

## A Closer Look at Gene Stratton-Porter and *Her Father's Daughter*



Gene Stratton-Porter, author of *Her Father's Daughter*

When Gene Stratton-Porter published *Her Father's Daughter* in 1921, she was, unbeknownst to anyone else, the civil-rights activist of her day. But her method differed from the ways of those who followed. While the civil-rights leader Martin Luther King changed racial attitudes by appealing directly to white Americans themselves, thereby coming into conflict with their cultural prejudices, Gene Stratton-Porter made a subtle appeal to mothers-to-be while they were still children: she entered the hearts and minds of twelve-year-old girls who would become the mothers of the next generation of Americans, and from her grave she would dictate the racial attitude of America for generations to come.

To modern readers, it appears that Gene Stratton-Porter, in *Her Father's Daughter*, exhibited racism in the extreme. But a careful analysis of this seminal work reveals just the opposite—that she was a leader, ahead of her time, in promoting an egalitarian regard for other races in a world where this was rare. And she handled this challenge with a finesse never before found and never since seen in the annals of the printed word.

Gene Stratton-Porter instilled into the developing minds of young girls, destined to become mothers, ideas that these mothers-to-be would pass on to their own children, so that the next generation of Americans would have a more enlightened racial attitude. Thus, she created respect for minority races and built the foundation upon which minority civil rights could actually be realized by her successors. And she did this with a complex array of interwoven subliminal suggestions operating at many levels of the subconscious mind.

It is one thing to be told a new idea contradicting what you were taught when you were a child and to accept the new idea intellectually. It is something quite apart to have that same new idea made a part of your upbringing. In the first case, intellectual acceptance does not give rise to change in a deeply ingrained attitude. In the second case, the desired attitude is instilled during childhood, so that it will override attitudes of the previous generation. This principle is exemplified by the attitude associated with the caste system in India, an attitude that has not been eradicated by legislation and intellectual arguments. It has been so deeply embedded into the minds of the masses by their parents that it cannot be erased by logical argument, and not enough is being done to instill a more modern attitude at an early age. So it will take many generations to get rid of the old attitude about caste, if that can ever even be done.

Changing deeply embedded cultural attitudes is an almost-impossible undertaking. But Gene Stratton-Porter did just that.

In order to understand the workings of her mind, as revealed in her writing, one must first look at the racial attitude prevailing in her day: in the late

nineteenth century, it was commonly believed that East-Asian peoples were of inferior intelligence compared to the white man.

An illustration of that racial attitude is found in a headline in *The New York Times* in 1901 that read, “Chinese Shoot Straight.” This story revealed that, contrary to popular belief, Chinese soldiers actually had enough intelligence to align the sights of a rifle well enough to shoot straight on the battlefield. The existence of this level of intelligence in East Asians was such a surprise to western newspaper readers that it became headline news.

And in that era, Down syndrome was referred to as Mongoloid idiocy, a medical term based on an ethnic-classification theory that related head shape to intellectual capabilities. That theory, which was part of the medical science of the day, led to the belief that, because of the shape of their heads, East Asians were of low intelligence.

It was in this attitudinal environment that Gene Stratton-Porter wrote *Her Father's Daughter*, a novel in which the student standing at the top of the senior class in a Los Angeles high school was Japanese!

In order to overcome the shock, in order to overcome the outrage that this affront to common sense would cause readers of the day, it was necessary to introduce, into the story, inconsequential, commonplace racial remarks to avoid alienating intelligent, civilized Americans, and thereby jeopardizing her goal: to get her readers to regard East Asians as having human intelligence like the white man.

Gene Stratton-Porter makes the top student Japanese to suggest that East Asians are as intelligent as western peoples, and she cloaks this seemingly preposterous suggestion in a scholastic-contest subplot inlaid with unusually harsh racial comments uttered mainly by the lead character Linda Strong, a high-school junior. These harsh racial comments were a necessary part of her strategy to infuse the reader with an egalitarian racial attitude. By creating a struggle between the races, she was able to end up with the white student winning the

battle against the Japanese student, but with the Japanese race ending up intellectually equal to the white race in the mind of the reader. If she had created a story that extolled the intellectual equality of the Japanese with whites, the reader would have scoffed at what would have been perceived as ludicrous, because it would have violated the common attitude of the times, and her attempt to create an egalitarian racial attitude would have failed. But, by displaying antagonism toward the Japanese, and by warning of the great danger they presented to the white race, she was able to make the reader accept everything she said about the intellectual capabilities of the Japanese.

In order to induce the reader to adopt the opinions expressed by the lead character, she elevates the rank of authority-figure Linda Strong, the “positively incandescent heroine” of the story, by words like:

“When Linda laughed, which was very seldom, those within hearing turned to look at her. Hers was not a laugh that can be achieved. There were a few high places on the peak of Linda’s soul, and on one of them homed a small flock of notes of rapture; notes as sweet as the voice of the white-banded mockingbird of Argentina.”

