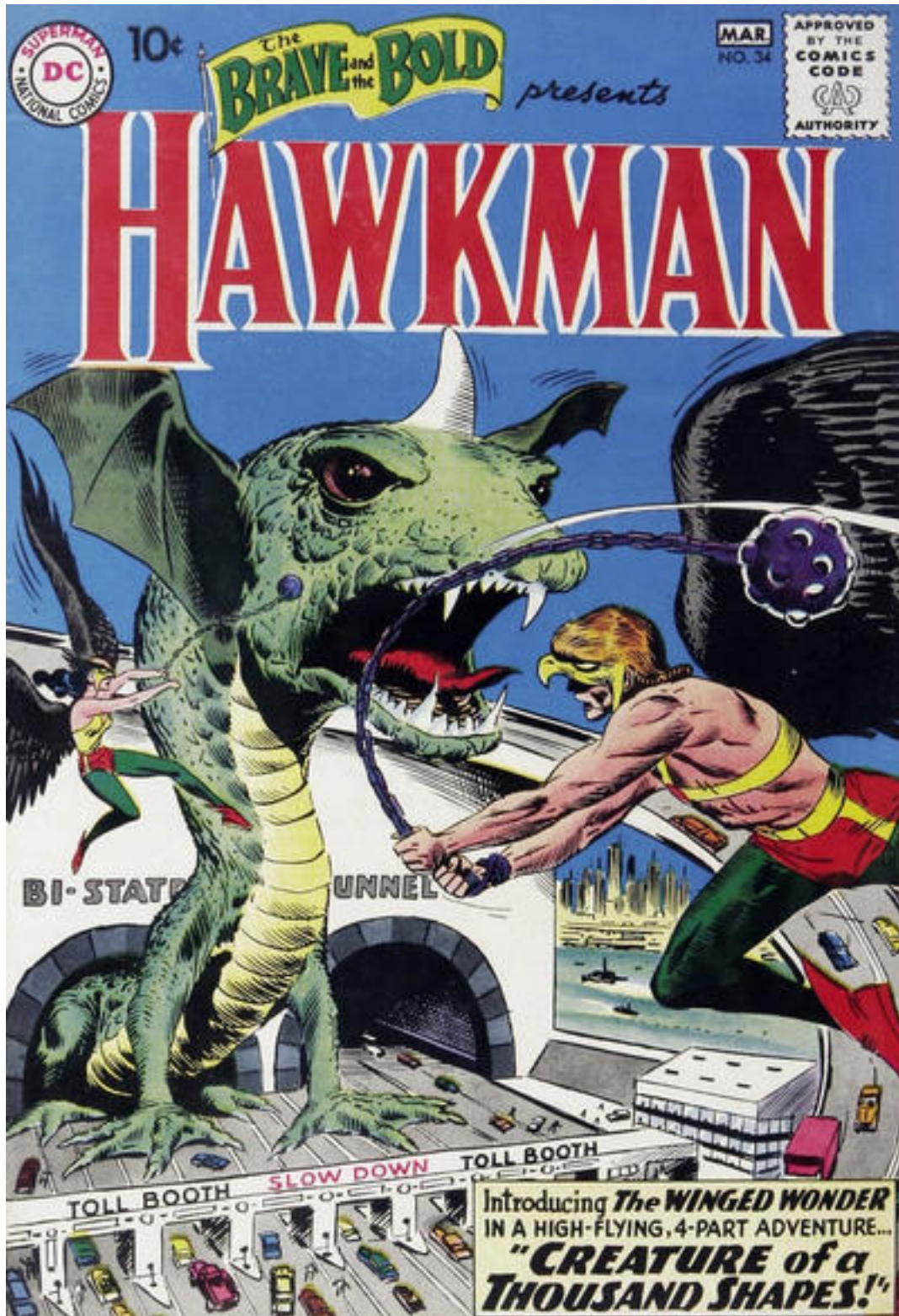


Fig. 61. First appearance of Hawkman in the Silver Age. *Brave and the Bold* 34 (New York: D.C. Comics, 1961).



Fig. 62. First appearance of the Justice League of America, a superhero team patterned after the Justice Society of America. *Brave and the Bold* 28 (New York: D.C. Comics, 1960).



Fig. 63. An example of an Atlas-era monster comic. *Tales To Astonish* 12 (New York: Atlas, 1960).



Fig. 64. First appearance of Fin Fang Foom. *Strange Tales* 89 (New York: Atlas, 1961).



Fig. 65. Final chapter of the Dragon Seed Saga. *Iron Man* 275 (New York: Marvel, 1991).

