

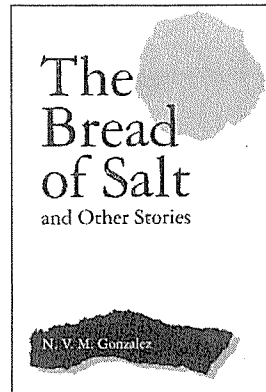
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"Superman is about to visit the relocation centers" & the Limits of Wartime Liberalism

GORDON H. CHANG

In late June 1943, advanced notice of a story line that would appear in the daily newspaper version of the Superman comic strip alarmed the Office of War Information, the Roosevelt administration's wartime propaganda bureau. "Superman is about to visit the relocation centers," Philleo Nash, an OWI media analyst who monitored minority relations in America during the Second World War, alerted his superiors. Nash described what was soon to appear before millions of readers across the country. In the story, according to Nash, "subversive and disloyal Japanese in the centers will perpetrate an act of destruction which will be stopped by Superman, who will then leave the center and will prevent further sabotage by Japanese *outside* the centers."¹

Nash's report touched off a flurry of activity among those responsible for the relocation camps in the Roosevelt administration. Their response and the bizarre story line that finally did appear in the Superman strip provide insight into the complex of often self-contradictory public as well as official attitudes toward Japanese Americans during the Second World War. In particular, the incident exposes the limits, even bankruptcy, of liberals who thought themselves passionate opponents of racism but who also endorsed mass forced relocation of aliens and citizens alike solely on the basis of race.

In the short span of a year or two since the character first appeared in book and strip form in 1938-1939, Superman had become one of the

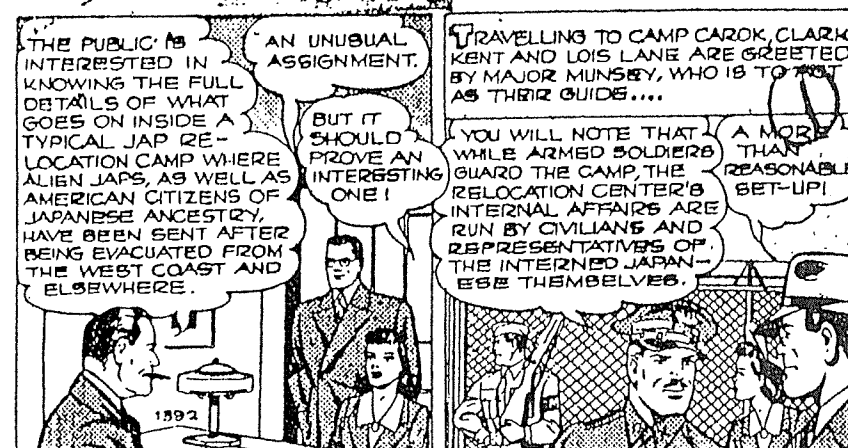
GORDON H. CHANG is associate professor at the University of California, Irvine and currently teaches in the Department of History, Stanford University.

most popular comic features in the United States. By 1941, it surpassed in readership long-established cartoons like Little Orphan Annie, Dick Tracy, and Popeye and appeared in 230 newspapers across the country with a combined following of an estimated twenty-five million persons. Magazine editions of Superman's exploits ran into a million and half copies and countless listeners followed his radio program. Superman was on his way to becoming the most important comic strip character in American history and to ensuring the success of the comic book as a central genre of mass culture.²

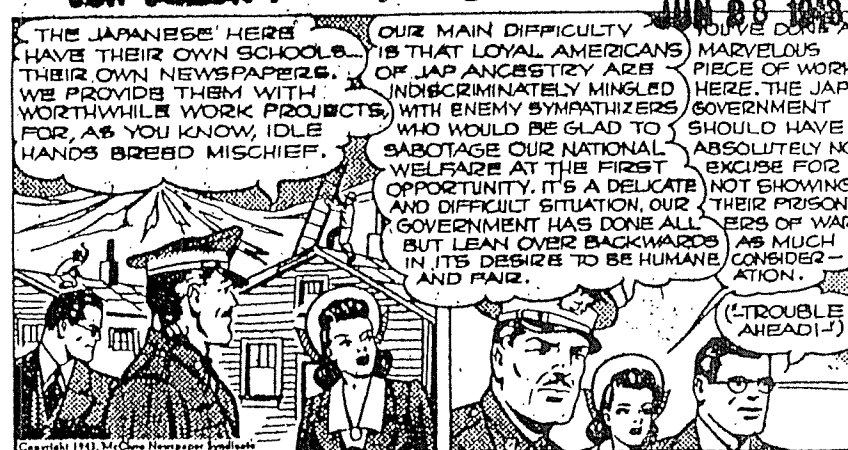
The spectacular adoration of Superman in the late 1930s and early 1940s, however, befuddled cultural observers at the time, as difficult as that may seem for those in the late twentieth century who have grown up with Superman comics, television shows, and movies. Fifty years ago, Superman was a genuine novelty as he was the first "super-hero" in popular science fiction, inspiring the birth of countless other characters. His creators actually had failed to sell their idea to publishers for years, so Superman's sudden success provoked commentators to try to make sense of the mass phenomenon. According to a writer for the liberal periodical *The New Republic*, the explanation for Superman's popularity lay in the power of "primitive myth" or "the blacker arts of modern demagoguery." Superman embodied all the traditional attributes of a "Hero's God"; he was a "protective deity" who was to be the "savior of the helpless and oppressed." Superman filled "some symptomatic desire for a primitive religion." The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's *Übermensch* and his notion of a "will to power" were even invoked as possible inspirations for the character's creators. Whatever the explanation, Superman would endure over the years with only slight modifications in appearance, cast of characters, and plot.³