And she adds to this authority-image by providing her with an illustrious father: the man “who was the author of a half-dozen books that have been translated into many foreign tongues, and are used as authorities all over the world”—a father who is “exactly like Linda.”

Throughout the story she builds up the image of the heroine to give her maximum authority in the eyes of the young girls who will read this book. She displays Linda Strong as an adventurous girl who drives her *Bear Cat* fast. Her readers knew how exciting a *Stutz Bear Cat* was. Look at this picture, and you will too:



The top white student in the senior class, Donald Whiting, “one of the most brilliant and popular seniors of the high school,” enhances her authority by saying to her:

“Well, there is one thing you don’t take into consideration,” said Donald.

“All of us did not happen to be fathered by Alexander Strong. Maybe we haven’t all got your brains.”

Next, to prepare for the struggle between the races, Gene Stratton-Porter raises the estimation of the Japanese in the eyes of the reader by characterizing them as a great threat to the white race. To do this, Gene Stratton-Porter adds to the scholastic struggle--she accentuates the top position of the Japanese student, Oka Sayye, by describing Donald’s reaction to Linda Strong’s complaint about a “Jap” standing at the head of the class with:

“An angry red rushed to the boy’s face. It was an irritating fact that in the senior class of that particular Los Angeles high school a

Japanese boy stood at the head. This was embarrassing to every senior.”

Linda Strong adds to this by challenging this top white student with:

“a boy as big as you and as strong as you and with as good brain and your opportunities has allowed a little brown Jap to cross the Pacific Ocean and in a totally strange country to learn a language foreign to him, and, with the same books and the same chances, to beat you at your own game. You and every other boy in your classes ought to be thoroughly ashamed of yourselves.”

Next, Gene Stratton-Porter equalizes the struggle by lowering the estimation of the top white student in the eyes of the reader, thereby characterizing the Japanese as strong competition to the white race. She does this by portraying Donald Whiting as lost and in need of leadership and ideas from Linda Strong to help him beat the Japanese student:

“I’ll do anything in the world if you will only tell me how,” said Donald. “Maybe you think it isn’t grinding me and humiliating me properly. Maybe you think Father and Mother haven’t warned me. Maybe you think Mary Louise [his sister] isn’t secretly ashamed of me. How can I beat him, Linda?”

Here, Donald Whiting, despite being “one of the most brilliant and popular seniors of the high school,” shows a weakness that subliminally suggests that the white man, even at his very best, is not intellectually superior to the Japanese.

To further strengthen the image of the Japanese, Gene Stratton-Porter uses the following exchange, begun by this top white student:

“Dad is a Harvard man, you know, and that is where he’s going to send me, and in talking about it the other night I told him about you, and what you had said to me. He’s the greatest old scout, and was mightily interested.

He went at once and opened a box of books in the garret and dug out some stuff that will be a big help to me. He's going to keep posted and see what he can do; he said even worse things to me than you did; so you needn't feel that you have any responsibility; besides that, it's not proved yet that I can beat Oka Sayye."

"Yes, it is!" said Linda, sending a straight level gaze deep into his eyes.  
"Yes, it is! Whenever a white man makes up his mind what he's going to do, and puts his brain to work, he beats any man, of any other colour. Sure you're going to beat him."

"Fat chance I have not to," said Donald, laughing ruefully. "If I don't beat him I am disgraced at home, and with you; before I try very long in this highly specialized effort I am making, every professor in the high school and every member of my class is bound to become aware of what is going on. You're mighty right about it. I have got to beat him or disgrace myself right at the beginning of my nice young career."

and

"you said I have to beat him with my brains, by doing better work than he does; so about the biggest thing I can honestly tell you is that I have held my own. I have only been ahead of him once this week, but I haven't failed in anything that he has accomplished. I have been able to put some additional touches to some work that he has done for which he used to be marked A which means your One Hundred. Double A which means your plus I made in one instance. And you needn't think that Oka Sayye does not realize what I am up to as well as any of the rest of the class, and you needn't think that he is not going to give me a run for my brain. All I've got will be needed before we finish this term."

These passages contain subliminal suggestions that the Japanese are a great challenge because of their great intellectual capabilities, and that, because

of this intellectual greatness, it will take a great effort for even the best white student to beat the “little brown Jap.”

Gene Stratton-Porter further weakens the best white student with,

“Linda’s eyes were narrowed to a mere line. She was staring at the wall back of Donald as if she hoped that Heaven would intercede in her favour and write thereon a line that she might translate to the boy’s benefit.”

and,

“there is a boy in high school who is making a great fight for a better scholarship record than a Jap in his class. I brood over it every spare minute, day or night, and when I say my prayers I implore high Heaven to send him an idea or to send me one that I can pass on to him, that will help him to beat that Jap.”

Here Gene Stratton-Porter suggests that only Heaven can help the white man, so lacking in creativity is he by himself, i.e., the creative white man needs divine assistance to make himself creative to achieve the supremacy to which he has a right.

And the relentless brooding, day and night, is a subliminal suggestion that the Japanese are so smart that beating them intellectually will entail enormous mental effort.