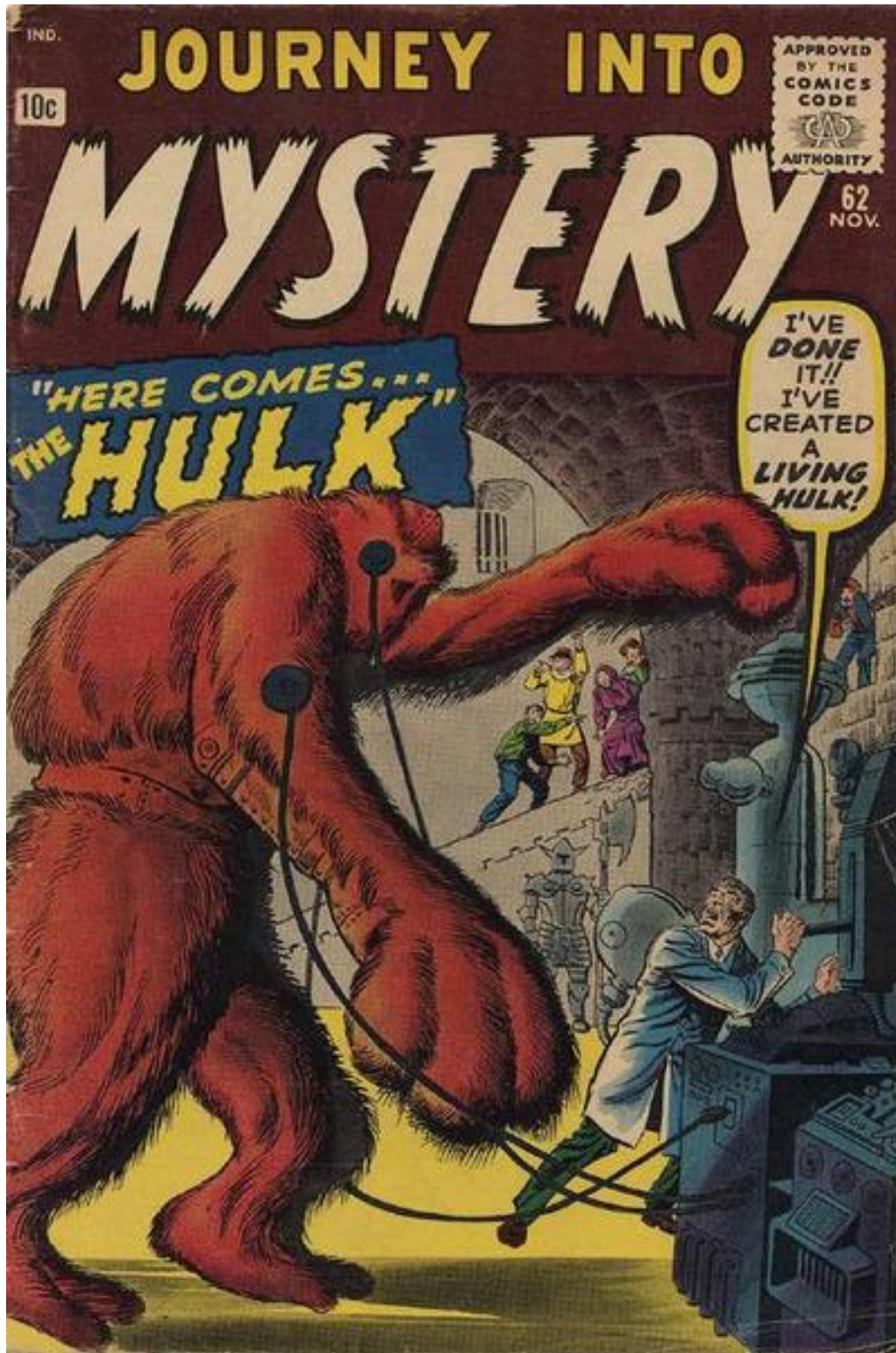


Fig. 66. Hulk prototype. *Journey Into Mystery* 62 (New York: Atlas, 1960).



Fig. 67. Dr. Doom prototype. *Tales of Suspense* 31 (New York: Marvel, 1962).



Fig. 68. Magneto prototype. *Strange Tales* 84 (New York: Atlas, 1961).



Fig. 69. Electro prototype. *Tales of Suspense* 13 (New York: Atlas, 1961).

