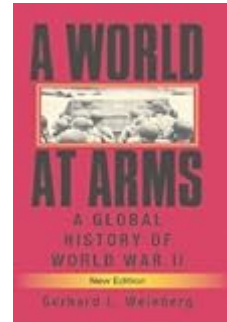




**Gerhard L. Weinberg.** *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005. xxix + 1178 pp. \$25.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-61826-7; \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-85316-3.



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## A Flawed Masterpiece

When Gerhard Weinberg's history of the Second World War appeared in 1994, it was widely recognized as a peerless one-volume work on the global conflict. With its extensive bibliographical essay and copious annotations (with citations of primary sources and relevant literature as well as consideration of significant issues that would have encumbered the readable text), the book offered the closest thing to a comprehensive-yet accessible-synthesis of a half century of international scholarship on the war. Like many academic colleagues, I was glad to be able to assign it as a basic text on the World War II era, even though there were mistakes (not surprising in a detailed study of over a thousand pages). I pointed these out to my students and looked forward to seeing them corrected in a second, revised edition.[1]

However, the second edition, as it is designated on the title page and in the copyright listing, turns out not to be a revision of the first. The cover of the paperback and the 2004 preface (pp. xiii-xxii) refer to it as a "new edition," but the book's main text, bibliographical essay, notes, maps and index were printed from the same plates as the first edition. A number of misspellings have indeed been

corrected by pasting in individual words, but changes that would have required resetting more than a few lines of type have evidently not been made. Consequently, the only thing that makes the reviewed book a "new edition" rather than a reprinting of the first edition with corrections is the ten-page preface from October 2004. Here Weinberg implicitly acknowledges that the second edition is unrevised, when he writes: "While there may be an opportunity to revise the book as a whole, in the meantime this is a good interval at which to point to some areas where either changes will be needed or new studies have reinforced the interpretation previously offered" (p. xiii). Two pages later he also acknowledges that "like most authors, I have not stressed sufficiently ... the general strategic significance for the course of the war on the Eastern Front" (p. xv). He does not elaborate on this point, but the issue and its implications have been addressed in a *New York Review of Books* article by Norman Davies.[2]

In the new preface, Weinberg updates his fine bibliographical essay on pp. 921-944, referring the reader to some forty works published since the original edition,

but writing, in a concluding footnote, that “there are, of course, large numbers of useful and important works that have been published in the last twelve years but are not cited here” (p. xxii). Among those not cited are two particularly significant titles that shed surprising new light on the wartime role of the Japanese emperor and the elaborate postwar cover-up by American and Japanese authorities, who agreed that stability in Japan could best be assured by retaining the emperor as the head of a parliamentary monarchy, with MacArthur serving as a kind of interim shogun. This arrangement was made feasible by concealing information on Hirohito’s complicity in Japanese aggression and wartime decision-making, shielding him from the postwar war crimes trials. In 1999, John W. Dower provided an authoritative account of the cover-up and whitewash of the emperor in *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (1999), and a year later, Herbert P. Bix, in *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (2000), showed that the emperor had indeed played a far more active wartime role than affirmed in the assiduously crafted postwar legend reflected in most histories of the war, including Weinberg’s.[3]

In his consideration of works published since the original edition, Weinberg cites in his new preface (p. xx, n. 24) William H. Bartsch’s *December 8, 1941: MacArthur’s Pearl Harbor* (2003), but does not mention, as he might have done in a footnote, the mistake in his own account of the Japanese attack on the Philippines, where he writes: “On the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, they surprised MacArthur in the Philippines as effectively as they had Kimmel and his army associate, General Short, in Hawaii” (p. 260). The Japanese attacked Luzon and Oahu the same day, but because the Philippines are west of the International Date Line, the crippling attack on Clark Field on Luzon at shortly after noon, December 8, local time, took place shortly after 11 p.m., December 7, Washington time.[4]

Notwithstanding its flaws, Weinberg’s work—the original edition published in 1994 hardly less than the 2005 printing with some corrections and a new preface—remains, in my opinion, the finest scholarly one-volume history of the Second World War in English, and for those particularly interested in Germany, it is especially valuable for its concise, authoritative coverage, in global context, of the Third Reich at war.[5]

## Notes

[1]. For example, regarding the long-term impact of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Weinberg wrote, “The [sunken] ships were for the most part raised; by the end of December, two of the battleships Yamamoto had imagined sunk were on their way to the West Coast for repairs. All but the *Arizona* returned to service” (p. 261 of the first edition, unchanged in the second). As a matter of fact, the *Oklahoma* did not return to service either. According to the Naval Historical Center’s Online Library, in 1943 she was refloated, but “too old and badly damaged to be worth returning to service, *Oklahoma* was formally decommissioned in September 1944. She was sold for scrapping in December 1946, but sank while under tow from Hawaii to California in May 1947” (<http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/sh-usn/usnsh-o/bb37.htm>).

[2]. Norman Davies, “The Misunderstood War,” *The New York Review of Books* 41, no. 11 (June 9, 1994), accessible at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2204>.

[3]. For preliminary assessments of these two books’ contribution to our understanding of Hirohito’s role in the war, see the review essays by Ian Buruma: “MacArthur’s Children” (on Dower) in *The New York Review of Books* 46, no. 16 (October 21, 1999), accessible at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/337>, and “The Emperor’s Secrets” (on Bix) in *The New York Review of Books* 48, no. 5 (March 29, 2001), accessible at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/14120>.

[4]. Kit C. Carter and Robert Mueller, *The Army Air Forces in World War II: Combat Chronology, 1941-1945* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1973), p. 2.

[5]. For comprehensive coverage, see the multi-volume official German history of the war approaching completion under the auspices of the Research Institute for Military History (initially in Freiburg, but since unification in Potsdam): *Das deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, vols. 1-7 and 9 (Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1979-2005), six volumes of which have been published in English translation as *Germany and the Second World War*, vols. 1-6 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990-2003).

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