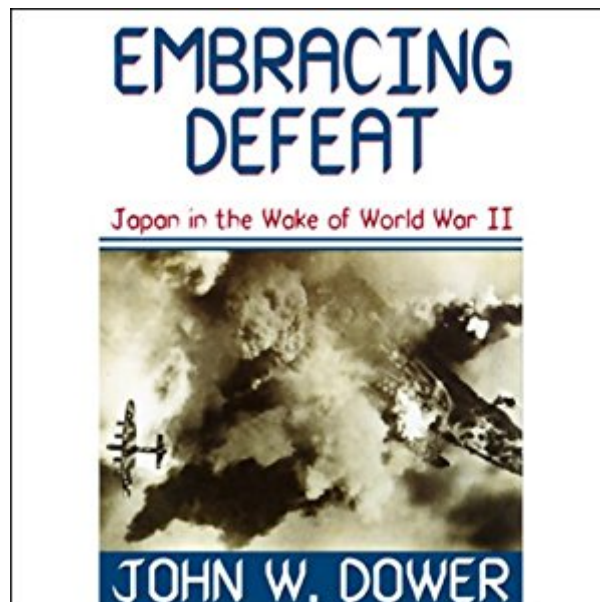


The book was found

Embracing Defeat



Synopsis

Pulitzer Prize, General Nonfiction, 2000 National Book Award, Nonfiction, 1999 In this illuminating study, Dower explores the ways in which the shattering defeat of the Japanese in World War II, followed by over six years of American military occupation, affected every level of Japanese society. He describes the countless ways in which the Japanese met the challenge of "starting over", from top-level manipulations concerning the fate of Emperor Hirohito to the hopes, fears, and activities of ordinary men and women in every walk of life. He shows us the intense and turbulent interplay of conqueror and conquered, West and East, in a way no Western historian has done before. This is a fascinating portrait of an extraordinary moment in history, when new values warred with the old, and early ideals of demilitarization and radical reform were soon challenged by the United States' decision to incorporate Japan into the Cold War Pax Americana.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As a company commander in far SW Honshu and Kyushu I would say Prof. Dower's scholarly work widely missed the mark when he attempted to discuss the life of the Army man in Japan.

Occupation life in Tokyo and the rest of Japan were entirely different. Dower makes it sound very cushy. He has a photo of a Chief Petty Officer in Tokyo sitting down with his wife and children at family dinner. The Chief has on his full uniform, the children are scrubbed and brushed, the boys wear neckties and behind them are two Japanese maids in kimono and obi. As an officer commanding 200 men, I had no maid, our mess hall had no maids, meals were served cafeteria style. Our enlisted men were pampered by Japanese who served as KPs. Instead of peeling

potatoes, my men and officers were entirely free to perform training and reconnaissance missions. In that part of Japan I never saw homeless people squatted on the sidewalks, I never saw people who looked starved or in rags, I never saw the labor unions demonstrating. My company lived in the country 40 miles from division headquarters. There were no bowling alleys, there were no movies. We did have an E.M. club with slot machines and on occasion we used those profits to hire a Japanese show, a magician, a very unsophisticated musical with dancers. In a small nearby town in Shimane Ken there was as best described, a Japanese beer joint; this place had no girls but it did have a Wurlitzer juke box and served very cold, excellent Japanese beer that we paid for. After I was in Japan almost a year I was allowed a vacation to Tokyo and to see friends in Sendai. Tokyo was like a different world.

'Embracing Defeat' is a Pulitzer prize winning portrait of Japanese society after the defeat in WW2. It is a wide ranging survey, which, despite some guiding themes, often feels more like a collection of essays than a unified work. There are, I think, several questions of great interest to the contemporary reader about Japan. One would probably be most interested in learning about how Japan dealt with the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; how Japan turned from a racist, imperialist country into a democratic and pacifistic one; and how Japan not only recovered from the economic devastation of the war, but finally became one of the world's leading powers. Strangely, Professor Dower seem to give peripheral attention at best to the first and third question, and pays most attention to the second, as well as to minuet study of the interactions between the US occupation force and the Japanese population. He also focuses mostly on the early years of the occupation, up to 1949 or so, as if a chapter or two on the outbreak of the cold war were planned but later discarded. Much of the book is 'social history' - a depiction not so much of the leading characters and figures, but of sociological and economic trends. All too often, Dower fall into the trap of this kind of writing - describing things that, for any observer with the slightest knowledge of the society, would be patently obvious. Who could fail to anticipate poverty and corruption in a country devastated by war? Given the existence of rationing, every one who ever took any economic course can predict the appearance of a black market. And obviously, a country that lost millions of its young population in war would pay more attention to its own casualties than to those of the former enemies.

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