The outbreak of World War II provided Superman with an opportunity to bring his Manichean battle with evil out from removed make-believe into a more emotionally engaged "real world." Genuine human monsters replaced petty criminals and fantasy adversaries. Superman joined other detective and military comic strip characters to fight the wartime enemies of America at home and abroad. The Nazis and "Japs" were frequent and predictably portrayed as villains in the pulps, although the Pacific War received much greater attention than the war in Europe, according to a 1942 OWI survey of the comics. The grotesquely racist caricatures of the enemy—Japanese in particular were routinely portrayed as vermin, sub-human, or simian—were as simple and unproblematic as the American patriotism that was promoted. These images, moreover, were highly influential since the comics had become a powerful media form in the United States among people of all

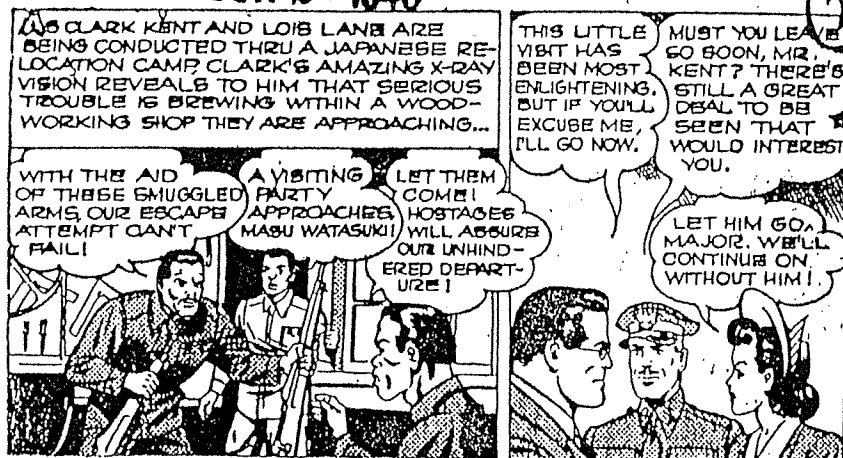
SUPERMAN Washington Daily Star Superman 5:45 P.M. Today—



WOLFE by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster



SUPERMAN JUN 29 1943 War Superman 5:45 P.M. Today



Washington Post Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster



ages, not just the young. The Advertising Research Foundation in 1942 discovered that the comics page of the daily newspaper, other than advertising, was the most widely read feature among adult readers. The OWI itself determined that approximately 83 percent of all adults in the U.S. read at least one comic strip daily.⁴

The simplistic messages and crude images sometimes disturbed the media watchdogs at the OWI who believed the anti-fascist aims of the war were being insufficiently communicated to the public. To counter blatant white chauvinism, for example, the OWI encouraged a non-racialist understanding of the Pacific War in some radio scripts it released for consideration by broadcasters. In one of these, the OWI observed,

Men and women who foster racial prejudices are fighting for the enemy. . . . To pepper [the Japanese] with epithets like yellow Japs. . . is not the way to win battles.⁵

On the whole, however, the federal government devoted little effort toward trying to dictate the specific content of strips produced by the private sector. The OWI's actual authority was limited; it had no censorship powers and its charge was mainly to monitor the media, disseminate war-related information, and produce morale-boosting features for public consumption.⁶ The intensity of government activity provoked by Superman's impending visit to a relocation camp holding Japanese Americans was therefore unique. Because the Superman strip would imply criticism of an actual, not fictitious, government program and controversial domestic policy, the strip had more direct relevance to bureaucratic concerns than the usual war story. Washington officials evidently believed that the story line would make their efforts to implement war-necessitated measures on the home front more difficult. (In contrast, the cover of the March 1943 Superman comic book that declared "SUPERMAN SAYS: YOU CAN SLAP A JAP," replete with a racist caricature, failed to generate similar concern at the OWI.)⁷

Philleo Nash, who had first brought the Superman comic strip story line to the attention of the leading officials in the OWI, was like many other New Deal intellectuals who wanted to devote their professional skills to social improvement. He had received his doctorate from the University of Chicago in anthropology in the early 1930s, and by the 1940s had broadened his expertise from his early attention to Indian life to race relations generally in the U.S. In 1942 he joined the domestic branch of the OWI to study public opinion and minority issues. He later became a special assistant to President Harry Truman on minority affairs, lieutenant governor of Wisconsin in the late 1950s, and

Commissioner of Indian Affairs during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. The red-baiting Senator Joseph McCarthy charged Nash as being a "communist" when he was an adviser in the White House in the early 1950s. On the other hand, Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall fondly wrote to Nash's widow upon his death in 1987, that Nash "will always be remembered for his great contribution to civil rights and civil liberties during the trying days. I remember too well that he was always there when needed." Through his long public career, Nash forged a distinguished intellectual reputation and established firm liberal credentials.⁸

Back in June 1943, though, Nash worried that the Superman story line would make running the relocation camps more difficult for federal authorities because of the story's suggestion that the camps were hotbeds of disloyal, even subversive, activity and that the War Relocation Authority, charged with responsibility for camp administration, was negligent in its security measures. Nash anticipated that the story would fuel public pressures for *more* stringent measures against the internees, measures which were contrary to administration efforts to implement what it considered was a legitimate policy, that is relocation, carried out humanely and cognizant that many Japanese Americans were indeed loyal.

