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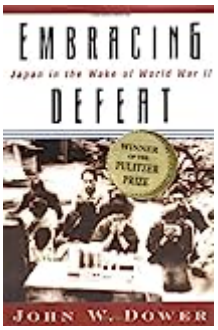

John W. Dower. *Embracing Defeat. Japan in the Wake of World War II.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999. 676 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-393-04686-1.

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There are moments, though rare, when a work of great genius transports us on a grand journey. John Dower's new book *Embracing Defeat* has created just such a moment in time. This work, deeply researched, broadly conceived, magnificently written, redefines the postwar occupation by the United States of Japan and in the process, gives scholars a new language not only for the period, but also for thinking about American involvement in the Pacific in general. Coming after his breathtaking *War Without Mercy*, Dower's thoroughly brilliant performance demonstrates once again that he has few peers in the historical profession.

Embracing Defeat is really several books. Dower could have published separate books on democracy, revolution, and postwar despair and liberation, because each of these sections is so thorough and well thought out. Many times, the separateness of the several means that they do not fit well together. Not true in this case. These pieces simply become separate threads of his overall argument. The book comes as close as any I have read in recent memory to being a total history, not just politics or economics or elite culture but all of these and popular culture too, as well the intercultural relations of the conqueror and conquered.

Dower begins the book with an interesting twist by describing developments in popular culture in the wake of defeat. Of course, most scholarship of the period concentrates on politics and economics, but with his foray into popular culture, Dower has unearthed a mother lode of evidence for a remarkably open period of fluorescence in Japan. The Japanese, by transforming the defeat and the condition of kyodatsu (war exhaustion) into liberation, created the openness that made Japan so receptive to the American occupation goal of democratization. The kyodatsu condition was a response to a destroyed world. Yet, like a forest burned to the ground, in that destruction lay the seeds for a new Japan – one freed from the strictures of militarist censorship, open, promiscuous, even absurd, and with a clear understanding that these things pointed Japan toward an embrace of humanity and its liberation after the years of mind and emotion numbing death and destruction. Dower explores the astonishing rise of a sexuality and decadence that some Japanese intellectuals believed to be transformative. The panpan girls who were prostitutes serving the American troops, nudes-in-frame shows, strip bars, black marketeering, even the play of children awoke Japan from its wartime somnolence. In this experience, women, who previously had been admonished to be good wives and wise mothers, now took a leading role. Dower demonstrates the ways in which women's status improved in this open environment, pointing out that books on conjugal love and sex were best sellers in the postwar period

and concern for women's feelings and experience heightened. But one wonders how far this argument can be taken. It is possible that the arena of sexuality was actually a far more contested terrain, where some Japanese women desired more autonomy and thought open sexuality a pathway to that goal, Japanese men dreamt of reasserting themselves over the Japanese female body as a way of deflecting their own wartime failure, and American conquerors successfully displayed their power over both. Nonetheless, Dower's argument convinces the reader that Japanese cultural vibrancy was the result of kyodatsu. Defeat opened cracks through which exuberance trickled at first and then poured forth. This picture contrasts starkly with portrayals heretofore of a defeated Japan unable to resist American overtures of democracy. Anyone who reads Dower's book will understand that Japan was not liberated by the United States but saw to its own liberation with remarkable speed and alacrity. The Americans simply created conditions in which the Japanese revolution could flourish from 1945-1948.

Dower also introduces a new language to describe American conquest and occupation as a neo-colonial revolution. This phrase is an acknowledgement of overwhelming American power in Japan after World War II, and also describes the way in which Americans imposed their agenda in a manner reminiscent of a Western imperialist. While Dower does not define the phrase, the reader uncovers its meaning in American exclusions and impositions. The Americans occupied as conquerors, riding special trains, confiscating the best available housing for their use, living in a special section of Tokyo that was off-limits to Japanese. American officers lived in a manner inconceivable back in the United States with Japanese servants waiting on them. It is here that Dower also begins to build, layer-upon-layer, the argument for why Japanese democracy in the postwar period became stunted, elite-driven, and retained many similarities to prewar Japan. The Americans, while determined to bring democracy to Japan, were also conquerors bent on imposing their will on the postwar situation. And so democracy in Japan was strewn with contradictions from the start. The Americans ruled Japan indirectly but firmly. They were the hidden hand writing the postwar rules– the constitution, political and economic arrangements, almost everything in Japan was under their purview – and so it is not a surprise that Japanese postwar exuberance melted into cynicism about democracy by 1949. Dower makes it clear that the Japanese understood these contradictions very well, even at the grass roots. Thus, the widespread cynicism within Japan today about political change has its roots in the postwar period. Official SCAP (Supreme Commander Allied Powers) censorship also contributed to the skepticism. Not only was democracy stunted but it was also opposed outright by conservative elites within Japan who believed ordinary Japanese incapable of it and by American diplomats who had made their acquaintance with these elites before the war. The contrary American impulse to democratize resulted from an influx of New Dealers and a motley array of Japan experts, some of them not even Americans.