“I implore high Heaven to send him an idea ... to beat that Jap.” implies that the white man’s intelligence is not better, but that the white man needs help from Heaven to beat the Japanese intellectually.

Gene Stratton-Porter adds to this need, on the part of the best white student, with Linda saying to Donald:

“If your father helped you at one angle, it’s altogether probable that Peter Morrison could help you at another.”

Then, Gene Stratton-Porter states that the Japanese are merely imitative, but her statement, as follows, contains two internal elements to rebut this:

“I have been watching pretty sharply,” she said. “Take them as a race, as a unit—of course there are exceptions, there always are—but the great body of them are mechanical. They are imitative. They are not developing anything great of their own in their own country. They are spreading all over the world and carrying home sewing machines and threshing machines and automobiles and cantilever bridges and submarines and aeroplanes—anything from eggbeaters to telescopes. They are not creating one single thing. They are not missing imitating everything that the white man can do anywhere else on earth. They are just like the Germans so far as that is concerned.”

Here, the allegations of being merely imitative are countered by:

- (1) the qualification “of course there are exceptions, there always are”; and she later tells Donald how to outdo the Jap--by getting help from his father’s books, then from Peter Morrison’s books, and then from ideas she seeks to get from high Heaven by praying. So, the ability to be more than imitative is had by only a very few white people, since even the smartest in the class need help. So the “exceptions” among the Japanese, by implication, are as prevalent as the creative among the white race.
- (2) “They are just like the Germans so far as that is concerned.” Aren’t Germans part of the white race, and creative, too? Apparently not since the Great War (WWI). Today one sixth of the US population is partly German, and in 1921, when *Her Father’s Daughter* was published, the percentage was far higher. This internal contradiction in the above quotation is another subliminal suggestion used by Gene Stratton-Porter to show that the idea of the Japanese being just imitators is not valid, since they are “just like the Germans so far as that is concerned.”

Then, in response to Donald saying, “for God’s sake, Linda, tell me how I can beat that little cocoanut-headed Jap,” Gene Stratton-Porter gives us:

“Linda slammed down the lid to the lunch box. Her voice was smooth and even but there was battle in her eyes and she answered decisively: “Well, you can’t beat him calling him names. There is only one way on God’s footstool that you can beat him. You can’t beat him legislating against him. You can’t beat him boycotting him. You can’t beat him with any tricks. He is as sly as a cat and he has got a whole bag full of tricks of his own, and he has proved right here in Los Angeles that he has got a brain that is hard to beat. All you can do, and be a man commendable to your own soul, is to take his subject and put your brain on it to such purpose that you cut pigeon wings around him.”

The lofty attributes that the author has given Linda Strong give credibility and authority to her denunciations against anti-Japanese name-calling, legislating, boycotting, and tricks. And by slamming down the lid on the lunchbox and having battle in her eyes, and the anger implied thereby, she adds emphasis to the outrage that these odious activities should give rise to in the developing minds of the young readers of this book. And by referring to Earth as “God’s footstool” she adds a moral connotation to the behavioral advice that Linda Strong is giving. This passage under these circumstances will instill in any reader, particularly the young, a disinclination to advocate anti-Japanese name-calling, legislating, boycotting, or tricks, firstly because they won’t work, and secondly because they are immoral.

So, Linda Strong is advocating respect for the Japanese. In addition, she uses the phrase “commendable to your soul” to reaffirm that it is immoral to behave otherwise, and not befitting a member of our society. And the apparently negative accusations she uses reinforce the idea of intelligence: “sly as a cat” and “bag full of tricks.” So, under the guise of waging war against the Japanese, Gene Stratton-Porter is making a subliminal suggestion, at both a behavioral and a moral level, that respect for the Japanese is an essential element in that war.

This uplifting theme is enhanced by a later comment of Linda Strong about the Japanese:

“They won’t lay down their guns and walk to surrender as bunches of Germans did. Nobody need ever think that. They are as good fighters as they are imitators.”

This passage suggests that the Japanese are courageous, and it will increase the esteem in which they are held by readers. So, in this war against the Japanese, Gene Stratton-Porter is making a subliminal suggestion that the Japanese are worthy contenders in that war, and are worthy of our esteem.

Then, in a passage begun by Donald, we have:

“I think the little monkey—”  
“Man, you mean,” interposed Linda.  
“‘Man,’” conceded Donald.

Again, Gene Stratton-Porter is advocating respect for the Japanese.

Later in the story, Gene Stratton-Porter changes Donald’s attitude toward the Japanese student with:

“Looking for you,” he cried gaily when he saw her. “I’ve got my pry in on Trig. The professor’s interested. Dad fished out an old Trig that he used when he was a boy and I have some new angles that will keep my esteemed rival stirring up his gray matter for some little time.”

Donald’s appellation for the Japanese student changes from “the little monkey” to “Man” to “my esteemed rival.” This change is brought about by the exhortations of authority-figure Linda Strong, and is introduced to instill into the developing minds of young readers an inclination to renounce the use of degrading ethnic terms and to show proper respect for the Japanese.