The Superman story could not have come out at a worse time, from Nash's and the WRA's point of view. In September 1942, newspapers carried lurid stories about alleged Japanese spy rings operating in the U.S. The Chicago *Herald American*, with a two and one-half inch headline, declared "BIG JAP PLOT HERE! G-MEN JAIL 81." In articles that foreshadowed the Superman story line, the paper described the break-up of the leadership of a supposed "Jap-inspired fifth column" that advocated "exterminating the white race." Under the direction of the "powerful Japanese Black Dragon Society," and "Jap intelligence ace," Major Satakata Takahashi, whose "English was perfect, without accent," the subversive "army" supposedly numbered up to 100,000 throughout the United States. (The arrested were apparently African-Americans who opposed the war.)⁹ Then in November 1942, internees at the Poston camp, largest of the relocation camps, conducted a mass strike for self-government rights. In December, a violent riot over camp conditions at Manzanar left two internees dead and a dozen wounded. Exploiting the sensational publicity generated by these events and the widespread racist attitudes toward Japanese Americans, zealots within and without the government in early 1943 began publicly accusing the Roosevelt administration of coddling Japanese Americans and of endangering domestic security.¹⁰

This adverse public attention threatened to disrupt "resettlement," what the WRA considered to be one its "fundamental" policies. In early 1943, the WRA had begun a screening process to try to determine the loyalties of internees and stepped up a program of release and resettlement of those the government deemed free of suspicion. By May 1943, 4186 internees had been granted "indefinite leave" from the camps.¹¹ Along with the formation of the army team that became known as the 442nd Combat Unit, the resettlement program had raised the ire of men such as General John L. DeWitt, military commander of the Western Region and a prime instigator of relocation in the first place, who rejected any notion that the loyalty of Japanese Americans could be determined. DeWitt flatly opposed the formation of the 442nd and the screening process on racist grounds that even the Assistant Secretary of War, John J. McCloy, no liberal himself and the highest government official concerned with the running of the camps, found unacceptable.¹²

From Capitol Hill, the Administration was under attack from Texas Congressman Martin Dies, head of the notorious House Committee on Un-American Activities. Dies was an anti-Black, anti-Asian chauvinist who even before Pearl Harbor had purported to have evidence showing that Japanese in America were engaged in widespread propaganda and espionage. After the outbreak of the war, Dies, convinced that "racial characteristics" made all persons of Japanese ancestry in America security threats, continued to call for repressive measures against them. In June 1943, at virtually the same moment that Philleo Nash learned of the Superman story line, Dies prompted the convening of a special subcommittee under Representative John M. Costello of Hollywood, California to investigate camp administration and the entire resettlement program. Costello publicly accused the WRA of permitting "pro-Japan" elements to seize virtual control of the relocation camps and undertake "subversive activities." Costello charged that "native-born and alien troublemakers have been permitted to leave the camps" due to the "lack of aggressive leadership" by the WRA.¹³

Aside from Nash and the OWI, the WRA itself had become concerned about the planned Superman story and on its own raised the issue to the McClure Syndicate, distributor of the strip. The WRA, however, received an unsatisfying response. The McClure people saw nothing in the strip that would require the retraction of the panels that had already been sent out to newspapers across the country by late June. Philleo Nash dejectedly acknowledged on June 28, 1943, the day the story line began appearing, that time made it "impossible for the syndicate to withdraw the next two weeks strip now even if they wanted to."¹⁴

Nash recommended the OWI urge the McClure Syndicate to point out to Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, Superman's creators who themselves may have had Jewish relatives in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany, that "This story about disloyal Japanese, with only a passing mention of loyal Japanese, works a severe hardship on the 5,000 Japanese who are already in the Army, the Japanese who have never been placed in the centers, and on the loyal Japanese who have been released from the centers to work on farms and in war production plants."

Nash's neglect to mention the tens of thousands of persons of Japanese ancestry who continued to languish in the relocation centers was not an oversight, for whatever personal concern he may have had for the rights of the Japanese, he expressed interest in this instance only in what effect the strip would have on the government's ability to implement relocation and resettlement. Nash explained to his superiors:

The Superman reference will create new hostility to the work of the War Relocation Authority program. The centers have to be run. No one suggests that there should be *no* Japanese relocation program. Even the severest critics of the War Relocation Authority admit that there are very large numbers of loyal Japanese in the centers. The task of segregating them is enormously difficult. It will only be made more acute by the portrayal of incidents like this in such a popular medium as comic strips.

Nash's assertion that "no one" opposed the relocation program betrayed the limits of his liberalism. He obviously ignored the public opposition, albeit weak, to the camps that did exist and, of course, the sentiments of the internees themselves. Nash, however, like many of those who ran the WRA, as Richard Drinnon has pointed out, likely believed he was opposing racists who refused to appreciate the conscientious work of the WRA.¹⁵ Nash wanted the OWI and the WRA to inform the McClure Syndicate that the federal agencies "strongly feel that an episode should be *added* to the present Superman sequence, or later episodes should be created, *in which loyal Japanese assist Superman; in which the Japanese Combat Team is mentioned; and in which the absence of sabotage accredited to Japanese both in Hawaii and on the Mainland is mentioned.*" (emphasis in original)¹⁶ #

Instead of pursuing the recommendation immediately, however, Nash's superior directed him to explore whether the government's Office of Censorship could handle the matter.¹⁷ Nash inquired but found that the censorship people believed the matter was "strictly not censorship business." Nash then suggested that the OWI get Assistant Secretary of War, John J. McCloy, involved and have him contact the artists, their agents, and the McClure Syndicate. McCloy, aside from his

official position, was already a powerful man on Wall Street and in Washington and on his way to becoming known in the post-war era as the chairman of "The Establishment." Nash was probably right to assume that representations from a man of McCloy's stature would have an effect on the Superman people.¹⁸

