

Manga and Japanese History

Illustrating the Asia-Pacific War: Propaganda Comics,
Graphic Autobiography, and Demands for Accountability

“The outbreak of the war . . . had clarified the Japanese character, whose basic traits were brightness, strength, and unrighteousness. These qualities made the Japanese ‘the most superior race in the world.’”

-John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*



Japan Times supplement, 1934

“At the everyday level, purification was understood to mean (1) expunging foreign influences, (2) living austerely, and (3) fighting and, if need be, dying for the emperor.”

-John Dower, *War Without Mercy*

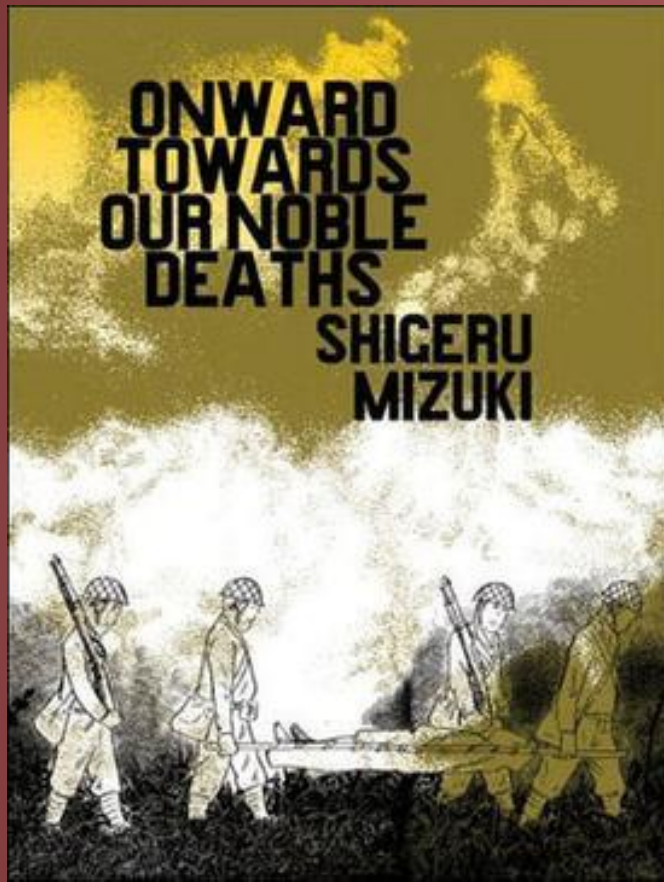


“Purging One’s Head of Anglo-Americanism” (*Manga*, 1942)