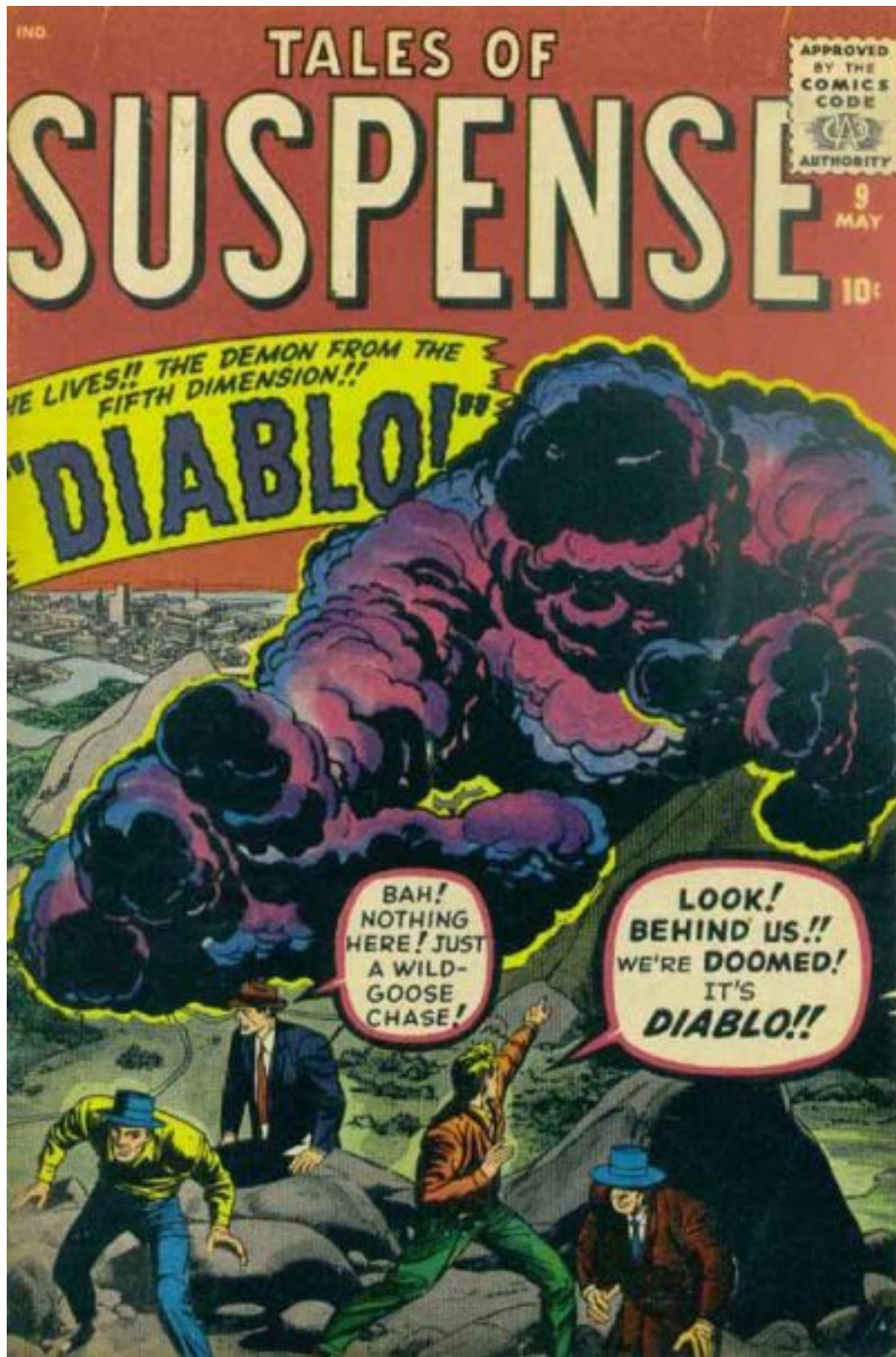


Fig. 70. Diablo prototype. *Tales of Suspense* 9 (New York: Atlas, 1960).



Fig. 71. Sandman prototype. *Journey Into Mystery* 70 (New York: Atlas, 1961).



Fig. 72. Cyclops prototype. *Tales of Suspense* 10 (New York: Atlas, 1960).



Fig. 73. The Thing prototype. *Strange Tales* 79 (New York: Atlas, 1960).

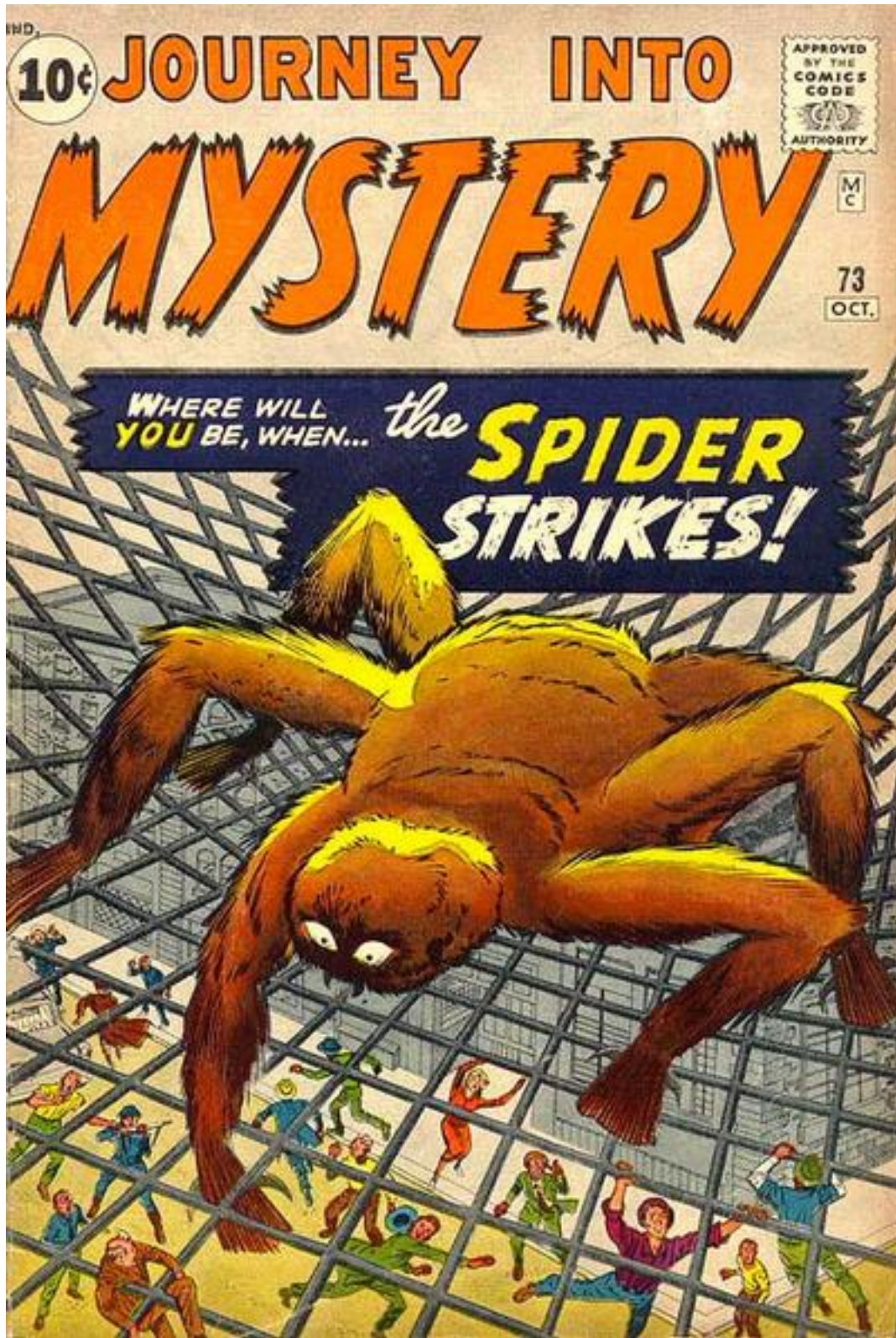


Fig. 74. Spider-Man prototype. *Journey Into Mystery* 73 (New York: Atlas, 1961).