The chapters on the writing of the constitution exemplify this democratizing impulse. Dower sees the new constitution as the most positive contribution of the Americans, because it is the most radical document to come out of any of the postwar arrangements and it is more forward thinking than even the American constitution. In it, women were liberated, sovereignty given to the Japanese people, war and its means outlawed, although the Emperor was retained as a "symbol" of the nation. How did this apparent anomaly take place? American New Deal progressives happened to be in charge of the SCAP section responsible for its writing, the early Japanese drafts were deemed unacceptable, and the document was written in one week to comply with a small window of opportunity that would close soon. New interests were moving into the occupation such as the Far Eastern Commission (FEC) and these organizations could well demand a different kind of constitutional reconstruction, one less forgiving of the Emperor. At this point, a young Jewish woman named Beata Sirota, born in Vienna and raised in Japan, became a crucial interloper in defining the status of women in the new charter.

The Japanese also dealt with the new atmosphere in different ways. Japanese intellectuals who had remained silent in the war or had actively supported the military government became a "community of remorse." However, the Emperor expressed no such regret. Dower departs into a lengthy analysis of the Emperor's war responsibility and the determined efforts of the Americans to help him evade that responsibility. Here Dower's argument is controversial, since the debate about the Emperor's war responsibility rages on with several major books published on opposing sides of the topic in the 1990s. Dower does not answer the question for all time, but his treatment, like everything else in this book, is most thought provoking. He argues that the thinking of the average Japanese suggested that SCAP could have jettisoned the Emperor without any lasting harm to the Japanese polity. Puns were told about the Emperor, and many other claimants to the throne, one even with a le-

gitimate argument about his own lineage, emerged. Kumazawa Hiromichi, who ran a variety store in Nagano, claimed a genealogy back to the disputed reign in the fourteenth century when the country had a northern and southern Emperor. Dower sees retaining the Emperor as one more stumbling block to attaining true democracy in Japan. It is quite possible that forcing the Emperor to take responsibility might also have soothed the broken relations that Japan has suffered from since the war with the rest of Asia. In addition, Dower points out that the war crimes tribunal was a farce in several aspects. The defendants were coached to stay away from any references to the Emperor. And the prosecution's argument that Japan acted as an aggressor without provocation distorted the realities of the prewar situation in East Asia. The Western imperialist context for Japan's actions was missing completely from the trials. I do think Dower's passion on the Emperor's war guilt distorts his argument in one instance. He claims there that MacArthur's foremost goal was to protect the Emperor. This simply does not ring true, since MacArthur's first goal was in all likelihood to create a stable and democratic Japan that could propel him into the American presidential race in 1948.

In an interesting way the portrait Dower paints of postwar Japan argues for both continuities and disjunctures. Although the first years were a renaissance in Japan, when the reverse course came in 1948, the Japanese elites must have had an "I told you so" expression on their faces as they saw SCAP repress the socialists and communists. These Japanese powerbrokers stepped back into power with years of experience both prewar and wartime.

Finally, it is clear from the book that Japanese explanations for defeat and for American dominance of the postwar scene were hedged about with attempts to retake the initiative and "Japanize" the experience. According to many different Japanese sources, the loss of the war was due to American industrial might and a lack of scientific knowledge on the part of the Japanese. This argument was an extension of the prewar argument that Japan was fusing the material strength of the West with the spiritual values of the East. They simply failed in this attempt and therefore lost the war. In addition, the Crown Prince Akihito suggested that the loss represented the problem of the selfish individualism of the Japanese. He believed that the Americans had worked together better in the war effort. This inversion of the prevailing stereotypes of American individualism and Japanese groupism also shows that Japanese views on the subject of Western-style individualism had not changed dramatically since the Meiji period. Denunciations of "selfish individualism" among nationalist elites were commonplace throughout the Meiji, Taisho, and early Showa periods. Others invoked Japanese traditions to deal with defeat. Tanabe Hajime of Kyoto University, the most influential philosopher in postwar Japan, constructed an ideology completely outside of the American occupation strategy, by looking back to an ancient Buddhist philosopher, Shinran, even turning to the oft-used idea of Japan as a middle way, this time between the extremes of capitalist democracy and Marxism in the postwar situation.

Dower's postwar Japan represents well the lost potential of the postwar period, a remarkable time capsule of Japanese determination to change itself, alongside the enduring political realities and ideas of Japan, with the Americans playing imperial intruder shaping Japan through subtle force and contradiction. This hybrid created the limited democracy and economic miracle that have become the Japan of today.

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