

HOW YOU LOOK TO THE JAPS



DO YOU believe that the Japanese launched their attack as a form of national suicide? If so, you're wrong. They have dared to attack the most powerful nation in the world simply because they believe our national characteristics prove us to be vulnerable.

To know what the Japs really think of us you have to live among them. You have to have a little house in Tokyo, employ native servants, buy from the local grocer, know your district policeman, travel a lot on busses, tramcars, and in taxis. Drink with your Japanese friend in little Ginza bars and escort him home afterward so he won't lose "face" with the little woman, who invariably waits up for him; work with him or for him, and—here comes the rub—try to sell him an idea. If your idea is thoroughly American he will get a little mad, and you will catch a glimpse of what he really thinks of Americans.

During two years in the "flowery kingdom" under commission by the Japanese Foreign Office to make photographs of "the true Japanese life," I had an unusual opportunity to learn their point of view and their feeling toward us. Talking with all kinds of people, from the then Prime Minister, Prince Konoye, in the home of whose brother I lived for three months, to my taxi driver, I gathered that the Japanese national opinion of Americans can be summed up like this:

THEY think we are soft, wasteful, irreverent, and stupid. They credit us with being sincere, as opposed to the English, whom they hold to be full of guile and treachery. But our sincerity, in their eyes, is a kind of naïveté which, in the face of our stupidity, cannot count for much.

Since most of the people in Japan have never left their native shores, about all they know of us is what they see in the movies. And to them it is a curious picture. They see us as completely lacking in the qualities which are the very sinew of their strength.

Japanese people work hard all the time. They have to in order to exist.

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And their industries have been organized to that end. For instance, manufacturing operations have been broken down into an infinite number of subdivisions which can be installed in the home, so that the work can be carried on continuously. This means long hours and cheap labor. No wonder the Japanese, seeing newsreels of American laborers driving to an eight-hour day's work and back to an evening by the radio, brand us as soft.

Another American characteristic which violates all Japanese principles is our wastefulness. To 70,000,000 people cooped up in an area less than that of California, thriftiness is next to godliness. And it follows that in their eyes we who waste must be good for nothing.

MOST serious of all to the Japanese is their belief that we have no spiritual quality, no sense of honor. For centuries they have been taught reverence for the head of the family, the policeman, the local great men, the ministers of state, and, above all, the God-Emperor, from whom stems all spirituality. Our pictures of gangsters defying the law, of unruly election crowds, of children "sassing" their parents, are proof to the Japanese that we are lacking in reverence and respect.

They see it as proof, too, that we certainly cannot be brave. Because, to the Japanese, bravery comes through a dedication of oneself to spiritual ideals. When they sank the Panay they waited in fear and trembling for our declaration of war, and, when all we asked was money to save our national honor, they believed they had our number. When they jumped us at Pearl Harbor it was not treachery to them—"How can you be treacherous to a nation without honor or the warrior spirit?" It was a measure of their contempt for us.

And then the Japanese think we are stupid—stupid because we cannot see that they are eventually going to conquer China and that we should back the winning horse. They claim that Japan has always been a better customer of ours than China and that we would make more money out of a triumphant Japan governing a well-ordered East Asia than from an always venal China. They are sure we are stupid, because we are not true to their conception of America. If money is our God, why should we hesitate to grab the chance they offer us to make more and more money?



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The Japanese do not minimize the strength of our resources and our wealth. They see the job ahead as hard and long, full of sacrifice and suffering. But, because of their conception of our national character, they believe there can be only one outcome—victory for their side.

AND so it is time we stopped and asked ourselves: What kind of people are we really? Are we so soft and wasteful that we cannot match the Japanese in industry and thrift? Above all, are we so lacking in spiritual ideals that we cannot dedicate ourselves to the national honor?

It's up to us to prove that there is something wrong with the Japanese picture of us, if we hope to win this war and the peace to follow.

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THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE

OldMagazineArticles.com