In the meantime, McCloy independently became drawn into the controversy. The start of the Superman story line on June 28 prompted immediate protests from the public, including cables and letters to McCloy from leading liberal voices such as Read Lewis and M. Margaret Anderson of the Common Council for American Unity. They wrote McCloy that Superman was "inciting" "race hatred against Japanese Americans." By spreading misinformation and creating distrust of all Japanese Americans, these strips "unless discontinued or altered, threaten to extend disunity and present wave of race hatred and also handicap [the] Army's special combat unit of Japanese Americans." Since the comic strip misrepresented Japanese Americans as "prisoners of war under the jurisdiction of the Army and implies the Army is lax enough to allow concealed weapons to the evacuees," the protesters believed McCloy's War Department should have "definite concern." References were also made to the concurrent investigations of the relocation program by the House Committee on Un-American Activities. "It would be a sad day for us to have the resettlement program bog down now because of national distrust."¹⁹ (In their letters, Read and Anderson did not object to the existence of the camps themselves and the relocation program, but limited their protest to the hostile public attitudes toward Japanese Americans. The Common Council itself had had conflicting views on the legitimacy of the relocation program which will be addressed below.)

McCloy himself, before the OWI had made contact with him, inquired whether the OWI could do something about the Superman strip. According to McCloy, the military had an interest in the matter since, if, as a result of anti-Japanese American agitation, there were "untoward incidents arising on the West Coast" against the former internees who were being resettled from the camps, "it will probably reflect against our prisoners in the hands of the Japanese." McCloy also argued that even from the perspective of the "most native of Native Sons," the comic strip was damaging to their aims, since "If the country through the Superman cartoons feels that the Japanese Relocation Centers are hotbeds of disloyalty and conspiracy, the efforts to redistribute the Japanese population throughout the country, thus relieving California and the other western states of some of their Japanese population, will be frustrated."

McCloy asked whether "there is anything that OWI could do" about the Man of Steel.²⁰

The OWI's response, apparently from Milton Eisenhower, brother of General Dwight D. Eisenhower and director of the WRA before he moved to the OWI, acknowledged that the OWI too had received telegrams and letters in connection with "Superman's exploits in the Relocation Centers," although it had been somewhat at a loss as to how to formulate an official response. McCloy was told that Philleo Nash had had an informal discussion with people connected to "Superman, Inc." in which he suggested that story lines be added to the strip to balance the negative portrayal of Japanese Americans, and that he apparently had some success. The "editor of Superman" agreed to work on the matter. The OWI asked McCloy to forward "factual material on the Japanese combat team and on the absence of Japanese sabotage in Hawaii and on the West Coast." The WRA would then send it along with information on the relocation centers directly to Superman, Inc. for possible use in future strips. Some days later, McCloy had a long letter sent to Eisenhower detailing "displays on the part of the evacuees in the centers of their loyalty to the United States."²¹

Philleo Nash, of course, had mistakenly argued that "no one" believed there should be no relocation program, but he was, in truth, not far off the mark. Other than the Japanese victims themselves, few Americans publicly opposed relocation. While the socialist leader Norman Thomas and the Quakers were notable dissenters to the federal policy, even the Communist Party, USA and others of the identifiable left openly endorsed relocation.

In June 1942, *People's World*, the CPUSA's West Coast newspaper, lauded the Army round-up of Japanese Americans and wholly accepted Washington's rationale—forced evacuation "was a job well-done which was dictated by military necessity." The editorial praised the action as having "eliminated the possibility of free operation of fifth-column elements among the Japanese" on the West Coast. And while it was "regrettable" that many "loyal Japanese-Americans" had to be evacuated, their experience was "unavoidable under the circumstances." "On the whole," the Party concluded, "the Japanese evacuees are being treated in a fair and democratic manner." Later in the year, the Party again endorsed relocation. The Manzanar riot, the Party maintained, proved the correctness of its opinion. The protest, by pro-fascist elements according to the CPUSA, demonstrated that forced relocation "was justified." After all, the Party argued, there had not been time to "sort the sheep from the goats" after Pearl Harbor, and thus the Army had

been right to move all Japanese away from the coastal area "where they could do mischief." The Party did not clarify which animals represented which political tendencies. The CPUSA also suspended the membership of its Japanese American cadres for the duration of the war.²²

The response of the Common Council for American Unity to relocation also illustrates the extent to which racial prejudice had infected the American left. The Council expressed its views in *Common Ground*, which first appeared in 1940, and was one of the leading liberal periodicals of the day. Its agenda was a forerunner of what is today known as "multiculturalism." *Common Ground* promoted appreciation of the ethnic and racial diversity of American life, anti-racism, anti-nativism, and vigorous and full extension of democracy to all peoples. Those affiliated with the publication ran the gamut from established liberals like Eleanor Roosevelt and Pearl Buck to leftwing intellectuals such as Langston Hughes, Louis Adamic, and Woody Guthrie. The publication was notably strong in its attention to Asian Americans, and had published the work of Younghill Kang, Toshio Mori, and Jade Snow Wong, among others. The liberalism of *Common Ground*, however, initially foundered on the rocks of the relocation program.

The inconsistency of *Common Ground's* liberalism is specifically seen in the views of Carey McWilliams, chief of the Division of Immigration and Housing for the State of California in 1942, and later prolific and leading author on American minority and labor affairs and editor of *The Nation*. McWilliams was a frequent contributor to *Common Ground* and his article "Japanese Evacuation: Policy and Perspective" was the lead piece of the Summer 1942 issue and was distributed as a special reprint.