Then, Gene Stratton-Porter introduces the coming war of the races with:

“I haven’t a doubt of it,” said Linda. “They [the Japanese] are quick; oh! they are quick; and they know from their cradles what it is that they have in the backs of their heads. We are not going to beat them driving them to Mexico or to Canada, or letting them monopolize China. That is merely temporizing. That is giving them fertile soil on which to take the best of their own and the level best of ours, and by amalgamating the two, build higher than we ever have. There is just one way in all this world that we can beat Eastern civilization and all that it intends to do to us eventually. The white man has dominated by his colour so far in the history of the world, but it is written in the Books that when the men of colour acquire our culture and combine it with their own methods of living and rate of production, they are going to bring forth greater numbers, better equipped for the battle of life, than we are. When they have got our last secret, constructive or scientific, they will take it, and living in a way that we would not, reproducing in numbers we don’t, they will beat us at any game we start, if we don’t take warning while we are in the ascendancy, and keep there.”

But this war-of-the-races concept is emasculated by the at-one-with-Nature concept introduced later in the story, as follows:

“Now what on earth do you mean by that?” inquired Donald.

“Why that is the very first lesson Daddy ever taught me when he took me to the mountains and the desert. If you are afraid, your system throws off formic acid, and the animals need only the suspicion of a scent of it to make them ready to fight. Any animal you encounter or even a bee, recognizes it. One of the first things that I remember about Daddy was seeing him sit on the running board of the runabout buckling up his desert boots while he sang to me,

*‘Let not your heart be troubled  
Neither let it be afraid,’*

as he got ready to take me on his back and go into the desert for our first lesson; he told me that a man was perfectly safe in going to the forest or the desert or anywhere he chose among any kind of animals if he had sufficient self-control that no odor of fear emanated from him. He said that a man was safe to make his way anywhere he wanted to go, if he started his journey by recognizing a blood brotherhood with anything living he would meet on the way; and I have heard Enos Mills say that when he was snow inspector of Colorado he traveled the crest of the Rockies from one end of the state to the other without a gun or any means of self-defense."

"Now, that is something new to think about," said Donald.

"And it's something that is very true," said Linda. "I have seen it work times without number. Father and I went quietly up the mountains, through the canyons, across the desert, and we would never see a snake of any kind, but repeatedly we would see men with guns and dogs out to kill, to trespass on the rights of the wild, and they would be hunting for sticks and clubs and firing their guns where we had passed never thinking of lurking danger. If you start out in accord, at one with Nature, you're quite as safe as you are at home, sometimes more so. But if you start out to stir up a fight, the occasion is very rare on which you can't succeed."

She then adds a conditional offer to fight the opposition:

"if Oka Sayye were having a fight with you and I were anywhere around, you'd have one friend who would help you to handle the Jap."

Gene Stratton-Porter is advocating peace, except under attack, which will never occur since it is not the Japanese who were the problem in California, but rather the racist white-supremacy advocates. In addition, she recognizes "a blood brotherhood with anything living," and that "if you start out in accord, at one with Nature, you're quite as safe as you are at home, sometimes more so. But if

you start out to stir up a fight, the occasion is very rare on which you can't succeed."

Why does Gene Stratton-Porter happen to be talking about avoiding conflicts with wild animals just before talking about defending oneself from Oka Sayye, "the Jap"? Although the story progresses logically as it is, one would normally introduce a discussion about justifiable conflict, with something that could detract from the immorality of the violence being advocated. The primary reason for the at-one-with-Nature passage is to instill in the subconscious mind of the reader a subliminal suggestion that will dispel prejudice, discrimination, and antagonism against the Japanese, but there is a secondary purpose: to create the feeling that violence is unnecessary so that the possible violence dealt with objectively will not be acted upon. She is making a secondary subliminal suggestion to the reader so that the reader will read the conditional (preceded by the word "if") exhortation to violence with an underlying disinclination to violence. So, the talk of defending oneself from Oka Sayye was introduced to mask a subliminal suggestion that will dispel prejudice, discrimination, and antagonism against the Japanese (an idea that might appear too favorable to the Japanese) with a call to battle that will not be acted upon, but nevertheless a call to battle that will prevent the reader from thinking that the author is pro-Japanese.

And from this at-one-with-Nature passage we can see that Gene Stratton-Porter recognizes "a blood brotherhood with everything living." And this passage makes a subliminal suggestion to the reader, at a philosophical level, that a blood brotherhood with everything living (including the Japanese) is an essential component of moral philosophy.

Gene Stratton-Porter enhances the intellect of the Japanese student by emphasizing how large the challenge is to beat him:

"I get that, all right enough," said Donald. "Now go on. What is your deduction? How the devil am I to beat the best? He is perfect, right straight along in everything."

The red in Linda's cheeks deepened. Her eyes opened their widest. She leaned forward, and with her closed fist, pounded the blanket before him.

"Then, by gracious," she said sternly, "you have got to do something new. You have got to be perfect, PLUS."

"Perfect, plus?" gasped Donald.

