“For Heaven’s Sake Do Not Embarrass the Administration"

https://www.harpweek.com/09Cartoon/BrowseByDateCartoon-Large.asp?Month=November&Date=10

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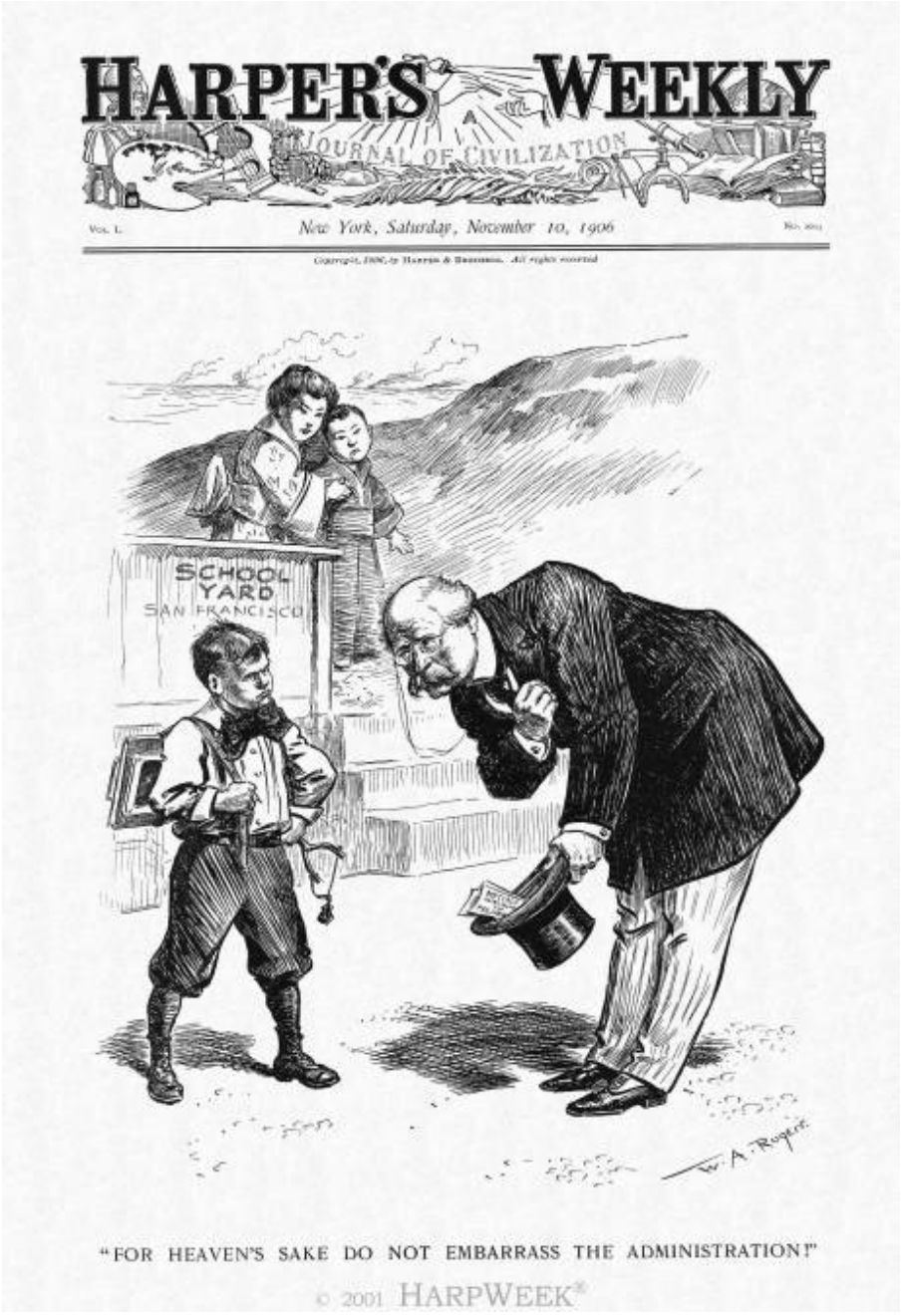

Complete HarpWeek Explanation:

On October 11, 1906, the San Francisco Board of Education ordered that Japanese students in the city's public schools henceforth be taught in racially segregated schools. The announcement sparked a diplomatic crisis between Japan and the United States, prompting President Theodore Roosevelt to send Commerce and Labor Secretary Victor Metcalf, a native Californian, to San Francisco in an effort to persuade the school board to change its decision. The cartoon's caption beseeches the cabinet officer not to embarrass the Roosevelt Administration, and the illustration indicates how that could be done. In the cartoon, Metcalf bows deeply to a white schoolboy, whose pugnacious glare and slingshot mark him as a troublemaker. In the background, a Japanese mother endeavors to lead her child (both dressed in traditional kimonos) to safety.