In his essay, McWilliams accepted the essential legitimacy of the camps as a wartime necessity, although he tried to distance himself from the overt racists. The Japanese, in his view, were removed "not because they are suspect en masse," but "primarily to allay popular uneasiness created by their presence on the West Coast in large numbers in strategic areas," an uneasiness that might have grown out of hand and interfered with the war effort. McWilliams, writing between the time of evacuation and assembly and the establishment of the actual relocation camps, saw the policy as a great challenge to American democracy but also an opportunity: "Here is a task which can be handled democratically and fairly for the attainment of highly desirable social objectives, or mishandled and botched in a manner that will gravely reflect upon the ideals and standards which now, as never before, we are proudly emblazoning to the world."

McWilliams believed that the relocation camps could become great

demonstrations of democracy and the resettlement of Japanese away from the West Coast a help to their economic progress and social integration, if only the whole matter was "soundly conceived," "liberally construed," and if "the American nation decides it should be done, and will not capitulate to demagogic harangues and discreditable race-baiting." McWilliams wanted a "humane" relocation. Addressing the obviously touchy question of the constitutionality of forced relocation based on race, McWilliams stretched far to rationalize that some sort of group "due compensation" could be offered to the Japanese American community "as we have always provided. . . when an individual's property is taken or his rights impaired for a public purpose." (emphasis in original)

Later issues of *Common Ground* also carried favorable articles from the government's public relations officer at Manzanar and an essay describing the relocation program from Dillon Myer himself, chief of the WRA. Only later in its Summer 1943 issue did the magazine completely reverse its position on the camps and begin to condemn the program. A powerfully worded article by M. Margaret Anderson signaled the reversal in position. In "Get the Evacuees Out," she condemned relocation as a "deep wrong," characterized the centers as "uncomfortably close to concentration camps," and demanded that America must either "really mean democracy—at home and abroad—or we don't." She called for the resettlement of Japanese Americans as quickly as possible. By mid-1943, McWilliams changed his opinion and also criticized relocation.²³

Carey McWilliams, it seemed, realized he could not continue to rationalize the contradiction between support for forced relocation, with its anti-democratic premises, and his liberal principles. Others, however, refused to undertake a similar intellectual self-examination. For decades following World War II, the CPUSA, for example, continued to waffle on its endorsement of the camps as well as its discrimination against its own Japanese American members.²⁴ Such political inconsistency can be explained, at least in part, by appreciating the depth of anti-Japanese prejudices that ran (and continue to run) deeply and pervasively in American culture. (The virulence of "Japan-bashing" in recent years indicate that such sentiments never disappeared but remained a subcurrent in American life.) The strangely revealing story line in the Superman strip helps illuminate the particular nature of this racism and aspects of the cultural assumptions that underlay relocation.

A description and assessment of the strip that ran six days a week (Sunday's strip ran a different story line) for more than eight weeks



SUPERMAN Washington Daily Planet Superman 5:45 P.M. Today



VOL. 1 JUL 1 1942 Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster



from June 28, 1943 to August 21, 1943 (much longer than the two weeks originally anticipated by Philleo Nash) is in order here. While the OWI and WRA in 1943 tried to pressure the Superman people behind the scenes, the cartoon story line unfolded in daily papers around the country, apparently unaffected by the political tumult.

The reader should note the presence of several traditional racist themes and assumptions in the strip—negative and demeaning portrayals of Asians had a long history in American cartoon art. Prominent themes include the suggestion of widespread disloyalty among Japanese Americans, the sinister and especially arrogant nature of the Japanese enemy, stereotypic Orientalia, dialogue, and slurs, and the implication that, for the United States, race formed a basis for nationality and loyalty (and conversely disloyalty). (These themes are even more evident in the published illustrated panels. The reader's imagination will have to substitute for the actual illustrations.) The following narrative is presented with minimal editorial comment (material enclosed in " " are direct quotes from either the strip's omniscient narrator or characters themselves):

Panel 1 (all bold in original)²⁵

Daily Planet editor Perry White directs Clark Kent and Lois Lane to what Kent describes as an "unusual assignment."

White says: "The public is interested in knowing the full details of what goes on inside a typical Jap relocation camp where alien Japs, as well as American citizens of Japanese ancestry have been sent after being evacuated from the West Coast and elsewhere."

Visiting "Camp Carok," Kent and Lane are hosted by "Major Munsey" who informs the reporters that "Our main difficulty is that loyal Americans of Jap ancestry are indiscriminately mingled with enemy sympathizers who would be glad to sabotage our national welfare at the first opportunity. It's a delicate and difficult situation. Our government has done all but lean over backwards in its desire to be humane and fair."

Lane praises the work, adding "the Jap government should have absolutely no excuse for not showing their prisoners of war as much consideration." Clark Kent (Superman) however senses that trouble lurks beneath the superficial calm.

Panel 2

"Clark's amazing x-ray vision reveals to him that serious trouble is brewing within a woodworking shop they are approaching."

A group of swarthy, sinister-looking Japanese internees, all male, secretly plan an escape with the aid of smuggled firearms.

"A visiting party approaches, Masu Watasuki!"

"Let them come! Hostages will assure our unhindered departure!"

Clark Kent ducks out of the tour, leaving Lane and the Major to be captured by the Japanese conspirators. Kent strips off his outer garments revealing "the super-dynamic MAN OF STEEL!"

Panel 3

Masu Watasuki, planning to abduct Lois Lane, finds Major Munsey an uncooperative hostage and is about to execute him.

"But even as the cruel-faced son of Nippon fires at the major, a stream-lined human form hurtles into the shop."

Panel 4

Faster than the eye can see, Superman rescues Munsey and Lois Lane, whisks them away to safety, and returns to deal with the shocked internees.