"Yes, sir!" said Linda emphatically. "You have got to be perfect, plus. If he can take his little mechanical brain and work a thing out till he has got it absolutely right, you have got to go further than that and discover something pertaining to it not hitherto thought of and start something NEW. I tell you you must use your brains. You should be more than an imitator. You must be a creator!"

Donald started up and drew a deep breath.

"Well, some job I call that," he said. "Who do you think I am, the Almighty?"

"No," said Linda quietly, "you are not. You are merely His son, created in His own image, like Him, according to the Book, and you have got to your advantage the benefit of all that has been learned down the ages. We have got to take up each subject in your course, and to find some different books treating this same subject. We have got to get at it from a new angle. We must dig into higher authorities. We have got to coach you till, when you reach the highest note possible for the parrot, you can go ahead and embellish it with a few mocking-bird flourishes. All Oka Sayye knows how to do is to learn the lesson in his book perfectly, and he is 100 per cent. I have told you what you must do to add the plus, and you can do it if you are the boy I take you for. People have talked about the 'yellow peril' till it's got to be a meaningless phrase. Somebody must wake up to the realization that it's the deadliest peril that ever has menaced white civilization. Why shouldn't you have your hand in such wonderful work?"

“Linda,” said the boy breathlessly, “do you realize that you have been saying ‘we’? Can you help me? Will you help me?”

“No,” said Linda, “I didn’t realize that I had said ‘we.’ I didn’t mean two people, just you and me. I meant all the white boys and girls of the high school and the city and the state and the whole world. If we are going to combat the ‘yellow peril’ we must combine against it. We have got to curb our appetites and train our brains and enlarge our hearts till we are something bigger and finer and numerically greater than this yellow peril. We can’t take it and pick it up and push it into the sea. We are not Germans and we are not Turks. I never wanted anything in all this world worse than I want to see you graduate ahead of Oka Sayye. And then I want to see the white boys and girls of Canada and of England and of Norway and Sweden and Australia, and of the whole world doing exactly what I am recommending that you do in your class and what I am doing personally in my own. I have had Japs in my classes ever since I have been in school, but Father always told me to study them, to play the game fairly, but to BEAT them in some way, in some fair way, to beat them at the game they are undertaking.”

“Well, there is one thing you don’t take into consideration,” said Donald. “All of us did not happen to be fathered by Alexander Strong. Maybe we haven’t all got your brains.”

While authority-figure Linda Strong extols the supremacy of the white race and proclaims the Japanese inability to do anything other than copy, Gene Stratton-Porter portrays the top white student as lost and seeking leadership and ideas from Linda Strong so that he can copy them in the way Linda Strong accuses the Japanese of doing. So, under the guise of advocating white supremacy, she is making a subliminal suggestion that the whites are having a tough time making their claim to supremacy, perhaps because they are not really trying, perhaps because they are not really supreme.

While talking about war of the races and the yellow peril, Gene Stratton-Porter introduces honorable ways to deal with them:

“There is. You can beat him, but you have got to beat him in an honourable way and in a way that is open to him as it is to you.”

and

“I have had Japs in my classes ever since I have been in school, but Father always told me to study them, to play the game fairly, but to *beat* them in some way, in some fair way, to beat them at the game they are undertaking.”

and

“We have brains, and with our brains we must do in a scientific way what Nature does with tooth and claw.”

and, to Judge Whiting,

“I appreciate his friendship, but it is not for my own interests that I am asking to have him taken care of while he wages his mental war with this Jap. I want Donald to have the victory, but I want it to be a victory that will be an inspiration to any boy of white blood among any of our allies or among peoples who should be our allies. There's a showdown coming between the white race and a mighty aggregation of coloured peoples one of these days, and if the white man doesn't realize pretty soon that his supremacy is not only going to be contested but may be lost, it just simply will be lost; that is all there is to it.”

These four passages will disincline readers against unfairness. The reader is led to believe that the honorable and intelligent thing to do is to be fair--to be “an inspiration to any boy of white blood among any of our allies or among peoples who should be our allies.” And the exhortation to beat them is a

subliminal suggestion that they are a real challenge because they are as smart as the white race.

Then she adds:

“If California does not wake up very shortly and very thoroughly she is going to pay an awful price for the luxury she is experiencing while she pampers herself with the service of the Japanese, just as the South has pampered herself for generations with the service of the negroes. When the negroes learn what there is to know, then the day of retribution will be at hand.”

So, black people too are a challenge to the superior intelligence of the white people.

Gene Stratton-Porter even suggests that it may be dangerous to be unfair, with Linda Strong saying:

“in all my life I have never seen anything so masklike as the stolid little square head on that Jap. I have never seen anything I dislike more than the oily, stiff, black hair standing up on it like menacing bristles. I have never had but one straight look deep into his eyes, but in that look I saw the only thing that ever frightened me in looking into a man’s eyes in my whole life. And there is one thing that I have to remember to caution Donald about. He must carry on this contest in a perfectly open, fair, and aboveboard way, and he simply must not antagonize Oka Sayye. There are so many of the Japs. They all look so much alike, and there’s a blood brotherhood between them that will make them protect each other to the death against any white man. It wouldn’t be safe for Donald to make Oka Sayye hate him. He had far better try to make him his friend and put a spirit of honest rivalry into his heart; but come to think of it, there wasn’t anything like that in my one look into Oka Sayye’s eyes. I don’t know what it was, but whatever it was it was something repulsive.”