Fig. 75. First appearance of Ant-Man. *Tales To Astonish* 27 (New York: Atlas, 1962).



Fig. 76. First appearance of Sunfire. *X-Men* 64 (New York: Marvel, 1970).



Fig. 77. First appearance of the Black Panther. *The Fantastic Four* 52 (New York: Marvel, 1966).

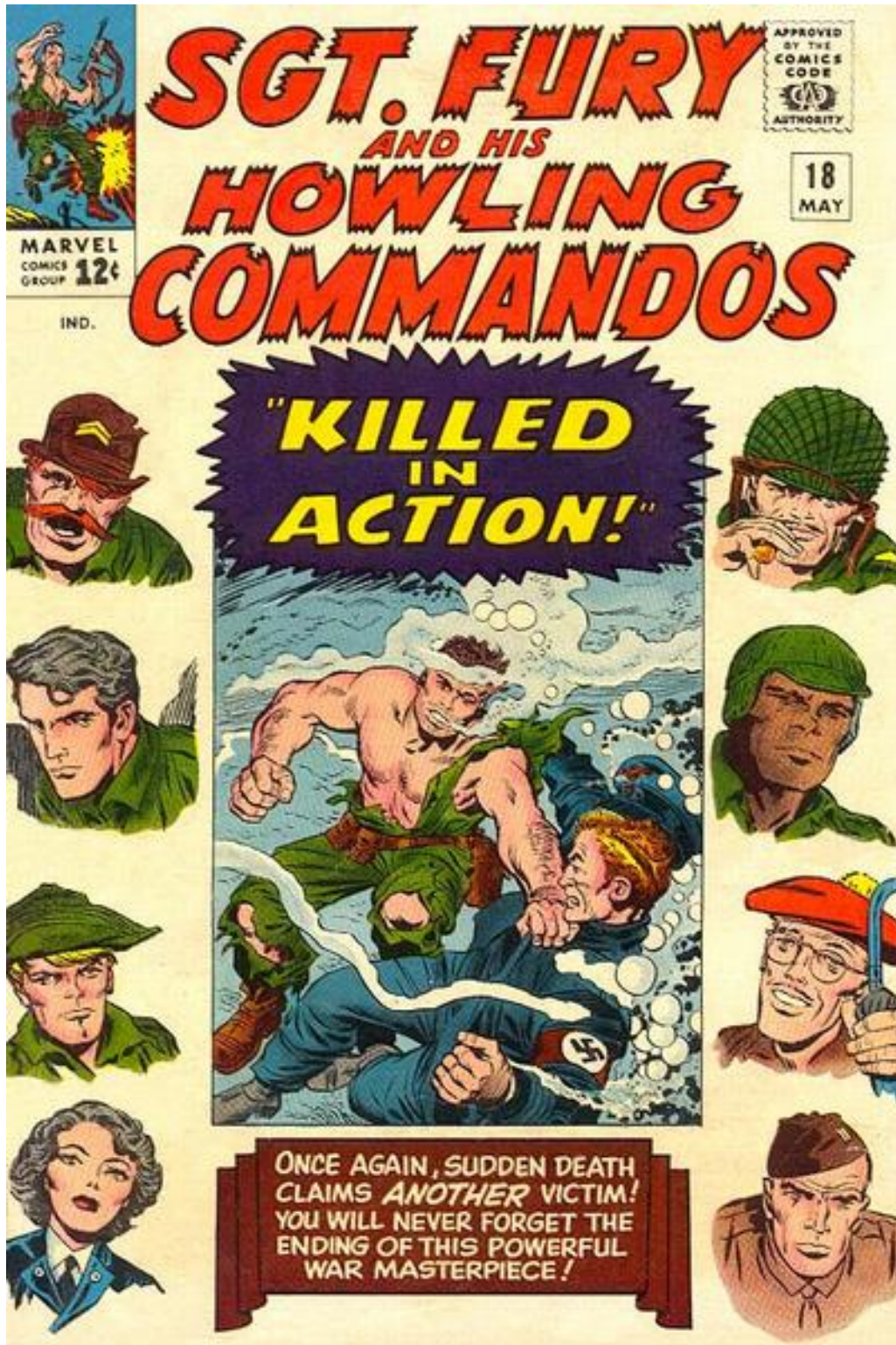


Fig. 78. Marvel's multiracial military platoon, the Howling Commandos, including African American Gabe Jones. *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* 18 (New York: Marvel, 1965).



Fig. 79. First appearance of the Hate Monger. *The Fantastic Four* 21 (New York: Marvel, 1963).



Fig. 80. First appearance of the Mandarin. *Tales of Suspense* 50 (New York: Marvel, 1964).



Fig. 81. Sojo, Toba. *Chojū-Giga*. c.12th-13th century. Kyoto National Museum, Kyoto.