"Superman!"

Panels 5, 6, 7

The internees find that bullets and electric saws cannot stop Superman. Frustrated and bashed against a wall, a villain cries out "Feat renders Jap-boys velly unhappy!!"

But Masu Watasuki drops a booby-trap of lumber on Superman, burying him.

"Behold—the highly vaunted Superman falls victim to Japanese ingenuity."

"Verree clever."

"Added proof that America is destined to become a vassal state of Japan!"

Panels 8, 9, 10, 11

Masu Watasuki's victory is short-lived. Superman breaks out of the lumber pile and imprisons the Japanese themselves in a wooden jail cell. He wonders, though, about the source of the smuggled weapons. His X-ray vision shows two white thugs lurking in the nearby forest wondering whether something has gone wrong with the escape attempt.

Superman strips off the clothes of Masu Watasuki and dons them. "Then with the aid of his amazing muscular control and makeshift materials, Superman disguises himself as. . ." "A Jap." "Takea lookee at the new Watasuki!" Superman says.

Panels 12, 13, 14, 15

The disguised Superman tells the thugs he was the only one to escape. He thinks to himself: "White men co-operating with the enemy! There are always renegades who will sell their country and their souls for

money. We must beware of these hidden enemies in our midst."

Camps guards try to stop the truck of the fleeing thugs and disguised Superman, but the superhero frustrates their efforts since he wants to uncover the headquarters of the subversives.

The truck arrives at the garage of a "large Oriental rug establishment," beneath which the thugs bring the fake Watasuki into a hall with a waiting assembly of scores of men who are apparently white. But wait!

A gong "unexpectedly reverberates" and in unison the crowd pulls off "Plastic Masks!" A white thug gleefully boasts: "When they wear one, I defy anyone to know they're really Japs!"

But as a stage curtain parts, the "Man of Tomorrow receives an even greater shock."

"No! It can't be!!"

Panels 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24

Superman cannot believe he sees "The Leer, dreaded Jap saboteur," who committed suicide in disgrace after being defeated by Superman in a previous adventure. As it turns out, however, it is not The Leer but his brother, The Sneer, who had been smuggled into the U.S. by submarine to continue the sabotage work. The Sneer speaks to the disguised Superman in Japanese, wanting to know the whereabouts of the other escapees.

The fake Watasuki "replies in his questioner's native tongue, for the Man of Tomorrow's knowledge is almost limitless and awareness of every language on earth is but one of his many accomplishments."

But suddenly, Superman's ruse is uncovered and he must subdue the whole "horde of enraged enemy Japs."

The Sneer exhorts his band, "Don't give ground! You can't lose inasmuch as you have the divine protection of Hirohito!"

Superman, however, has little trouble knocking out the subversives left and right. In one scene, Superman uses a special punch he says he reserved for "Traitors!" (The race or nationality of many of the bad-guys is not always clear.)

But before he can capture The Sneer and his cohorts, Superman is tricked away by a fake radio report that a nearby dam has been destroyed by a bomb. The Sneer escapes and Clark Kent returns to the Daily Planet.

Panels 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32

As a result of their harrowing experience in the relocation camp, Lois Lane and Clark Kent decide to collaborate on writing a series of articles emphasizing the need "for increasing resistance against the Jap foe." Their efforts come to the grateful attention of the "Chinese citizens of this city" and "Lum Wong, the 'mayor of Chinatown'" garbed in a

Hollywood-style Mandarin outfit, invites them to ride a float in a bond-selling parade through Chinatown.

But the *Daily Planet* articles infuriate The Sneer who vows to stop Kent and Lane. A henchman, who is of Japanese ancestry but whose nationality is unclear, comments, "It would be much more convenient for our beloved warlords if the Allies continued to concentrate on the European front."

The saboteurs plant a subterranean bomb in Chinatown to try to blow up Kent and Lane's float in the parade, but are frustrated by Superman. Superman seizes the bomb-planters, who are forced to reveal The Sneer's lair. The Sneer, in the meantime, seizes Lois Lane and flees to the countryside. The Sneer hurtles Lois Lane down a dry well to die.

Panels 33, 34, 35

Superman saves Lane in the nick of time and then foils a henchman's effort to decapitate him with a samurai sword.

Superman eavesdrops on The Sneer's briefing of his fellow agents (again of Japanese ancestry but of unclear nationality): "You will be pleased to learn that in this safe are duplicates of the Japanese High Command's plans for an all-out attack on Allied forces in the southern Pacific area. This attack is to occur almost immediately, and it will forerun the actual invasion of America itself!"

Superman breaks into the lair.

Panels 36, 37, 38

Superman grabs the documents and flies off to Washington with The Sneer, "his slant-eyed opponent," to alert authorities about the impending offensive. Lane is left to contact the FBI who rounds up the remaining agents.

Washington officials are grateful to receive the news but are dismayed by the prospect of having little time to transfer the necessary war material to repel the invasion.

Before Superman can bop him in the face, The Sneer gloats, "It will be another example of the democracies [sic] axiom of 'Too little, too late.'"

Superman offers his help to move the supplies, inspiring one official to say that "In this case one man may^{*} save the destiny of the civilized world."

Panels 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48

Superman uses his extraordinary abilities to help deliver the needed military supplies to the Allies and joins the fight against the Japanese invasion force.

The threat is destroyed, showing that, as one American military man observes, "our fighting men once again demonstrate that, given the weapons with which to defend themselves, they can crush the mad plan of scheming dictators in Tokio, Berlin and Rome to dominate the world."

In denouement, Lois Lane gushes to Clark Kent, "Out of all of Superman's mighty feats in defense of democracy, I think this latest exploit ranks at the top!"