This negative image of the Japanese student is introduced into the story to preclude accusations of being pro-Japanese while being outside the experience of readers who did not see menacing bristles or frightening things whenever they have looked at Japanese students. So, this passage will incline readers to be hostile only to those Japanese who have a frightening look in their eyes or menacing hair, i.e., none at all. In addition, the term “blood brotherhood” used in this passage is also found in a later passage where Linda Strong extols the virtue of having a “blood brotherhood” with anything living. So, by creating a glowing patina on the term “blood brotherhood,” that later passage contradicts and counteracts, in a subliminal manner, the apparently threatening aspect of the “blood brotherhood” among the Japanese.

Gene Stratton-Porter also discusses the war of the races with:

“If the homemakers of this country don’t get the idea into their heads pretty soon that they are not going to be able to hold their own with the rest of the world, with no children, or one child in the family, there’s a sad day of reckoning coming. With the records at the patent office open to the world, you can’t claim that the brain of the white man is not constructive. You can look at our records and compare them with those of countries ages and ages older than we are, which never discovered the beauties of a Dover egg-beater or a washing machine or a churn or a railroad or a steamboat or a bridge. We are head and shoulders above other nations in invention, and just as fast as possible, we are falling behind in the birth rate. The red man and the yellow man and the brown man and the black man can look at our egg-beaters and washing machines and bridges and big guns, and go home and copy them; and use them while rearing even bigger families than they have now. If every home in Lilac Valley had at least six sturdy boys and girls growing up in it with the proper love of country and the proper realization of the white man’s right to supremacy, and if all the world now occupied by white men could make an equal record, where would be the talk of the yellow peril? There wouldn’t be any yellow peril. You see what I mean?”

Later, Gene Stratton-Porter continues the war-of-the-races idea with:

"Peter opened a packing case, picked out a sheaf of papers, and sitting opposite Linda, began to read. He was dumbfounded to find that he, a man who had read and talked extemporaneously before great bodies of learned men, should have cold feet and shaking hands and a hammering heart because he was trying to read an article on America for Americans before a high-school Junior. But presently, as the theme engrossed him, he forgot the vision of Linda interesting herself in his homemaking, and saw instead a vision of his country threatened on one side by the red menace of the Bolshevik, on the other by the yellow menace of the Jap, and yet on another by the treachery of the Mexican and the slowly uprising might of the black man, and presently he was thundering his best-considered arguments at Linda until she imperceptibly drew back from him on the packing case, and with parted lips and wide eyes she listened in utter absorption. She gazed at a transformed Peter with aroused eyes and a white light of patriotism on his forehead, and a conception even keener than anything that the war had brought her young soul was burning in her heart of what a man means when he tries to express his feeling concerning the land of his birth. Presently, without realizing what she was doing, she reached for her pad and pencils and rapidly began sketching a stretch of peaceful countryside over which a coming storm of gigantic proportions was gathering. Fired by Peter's article, the touch of genius in Linda's soul became creative and she fashioned huge storm clouds wind driven, that floated in such a manner as to bring the merest suggestion of menacing faces, black faces, yellow faces, brown faces, and under the flash of lightning, just at the obscuring of the sun, a huge, evil, leering red face. She swept a stroke across her sheet and below this she began again, sketching the same stretch of country she had pictured above, strolling in cultivated fields, dotting it with white cities, connecting it with smooth roadways, sweeping the sky with giant planes. At one side, winging in from the glow of morning, she drew in the strong-winged flight of a flock of sea swallows,

peacefully homing toward the far-distant ocean. She was utterly unaware when Peter stopped reading. Absorbed, she bent over her work. When she had finished she looked up."

The "huge, evil, leering red face" is obviously the North American Indian, particularly since Linda Strong earlier complained that the "red man and the yellow man and the brown man and the black man can look at our egg-beaters and washing machines and bridges and big guns, and go home and copy them;" but she later makes further comment about the red race:

"Our North American Indians in their original state were as fine as any peoples that ever have been discovered the round of the globe. My grandfather came into intimate contact with them in the early days, and he said that their religion, embracing the idea of a great spirit to whom they were responsible for their deeds here, and a happy hunting ground to which they went as a reward for decent living, was as fine as any religion that ever has been practiced by people of any nation. Immorality was unknown among them. Family ties were formed and they were binding. They loved their children and reared them carefully. They were hardy and healthful. Until the introduction of whiskey and what we are pleased to term civilized methods of living, very few of them died save from war or old age. They were free; they were happy. The moping, lazy, diseased creature that you find sleeping in the sun around the reservations is a product of our civilization. Nice commentary on civilization, isn't it?"

So, the "red man" and the "huge, evil, leering red face" really represent a fine breed of people after all, perhaps more supreme than the whites of white-supremacy fame.