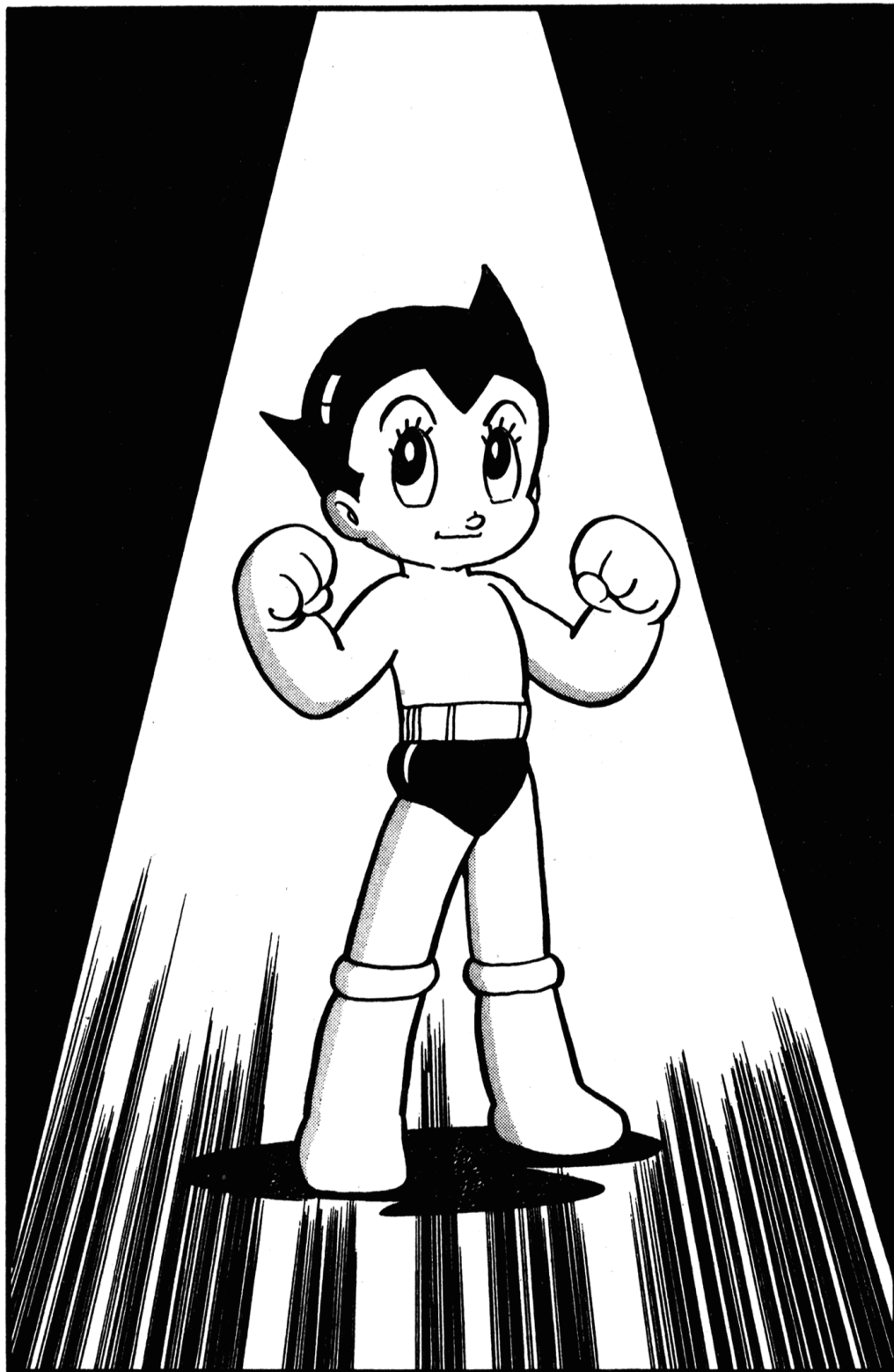


Fig. 82. Portrait of Tetsuwan Atomu. Rpt. in Tezuka, Osamu. *Astro Boy*. Trans. Fredrik Schodt. Milwaukee: Dark Horse, 2002. 1:32.

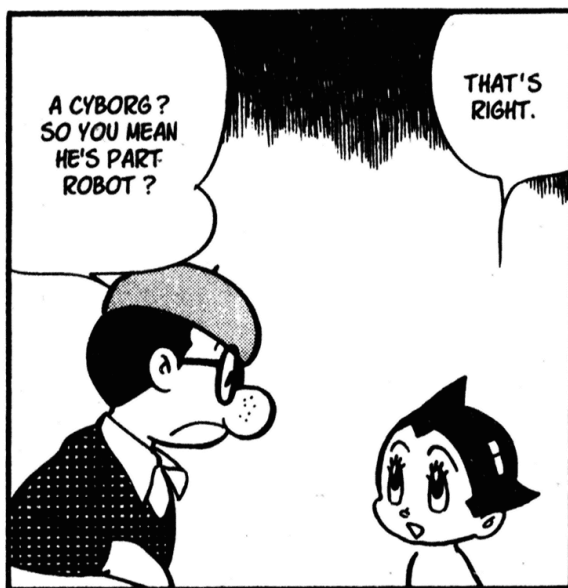
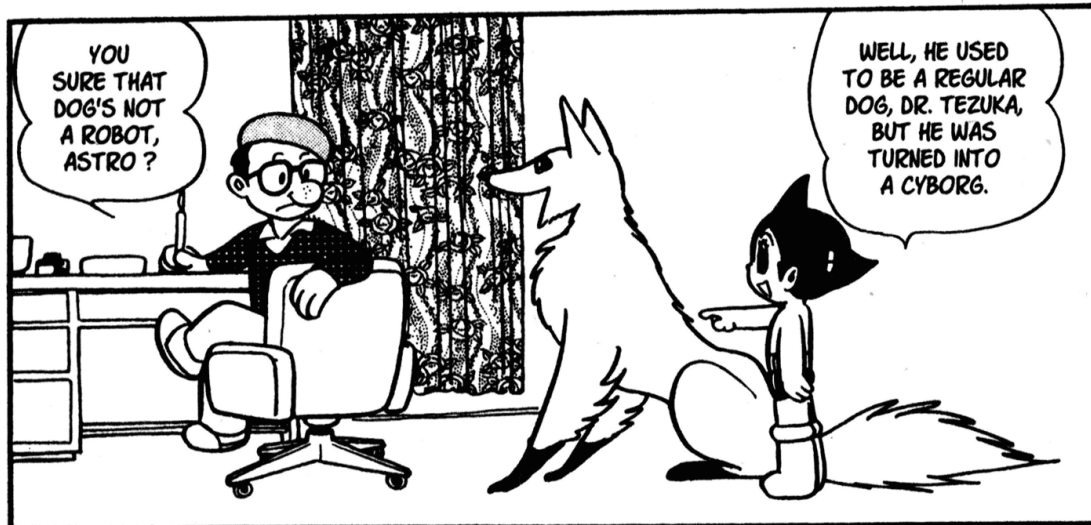