Clark Kent editorializes, "It will have served of inestimable value if only to point out to the public the importance of not belittling the Jap menace in the South Pacific."

And in the last frame (perhaps reflecting the efforts of the OWI, WRA, and John J. McCloy), Superman is given the last word after weeks of fighting the Japanese enemy. He faces the reader directly to lecture: "It should be remembered that most Japanese-Americans are loyal citizens. Many are in combat units of our armed forces, and others are working in war factories. According to government statements, not one act of sabotage was perpetrated in Hawaii or territorial U.S. by a Japanese-American."

Superman's final pitch in support of loyal Japanese Americans was too little, too late and essentially irrelevant in terms of public opinion. It was symbolic of the bankruptcy of a wartime liberalism that rationalized the entire relocation policy. Moreover, the story line resonated with the deep-seated tradition of American political demonology, particularly its Yellow Peril form. The story line both drew from and confirmed deep anti-Asian prejudices and patterns of racist thinking that made the closing generous gesture from Superman meaningless and gratuitous for Japanese Americans.

The racial and political incubus, in its Japanese wartime form, threatened to weaken and subvert the American body politic and required isolation (segregation and re-imprisonment). (The brief interlude into Metropolis' "Chinatown" accentuates these messages: the contrasting "goodness" of the allied Chinese serves to highlight the "badness" of the enemy Japanese, of course. But while the portrayed Chinese are themselves Asian and foreign, they are trivially exotic, contained, and controlled. Thus they are nonthreatening. And thus they are good for a further reason.) The Japanese enemy is both sub and superhuman. The enemy is dark, wild, cruelly animal-like and is associated with the subterranean; its behavior is deceitful; it launches attacks from behind and below, contrives traps, and intrigues. Yet it is also ingenious, arrogant, and able to overpower guileless legitimate

authority. A super-being is required to frustrate the super-demon; but the superbeing is also a man (Clark Kent), and is constantly referred to as a "man" by the subversives. Superman therefore is emblematic of an idealized America itself. He becomes the counter-subversive hero and, like other counter-subversive heroes in American racist folklore (the frontier scout who becomes a "savage" to hunt Indians, the Ku Klux Klan night-riders who don masks to carry out atrocities to avenge supposed atrocities, the federal agent who infiltrates the Reds) is permitted to mirror the projected behavior of the constructed foe who is being attacked. Superman strips the foe of his clothes, leaving him naked, vulnerable (clothes are power and identity—Superman is never without his costume, a modified American flag). Superman dons his enemy's outfit and assumes a new identity, his enemy's identity and license. He infiltrates the infiltrators; he impersonates the impersonators. Superman's behavior imitates the dark double to save the nation both literally and figuratively in the character of Lois Lane, the feminine America, with whom he is platonically linked. The Japanese foe, who are only male, grab and threaten her person. Ultimately, she and the nation are saved from violation by her male counterpart. In the end, Superman's sermon to the reader about the actual loyalty of Japanese Americans affirms America's self-conception of itself as a land of fair-play and democracy, but also, in so doing, legitimizes the playing of an imposter in the defense of an authentic America. Illusion and authenticity are doubly, triply confused and co-mingled both within the story line and between the story line and social reality.

There is no record of a formal Japanese American reaction to the Superman story line, although the internees sometimes did protest particularly vicious news articles that appeared in the mass media outside the camps. K.J. Takashima, chairman of the Poston Community Council (along the Colorado River in Arizona) wrote on behalf of the Council to protest to Elmer Davis, head of the OWI, inflammatory articles that appeared in the *Los Angeles Examiner* in September 1943 a few months after the Superman story line had run. He cited a story about the possibility that Poston internees might sabotage dams along the Colorado River and an article that had as its headline "ARMED JAP EVACUEES POURING INTO STATE." He feared these emotional stories would arouse public opinion against the WRA and the residents of the relocation centers, but pointed out that "any sane person would realize the fantasy" of the charges.²⁷ Probably unknown to Mr. Takashima, these "news" articles strangely echoed aspects of the fictional Superman story. In this case, fantasy and reality were very difficult for most Americans to untort.

Men such as Nash, Stimson, McCloy, Eisenhower, and Myer did not consider themselves racists—some thought themselves progressive. They all believed they were solicitous, to varying degrees, of the interests of Japanese Americans and understood that many, if not most, were loyal citizens of the United States. The WRA itself acknowledged, as stated in one of its internal reports without any trace of irony, chagrin, or self-awareness, that "the rights of citizenship and the rights of law-abiding aliens are closely associated with what we are fighting for in this war."²⁸ The administrators distinguished themselves from the outright racists such as DeWitt, Dies, and others who believed Japanese in America were for racial reasons loyal to Tokyo and against America. The professed liberals could point to what they believed was their sensitive treatment of the Japanese, the allegedly benign and democratic functioning of the relocation camps, and the resettlement program for proven loyal Japanese Americans, as evidence of their good intentions.

But these measures could not overturn the fundamental injustice of the camps or correct the horrendous message to the American public, just as Superman's closing instruction to his readers in the last frame of the story line could hardly neutralize the insidious characterizations built up over the previous weeks that resonated with traditional American political and racial demonology. The federal government, of course, subjected no other national ancestry group to indiscriminate incarceration and the laborious loyalty screening process. And thus, no matter how much the liberal administrators and officials in Washington urged public "fair" treatment for Japanese in America, those Americans who physically appeared like the racially-identified enemy could not but be looked upon with suspicion. Officials in the real Washington and the fictitious Superman both accepted incarceration on the basis of race as justified. Thus, popular animosity toward Japanese Americans remained fierce throughout the country. After all, who knew, if not the federal government, what was actually going on beneath that local "Oriental rug establishment?"