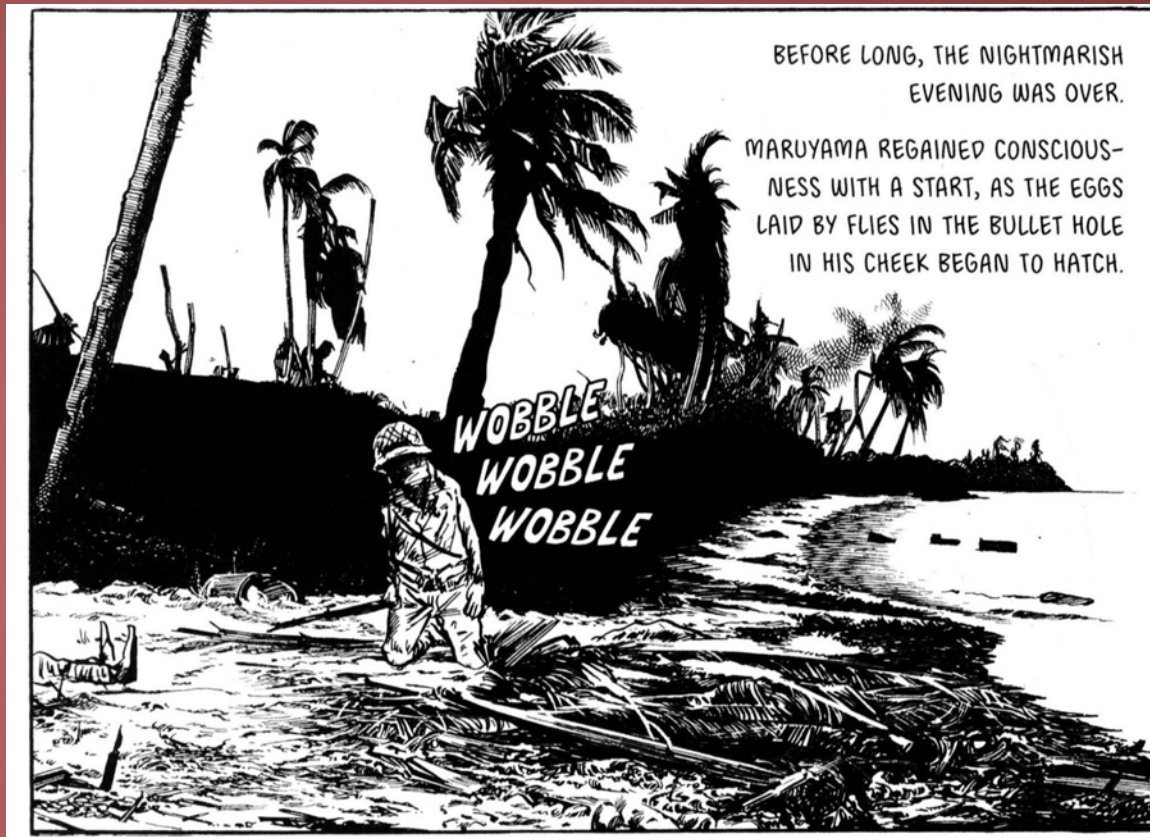
"Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere"

"India, now is the time to rise up!": John Bull, a personification of Britain, shackles Indians as he is stabbed by a Japanese flag reading "Greater East Asian War" (*Osaka Puck*, 1942).



**ONWARD
TOWARDS
OUR NOBLE
DEATHS**

**SHIGERU
MIZUKI**



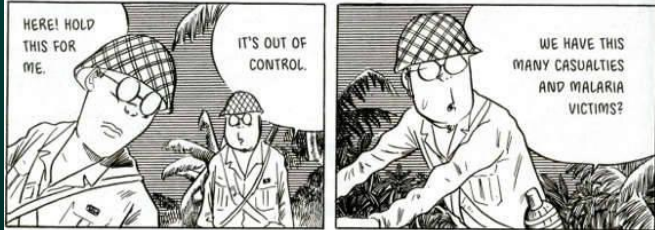
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MARUYAMA REGAINED CONSCIOUS-
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IN HIS CHEEK BEGAN TO HATCH.

**WOBBLE
WOBBLE
WOBBLE**

Remembering the War:
A Japanese Veteran's Illustrated Autobiography (1973)

Myth vs. Reality of Japan's "Holy War": Shigeru Mizuki's Not-so-Noble Deaths



Survivors of Japanese Imperial Violence Confront Historical Revisionism

- testimonies of 'comfort women' survivors
- Japanese soldiers testimonies and journals
- official and military related documents
- ▲ witness testimonies and others



Left: "There was no forced coercion of comfort women!"
 Right: "Japan should apologize and pay reparations!"
 South Korean newspaper *The Chosun Ilbo* (2007)

Reading + Discussion Questions

Based on John Dower's "The Pure Self," what were some prominent features of Japanese discourses on race during WWII? How did these notions of race compare/contrast with Euro-American ones? How were they used to legitimize Japanese imperialism in the Pacific?

How do Japanese wartime manga reflect the racialized imperial worldview described by Dower? In particular, how do these images use racial and ethnic constructs to reify the fantasy of an Asian "Co-Prosperity Sphere" equipped to stave off Western imperialism?

How does Shigeru Mizuki's graphic novel *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths* engage with the memory of WWII in the Pacific? Consider in particular how this veteran artist uses realism to unpack the myths versus the realities of the Japanese imperial project.

Based on this unit, what is the value of centering manga in the study of historical events and their memory? What insights do manga (and by extension, other popular media) provide that more traditional primary source materials might not?