Fig. 83. Tezuka's avatar in the *Tesuwan Atomu* manga. Rpt. in Tezuka, Osamu. *Astro Boy*. Trans. Fredrik Schodt. Milwaukee: Dark Horse, 2002. 1: 34.

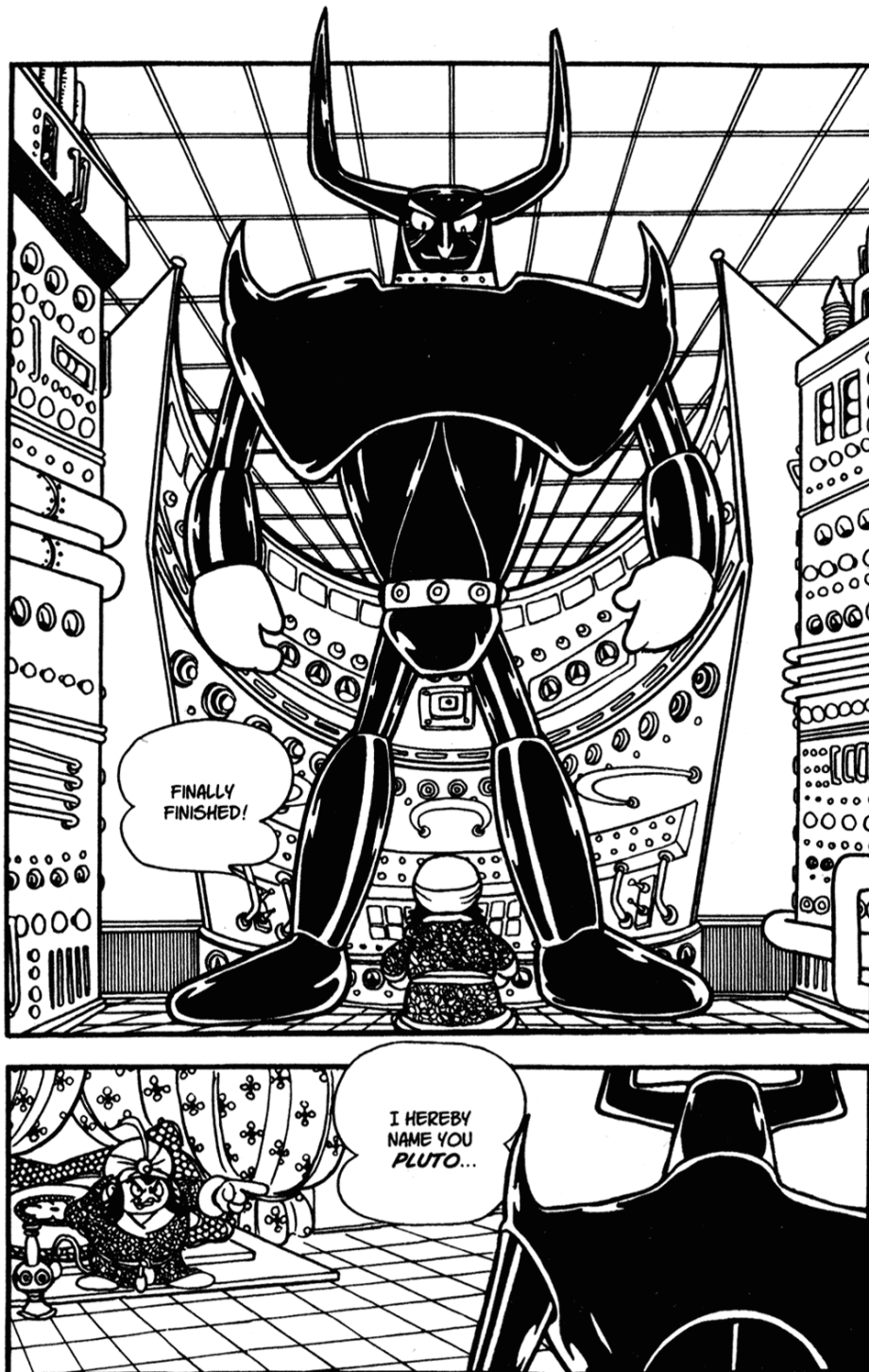


Fig. 84. Pluto the Robot. Rpt. in Tezuka, Osamu. *Astro Boy*. Trans. Fredrik Schodt. Milwaukee: Dark Horse, 2002. 3: 11.



Fig. 85. Atlas and Dr. Ram. Rpt. in Tezuka, Osamu. *Astro Boy*. Trans. Fredrik Schodt. Milwaukee: Dark Horse, 2003. 18: 162.