An editorial in the same issue of *Harper's Weekly* suggested that an appropriate retaliation for the Japanese would be to open a school of manners for white American students. The writer blamed the influential "hoodlum" element in San Francisco for that city's maltreatment of the Japanese and other East Asians. He traced the problem to a "period of impaired restraint and interrupted moral influence" during the area's boom-town beginning: "from 1849 to 1870 or later [,] San Francisco was probably the worst city for a boy to grow up in that there was in the United States." The editorialist then took a swipe at publisher William Randolph Hearst, a San Francisco native who was running for governor of New York in 1906. "The mental and moral detachment of Mr. Hearst from all standards … has long been noticeable to observers. He was born in San Francisco about 1864, and … [t]hat such a product of the San Francisco Sixties would be running for Governor of New York is a most curious example of the tricks that Fate may play."

With the emergence of Japan as the dominant power in the Far East at the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, tensions rose between the United States and Japan over issues of trade and, especially, immigration. White Americans on the Pacific Coast had long been hostile to immigrants from East Asia who were considered to be unfairly taking jobs away from American citizens and inassimilable into American society. In the late-nineteenth century, adverse attention had focused on the Chinese, resulting in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which barred Chinese immigration to the United States, a series of anti-Chinese riots in 1885-1886, and other discriminatory laws and actions.

In the 1890s, there were some calls for the exclusion law to be extended to the Japanese, but Japanese immigration remained relatively small and largely ignored as a distinct phenomena. The situation changed abruptly in 1905 after the Russo-Japanese War, and was exacerbated when the devastating earthquake of April 1906 heightened racial tensions and violence in San Francisco. The California legislature adopted a resolution

urging Congress to enact stricter immigration laws, a Japanese-Korean Exclusion League was established, the *San Francisco Chronicle* began an anti-Japanese campaign in its newspaper, the San Francisco school board announced its segregation plan, labor unions organized boycotts of Japanese businesses, and prominent leaders in the city's Japanese community were physically assaulted.

Japan was insulted by school board's directive, so its ambassador lodged an official complaint with the U.S. State Department in late October 1906. President Roosevelt convened a cabinet meeting on October 26, at which he dispatched Commerce and Labor Secretary Metcalf to San Francisco. The president assured Japan that he would do everything in his power to protect the rights of Japanese residents in the United States. In November, Metcalf met adamant resistance from the San Francisco school board, which refused to consider changing or reversing its segregation decision. The administration realized that the state courts were likely to support's the board's authority.

In his annual message to Congress on December 4, 1906, President Roosevelt labeled the school segregation order a "wicked absurdity," asked Congress to grant citizenship to those Japanese immigrants who wanted it, and vowed to protect the rights of all Japanese residents in the United States. Reaction to the message was largely negative. Newspapers in California insisted the school board would not (and should not) budge, the California congressional delegation protested vehemently to the president, and Southern Democrats expressed their dislike of federal intervention in local school affairs (since Southern schools were already racially segregated).

Roosevelt concluded that situation required him to do accomplish three things: 1) to alleviate the perceived (if unjustified) root cause by restricting the immigration of Japanese laborers to the United States; 2) to placate the Japanese so that cordial relations between the two countries could resume; and, 3) to prepare the U.S. Navy for possible action if hostilities escalated (several war scares erupted during the negotiations). Complicating matters, the Japanese refused to reach a settlement until the school order was rescinded, and California officials would not reverse the segregation plan until immigration was curtailed.

In early 1907, the president began working out the details for what was be termed the "Gentleman's Agreement" with Japan. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, a personal friend and key congressional supporter of Roosevelt, added an amendment to an immigration bill that gave the president the authority to ban any foreign individual's entry to the U.S. if the admission would adversely affect labor conditions. Despite Southern Democratic opposition, the bill passed in February 1907. In early March, the Roosevelt administration convinced Japan to issue passports only to those going to Hawaii. With the new immigration restrictions adopted, the San Francisco school board reversed its segregation order.

The Gentlemen's Agreement seemed to resolve the conflict for a time, but anti-Japanese rioting broke out in San Francisco in late May 1907. Local police halted further violence, but Japan was angered and newspapers in both countries ignited another war scare. In June, Roosevelt ordered the American fleet to the Pacific and requested military officials to draft war contingency plans. To ease Japanese fears, the fleet movement was labeled a practice cruise, and government officials in Japan and the United States were able to cool the war fever.

It was clear, however, that immigration from Japan was continuing at about the same level as before the agreement. The Roosevelt administration renewed its pressure on Japan, which included a visit from Secretary of War William Howard Taft in September 1907. By early the next year, Japan agreed to tighten their emigration procedures and to halt the immigration of laborers to Hawaii. Immigration from Japan to the United States fell steeply in 1908, and the improving relationship between the two nations was embodied that November in the Root-Takahira agreement, which sought to secure peaceful trade in the Pacific. Still, it took direct pressure from President Roosevelt in the last months of his presidency to prevent the California legislature from enacting a state school segregation measure and a law against restricting Japanese landownership.

Robert C. Kennedy