

Institute of Humanities and Creative Arts Research Seminar

‘Pathologies of War:

The Medical Model of the German and Japanese Enemy in World War II’

This paper considers one aspect of my wider comparative analysis of expert American wartime assessments which examines how the US government created representations of the German and Japanese enemies, with particular emphasis on the “pathologies” of Japanese and German culture, mind, and nature. This approach is premised on a key interpretive framework that shaped the American approach to both the German and Japanese enemy and the postwar world: the medical model of diagnosis, prognosis, and cure. As Franklin Delano Roosevelt argued in his 6 January 1942 State of the Union address: ‘We are fighting to cleanse the world of ancient evils, ancient ills.’¹ In response to the seemingly unfathomable “diseases” of Nazism and Ultrationalism in the case of Japan, concerned parties arrived at the unexpected conclusion that nations could be analyzed on the same basis as individuals. This “knowledge elite’s” efforts led to a focus on three fundamental aspects when seeking a diagnosis:

1. culture (in this context, the search for common aspects that would characterize differing peoples by their cultures),
2. mind (meaning an understanding of the “mentality” of the enemy), and
3. nature (meaning the search for inborn or inherent qualities that would provide the explanation).

This model not only provides coherence for the purpose of analysis, but also cements my position that the key interpretation of the German and Japanese “problems” was that they were diseased. The symptoms of the German and Japanese diseases were as follows: paranoia,

¹ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, ‘Address to Congress on the State of the Union, January 6 1942’ in Samuel I. Rosenman (ed.), *Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Volume 11: Humanity on the Defensive, 1942* (New York: Random House, 1938-1950), p. 41.

neurosis, aggression, an inferiority complex, dualism, repression, megalomania, compulsive behavior, sado-masochism, conformity and automation. In spite of the fact that Japan and Germany were very different countries, the proponents of the medical model viewed them as comparable cases. The medical model made the “problem” of Germany and Japan understandable through a series of processes. First, the enemy was characterized as diseased and a diagnosis regarding the causes of this disease was advanced. Second, a prognosis and proposed treatment was provided; and finally, a cure was planned.