Notes

The author wishes to thank Roger Daniels, Yuji Ichioka, Bob Lee, John Liu, and the Stanford Asian American studies faculty seminar for their helpful comments on drafts of this essay.

1. Nash to Palmer Hoyt, June 28, 1943, OWI Files—Alphabetical Files, Nash Files, Papers of Harry S. Truman.

The Harry S. Truman Library in Independence, Missouri contains a

large amount of material relevant to the study of the World War II relocation camps. The files of Philleo Nash, contained in the papers of Harry S. Truman, have federal government press releases and reports on the camps, clippings from newspapers around the country on Japanese Americans and Japanese in American, and internal government memoranda. Nash also monitored race relations in the U.S. and in the armed services generally during the war. The Nash files also have War Relocation Authority-generated material, public as well as internal. Useful material includes Department of Justice bi-weekly summaries of the camp press in 1942 and 1943. Translation of some Japanese-language articles appear in these. The summaries ran regular sections entitled "Ideological Aspects," "Grievances and Redress of Grievances," and "Organizational Activities." These provide insight into government knowledge and attitudes about camp life. The Nash files contain WRA population studies on Japanese Americans, studies of local popular attitudes toward Japanese Americans, and WRA reports on camp conditions and experiences. Most of the above material is found in Boxes 16, 23, 26, 27, 34, 50, 51, 52.

The Truman Library also holds the papers of Dillon S. Myer, Director of the War Relocation Authority. The Myer papers hold official and personal correspondence, including from the WRA years, memoranda and reports, news clippings and speeches. One half of Box 1 is of this material. Another useful collection is that of Tom C. Clark, who served in the Department of Justice during the relocation years and was later Supreme Court Justice. Scattered material on the relocation camps appears in oral histories, including that of Karl Bendetsen, Tom C. Clark, and H. B. Morrison, the Stephen J. Spingarn papers, and Harry S. Truman papers (Senate papers and President's Secretary File—Official File).

Archivists at the Truman Library say that few researchers have used the above material.

2. Slater Brown, "The Coming of Superman," *New Republic*, September 2, 1940, 301; Dennis Dooley, "The Man of Tomorrow and the Boys of Yesteday," in *Superman at Fifty*, eds. Dennis Dooley and Gary Engle (Cleveland, Ohio: Octavia Press, 1987), 19-34; M. Thomas Inge, *Comics as Culture* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 140, 141; Ron Goulart, *The Great Comic Book Artists* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 94.
3. Brown, "Coming of Superman," ed. Peter Nicholls, *The Science Fiction Encyclopedia* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1979), 581-83; E. Nelson Bridwell, "Introduction," *Superman: From the Thirties to the Seventies* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1971), 7-15. Also see David B. Guralnik, "Superstar, Supermom, Super Glue, Superdooper, Superman," in *Superman at Fifty*, 103-107.
4. Steve M. Barkin, "Fighting the Cartoon War: Information Strategies in World War II," *Journal of American Culture* (Spring/Summer 1984), 113-117. On racism in the Pacific War, see John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986)

5. OWI, "When Radio Writes for War," quoted in Elaine Lu, "Antithetical Self-Identification and Yellow Peril: Chinese and Japanese Stereotypes in American Comic Art, 1869-1949," unpublished senior thesis, Department of History, Stanford University, 1989, 64.
6. John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976), 21-39; Allan M. Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942-1945*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1978).
7. Superman comic book cover cited in Lu, "Antithetical Self-Identification," 70.
8. *Washington Post*, October 13, 1987, B6; Marshall to Edith Nash, October 21, 1987, Box 1, Memoir: "Science, Politics and Human Values," Nash Files. On other fronts, Nash actively opposed discrimination. He opposed segregation in the armed services, civil service, and education. He and his wife opened one of the first racially integrated schools in the Washington, D. C. area in 1945.
9. *Chicago Herald American*, September 21, 1942, 1.
10. Gary Okihito, "Japanese Resistance in America's Concentration Camps: A Re-evaluation," *Amerasia Journal* 2:1 (1973): 20-34.
11. War Relocation Authority, "Evacuee Resistances to Relocation," Community Analysis Report No. 5, June 1943, Nash Papers.
12. Richard Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps: Dillon S. Myer and American Racism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 64; Roger Daniels, *Asian American: Chinese and Japanese in the United States Since 1850* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1988), 250; Peter Irons, *Justice at War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 201, 207-210.
13. Irons, *Justice at War*, 214-216; *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 1943, Part I, 10.
14. Nash to Hoyt, June 28, 1943.
15. Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps*, 63-64, 266-269.
16. Nash to Hoyt, June 28, 1943.
17. Franklin Roosevelt created the Office of War Information in June 1942. Its top officials included Elmer Davis a veteran journalist, Archibald MacLeish, Robert Sherwood, Milton Eisenhower, and Gardner Cowles, Jr. The staff of the OWI was an uneasy amalgam of liberal intellectuals who wanted the OWI to play an education role in informing the American public about the aims, ideals, and realities of the war and Madison Avenue executives who wanted to apply their advertising methods to wartime propaganda. The advertisers eventually triumphed. Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 30-39; Polenberg, *War and Society*, 53-54.
18. Handwritten memo, Jan Allen to Nash, n. d. and n. a., Nash Files, Box 23, OWI Files—Alphabetical Files.
19. Cable, Lewis to McCloy, July 1, 1943 and Anderson to McCloy, June 30, 1943 in Nash Files, Box 23, OWI Files—Alphabetical Files.