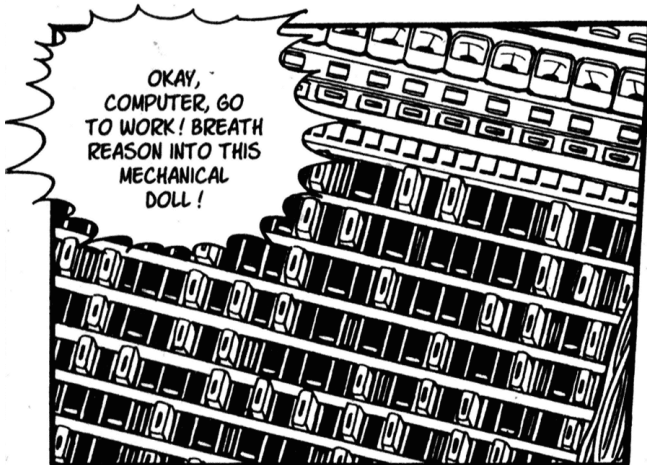
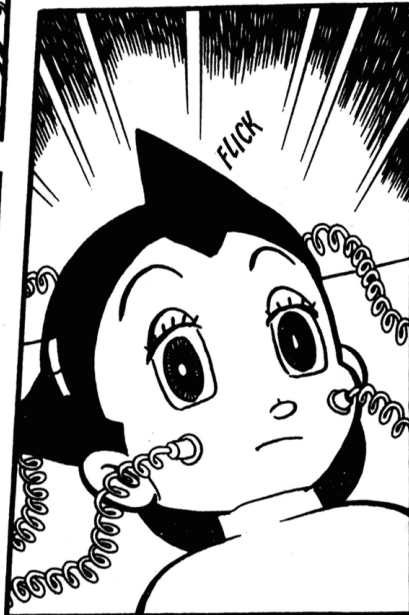
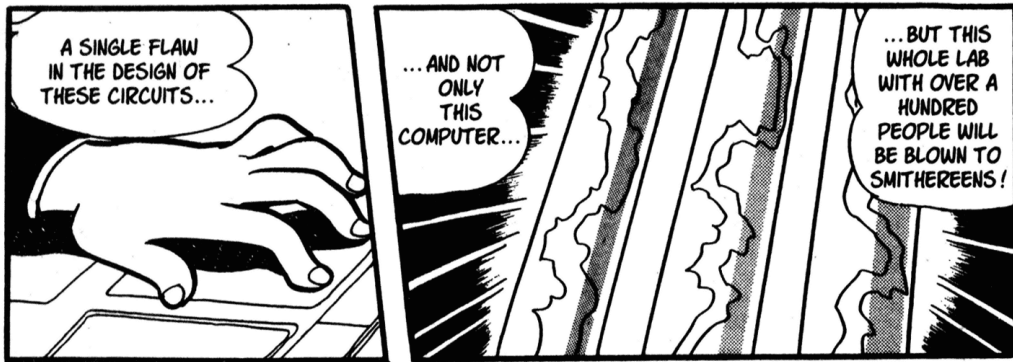


Fig. 86. The birth of Tetsuwan Atomu sequence. Rpt. in Tezuka, Osamu. *Astro Boy*. Trans. Fredrik Schodt. Milwaukee: Dark Horse, 2002. 1: 24.