This commendation of North American Indians is a subliminal suggestion introduced to emasculate the passages earlier in the novel about the "red man and the yellow man and the brown man and the black man" relating to the "yellow peril," and the "menacing faces, black faces, yellow faces, brown faces, and under the flash of lightning, just at the obscuring of the sun, a huge, evil,

leering red face” relating to the drawing Linda Strong did for Peter Morrison’s patriotic diatribe. And “a product of our civilization” refers to white supremacy and the white man in North America, and this reference emasculates “the white man’s right to supremacy” raised earlier in the story by Linda Strong.

Then, Gene Stratton-Porter defuses the intellectual conflict by making the Japanese student a well-educated adult:

“Well, that’s all right,” he [Donald Whiting] said heartily. “You can write me down as willing and anxious to take all the help I can get, for it’s going to be no microscopic job, that I can tell you. One week has waked up the Jap to the fact that there’s something doing, and he’s digging in and has begun, the last day or two, to speak up in class and suggest things himself. Since I’ve been studying him and watching him, I have come to the conclusion that he is much older than I am. Something he said in class yesterday made me think he had probably had the best schooling Japan could give him before he came here. The next time you meet him look for a suspicion of gray hairs around his ears. He’s too blamed comprehensive for the average boy of my age. You said the Japs were the best imitators in the world and I have an idea in the back of my head that before I get through with him, Oka Sayye is going to prove your proposition.”

and

“From the settled solidity of his frame and the shape of his hands and the skin of his face and the set of his eyes in his head, I couldn’t see that much youth. I’ll bet he’s thirty if he’s a day, and I shouldn’t be a bit surprised if he has graduated at the most worthwhile university in Japan, before he ever came to this country to get his English for nothing.”

and later:

“his hair was as black as jet, dyed to a midnight, charcoal finish, and I am not right sure that he had not borrowed some girl’s lipstick and rouge pot

for the benefit of his lips and cheeks. Positively he's hectically youthful today."

Readers will know that this does not apply to their own situation, because they will be sure that no Japanese student in their class is much older than they are, and certainly not thirty years old. Nor would rouge or lipstick fool anyone, certainly not for the full school year.

Then, the Japanese student tries to eliminate Donald from the contest:

"with a grinding crash, down came the huge boulder, carrying bushes, smaller rocks, sand, and debris with it. On account of its weight it fell straight, struck heavily, and buried itself in the earth exactly on the spot upon which Donald had been lying. Linda raised terrified eyes to the top of the wall. For one instant a dark object peered over it and then drew back."

However, the end of Donald's contest comes with the demise of the Japanese student:

"At that minute from high on the mountain above them a shower of sand and pebbles came rattling down. Linda gave Katy one terrified look.

"My God!" she panted. "He's coming down right above us!"

"Just how Linda recrossed the bushes and reached Katy she did not know. She motioned for her to make her way back as they had come. Katy planted her feet squarely upon the rock. Her lower jaw shot out; her eyes were aflame. She stood perfectly still with the exception of motioning Linda to crowd back under the bushes, and again Linda realized that she had no authority; as she had done from childhood when Katy was in earnest, Linda obeyed her. She had barely reached the overhanging bushes, crouched under them, and straightened herself, when a small avalanche came showering down, and a minute later a pair of feet were level with her head. Then screened by the bushes, she could have reached out and touched Oka Sayye. As his feet found a solid resting place on the

ledge on which Linda and Katy stood, and while he was still clinging to the bushes, Katherine O'Donovan advanced upon him. He had felt that his feet were firm, let go his hold, and turned, when he faced the infuriated Irishwoman. She had pulled the strap from around her neck, slipped the axe from it, and with a strong thrust she planted the head of it against Oka Sayye's chest so hard that she almost fell forward. The Jap plunged backward among the bushes, the roots of which had supported Linda while she used the glasses. Then he fell, sliding among them, snatching wildly. Linda gripped the overhanging growth behind which she had been screened, and leaned forward.

“He has a hold; he is coming back up, Katy!” she cried.

“Katy took another step forward. She looked over the cliff down an appalling depth of hundreds of feet. Deliberately she raised the axe, circled it round her head and brought it down upon that particular branch to which Oka Sayye was clinging. She cut it through, and the axe rang upon the stone wall behind it. As she swayed forward Linda reached out, gripped Katy and pulled her back.

“Get him?” she asked tersely, as if she were speaking of a rat or a rattlesnake.”

Although this passage emphasizes hostility, the use of the nurse, rather than a student (“again Linda realized that she had no authority; as she had done from childhood when Katy was in earnest, Linda obeyed her”), as the wielder of the axe removes any suggestion of student violence against ethnic minorities, and since it is in response to an attack, it does not create hostility towards peaceful people.

The scholastic competition subplot ends with Linda Strong overhearing a professor at her school declaring Donald Whiting the winner:

“One thing I shall always be delighted about. With my own ears I heard the pronouncement: Donald had the Jap beaten; he was at the head of his class before Oka Sayye was eliminated. The Jap knew it. His only chance lay in getting rid of his rival.”