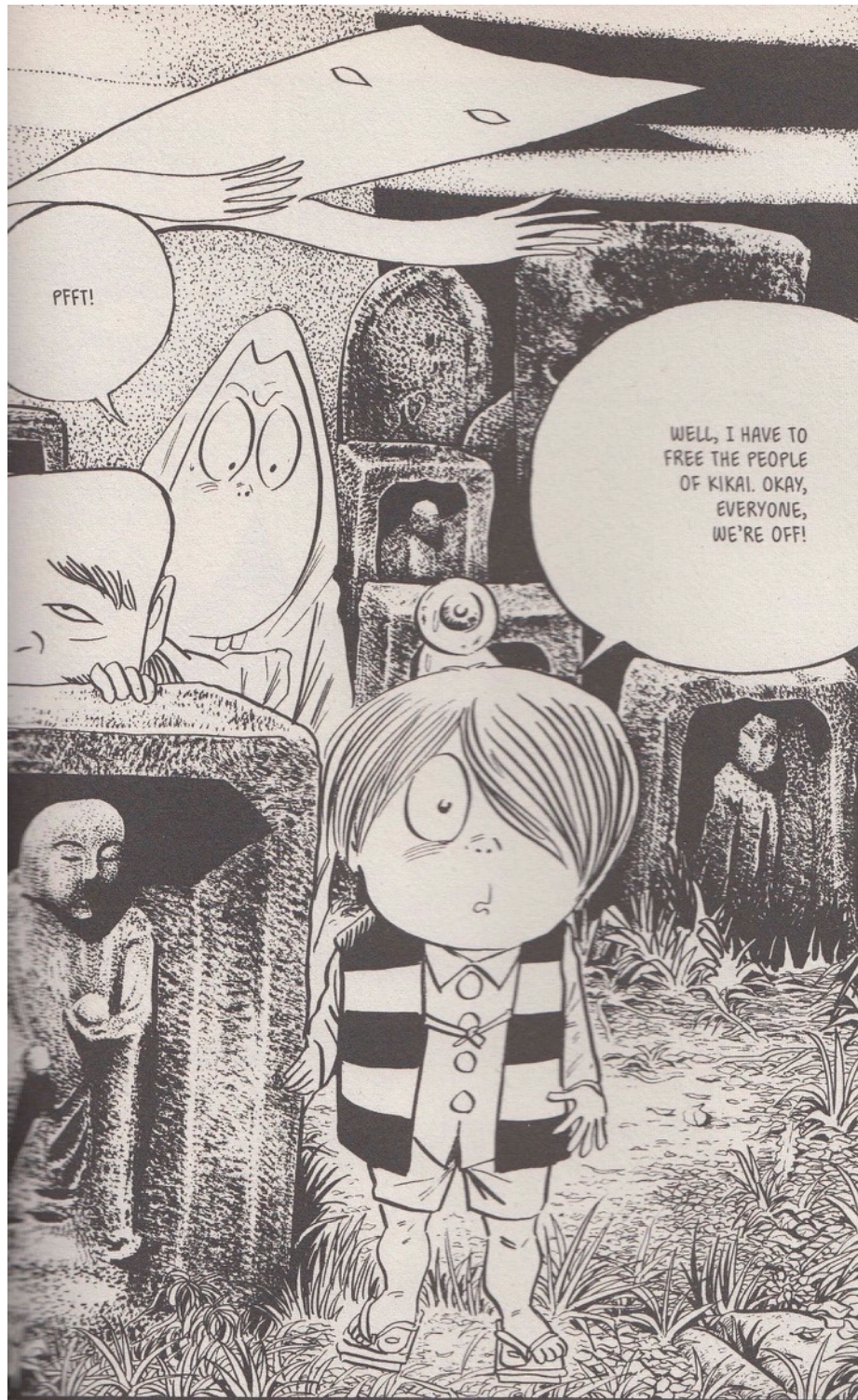


Fig. 87. Kitaro prepares to battle evil *yokai*. Rpt. in Mizuki, Shigeru. *Kitaro*. Trans. Jocelyne Allen. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2013. 162.



Fig. 88. Sequence featuring Kitaro's friend, Nezumi Otoko. Rpt. in Mizuki, Shigeru. *Kitaro*. Trans. Jocelyne Allen. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2013. 360.

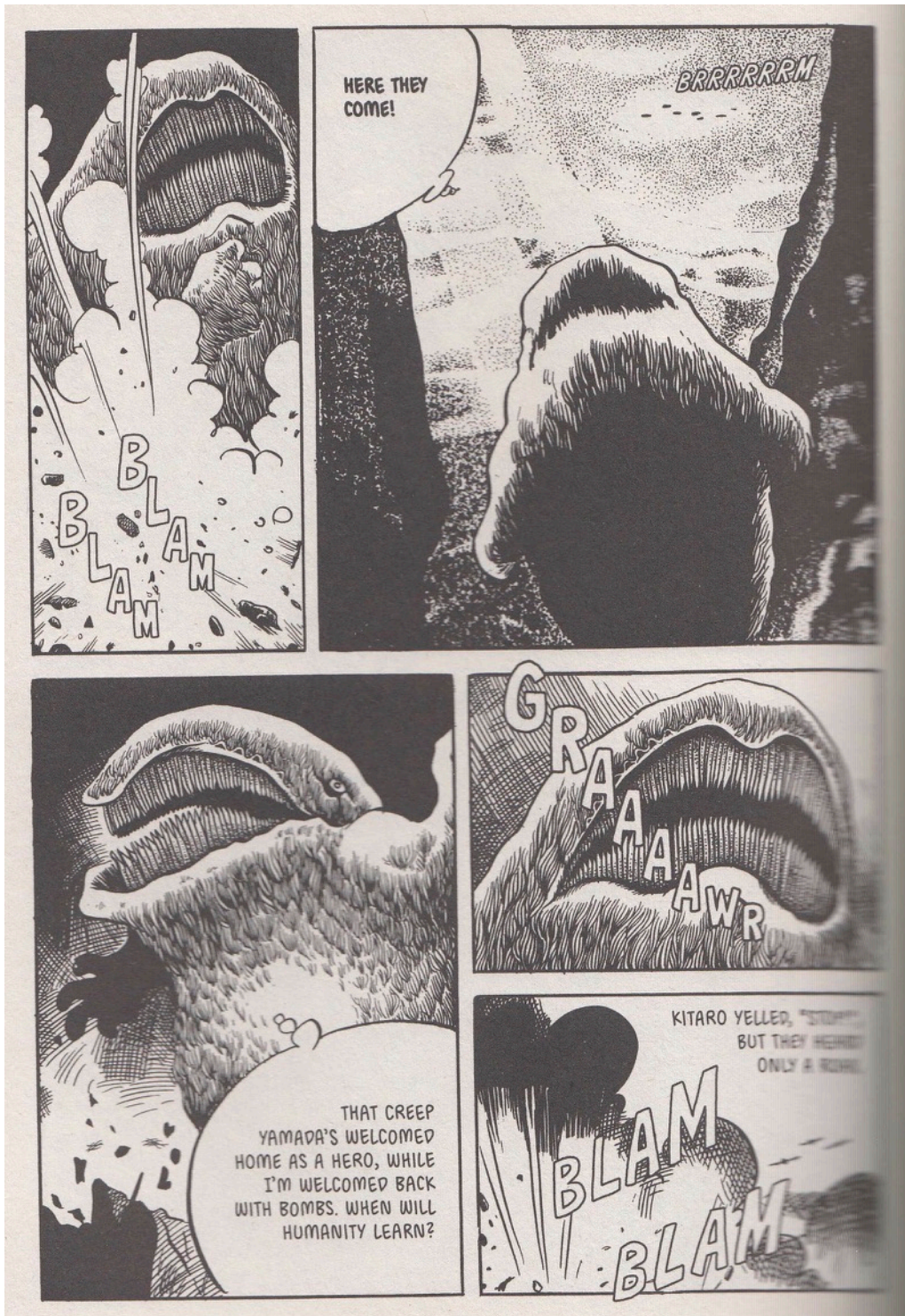


Fig. 89. Kitaro wrecks the city as a misunderstood whale monster. Rpt. in Mizuki, Shigeru. *Kitaro*. Trans. Jocelyne Allen. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2013. 245.

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