With *Her Father's Daughter*, Gene Stratton-Porter implemented an intricate pattern of interwoven strategies and tactics using subliminal suggestions operating as different levels of consciousness to eliminate racial prejudice, discrimination, and antagonism:

First level--behavior: renouncing name-calling, legislating, boycotting, and tricks;

Second level--morality: respect; fairness;

Third level--honor and esteem: perceived level of intelligence; recognition of courage;

Fourth level--philosophical ideas: brotherhood of all living creatures; being at one with Nature.

With subliminal suggestions, part of the reader's thinking is done by the subconscious mind, and the result is achieved without the reader even knowing consciously what happened. The reader thinks that she has adopted the combative attitude of Linda Strong, while she has really adopted the egalitarian racial attitude of Gene Stratton-Porter.

And how do we know that all this was done by subliminal suggestion? It is because not even the intelligentsia realized what happened or why. It was done below the threshold of consciousness--without the reader being aware of it. And its effectiveness can be seen by the egalitarian attitude Americans have about East-Asian peoples. No one has ever before seen the motive or method of Gene Stratton-Porter--until now.

Long before the Civil Rights movement arose, there was Gene Stratton-Porter, a silent activist before her time. She is acknowledged to be a conservationist before her time, but what people do not realize is that she started her own civil-rights movement without anyone knowing about it. And she did it without disturbing anyone. “Man, you mean” does not sound like much now, but it did then. She is the champion of civil rights, and no one ever noticed. She was so secretive at promoting her goal that it was reached with no one ever noticing that she was the one who brought it about. No one could oppose her because no one realized that a change was taking place. And her method was more effective than a direct appeal because she instilled her ideas into the minds of young girls who, as future mothers, would pass these ideas on to the next generation of Americans.

There were no wars, and no casualties other than her own reputation in the eyes of posterity, who regard her as having a racist attitude. Yet she laid the foundation and paved the way for the Civil Rights movement that arose decades later and that continued the job she had begun, when the young girls for whom she had written had borne and raised their children who would be part of a more receptive audience for the advocates of Civil Rights a generation later.

Many Americans look at their country and see it as the best country in the world. But few know why. It is because of the egalitarian racial attitude begun in America by Gene Stratton-Porter, an attitude found nowhere else until later. It is an attitude that fosters unity with diversity, a winning combination in which diversity generates creativity without being stifled by disunity. Diversity brings diverse ideas to all, and new ideas then arise from the combining of those diverse ideas. Unity allows these new ideas from diverse peoples to interact, serving one another, resulting in benefits to all. It is a winning combination found more in America than anywhere else on earth.

Aristotle said that the best race to be is the one prevalent in the country in which one is living. Until Gene Stratton-Porter and *Her Father's Daughter*, this was true everywhere. But it is not as true in America as it is in the rest of the

world, thanks to Gene Stratton-Porter and *Her Father's Daughter*. It is tolerance and racial harmony that promotes peace, prosperity, and happiness. And with the massive movements of peoples throughout the world today, this is more important than ever before. And in this area, America leads the world.

*Her Father's Daughter* set the stage for civil rights for all minorities, and American influence spreads civil rights throughout the world.

Gene Stratton-Porter took arguments found in contemporary diatribes against the East Asians and used them to present a glowing image of the abilities of the Japanese. The presentation of them as constituting a great intellectual threat prevents any reader from thinking that the Japanese are stupid (even though the yellow-peril conflict that existed in the minds of people of the day was not an intellectual contest, but rather a challenge that a low standard of living in the east gave rise to against the jobs of unskilled labor in the west).

Her reference to the “the slowly uprising might of the black man” and Linda Strong’s warning,

“If California does not wake up very shortly and very thoroughly she is going to pay an awful price for the luxury she is experiencing while she pampers herself with the service of the Japanese, just as the South has pampered herself for generations with the service of the negroes. When the negroes learn what there is to know, then the day of retribution will be at hand,”

is an indication of what Gene Stratton-Porter might have done had she not met an untimely death at the peak of her career. And it is an indication of what was ultimately to occur at the hands of those who followed and built upon the foundation that she had created.

One biographer writes, ‘As Stratton-Porter explained in “My Work and My Critics” (1916), “the task I set myself was to lead every human being I could influence afield; but with such reverence instilled into their touch that

devastation would not be ultimately complete.” She certainly encouraged her readers--female and male--to venture “afield,” and throughout her career she advocated a policy of conservation that was decades ahead of her time.<sup>1</sup> But it was not merely her feelings about conservation that were decades ahead of her time.

Though no longer widely read, *Her Father’s Daughter* has laid the foundation for a harmonious world; a foundation that is buried under, and hidden by, what continues to grow and be built upon it. And from her grave, secretly and silently, Gene Stratton-Porter dictates the racial attitude of America, and ultimately the world.

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Please email any comments you may have to

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Below are pictures of Gene Stratton-Porter from the age of ten years.



GENE STRATTON-PORTER