

# Embracing defeat: japan in the wake of world war 2 book review samples

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This book was written in the year 1999 by John W. Dower and published by W. W. Norton and Company. The book covers Allies Occupation of the country of Japan between the month of August 1945 and April 1952. It dwells in detail on topics such as the Tokyo's crimes of war trials, Hirohito's Humanity Declaration which is considered very controversial and Douglas MacArthur's administration. New York Times describes this book as "beautifully and magisterially" written. The awards under the court of this writer are many. They include Los Angeles Times Book Prize (1999), Mark Lynton History Prize (2000), PEN New England Award (2000), Bancroft Prize (2000), National Book Award (1999) and the Pulitzer Prize for Non-Fiction (2000). All these awards are deserved because the book not only covers historical events, but opens the reader's eyes to endless knowledge and reveals facts which were unknown. This book is deftly written by the author after a wide research into the subject matter and the details contained in the book are very wide. The reader is taken through the history of Japan and the makers of history themselves, their thoughts and the real happenings on the ground. Many authors who have attempted to write about this subject have not done it clearly as John did in this book. That is why it has won much acclaim and has been preciously priced.

Many authors who have attempted to write about this subject have examined Japan's defeat and occupation experience from the point of view of the conquerors themselves. It is very rare to find an author who writes a piece of literature about this subject matter from the point of view of the Japanese e experience. John Dower on the other hand attempts to comprehend the dreams (including exhaustion and hopelessness), visions

and the hopes of the Japanese who were defeated in this war. He seeks to understand and show how they sought to remake their values and identity in the aftermath of the war. The author probes the array of kaleidoscopic responses of the Japanese together with their contradictory features.

American Occupation of Japan was marked imperialist, arrogant, visionary and high-mindedness. It against this background that the writer examines old disillusion, new hopes, iconoclasm, selective forgetting, liberation, giddy and guilt as felt by the Japanese people.

Dower's style of writing is also unique. He tackles this theme in the form of twin narratives which he clearly uses to give facts about it. The first theme he uses is socio-cultural history which is very dense in nature. This narrative focuses on the first couple of years of the American Occupation of Japan. The second theme however concentrates on the detailed reconstruction of the political and constitutional phase which was there initially before the war. This narrative concentrates more on Tokyo Crimes of War, the new constitution genesis and the rehabilitation of the Japanese emperor. These discussed themes have been treated differently by other authors who have written about this subject. Dower on the other hand finds a way to intertwine them and bring consequence to a beautiful piece of literature which facts which have been well researched.

Though the book is beautiful, Dower's style has some mishaps. The intertwining of the above themes creates what is referred to as ' structural problems' in literature. Nevertheless, it is important to give credit where it is due. The book highlights the different issues which were important to both of the spheres. For example, the author writes about the debate on the

responsibility allocation for past, current and future identity of the Japanese people. This issue was central to both sides of the divide. These sides had to fight and resolve the ambiguous context and shifting of the politics of Occupation. Dower handles this issue theme deftly. Firstly, as the narrator of the book, he holds the canvas (which is very vast) together. Secondly, as the observer in the book, he holds deep sympathy for his subjects. At the same time, he still has sharp critical words and sense as he goes through the navigation of the muddy waters that is the untold history of the American Occupation of Japan.

When it comes to cultural history, Dower does a thorough research. It commences with his description of the materially and physically shattered lives which appear at the end of the war. These people are shocked, disillusioned, exhausted and despair is written all over their faces. Hopelessness and absence of faith mark their existence. They are said to be “unremittingly chronicled”. The writer conveys clearly the depth of confusion and loss of human strength to live vividly in his book. John Dower accounts at a very large scale the extent of social displacement, cultural disillusionment, missing persons and the long-drawn period of famine. In his writing, Dower coins out a phrase for famine. It is “food-wretchedness”. This by fact brings out the creative quality of the writer.

The Japanese people feel misery and despair both during, and after the war. This is experienced mostly during the American Occupation. This however continues even after the Americans have gone departed the country of Japan. Against this backdrop of social and economic misery, Dower also concentrates on the location of transformative effects of the defeat. Though

misery, despair and hopelessness was wide, certain sections of the population were still hopeful. Dower seeks to show this and to show how they still gathered strength to reshape their future identity and discover aspirations that would add them strength to go on. Dower in his book, ingeniously tackles all these issues.

John Dower's process of bringing out the hidden fact about this subject first starts with his investigation of the "subcultures of defeat". For example, the prostitution landscape during the Occupation was a simultaneous arena of sexual exploitation and a subsequent growth of the channel for the dismissal of the interracial stereotypes. Interracial affection grew as a result of this vice. It also undermined the racist propagandists who coughed at the thought of different races mixing. Though this became a national shame for Americans and their values of hedonism, luxury and materialism, most occupants and their subjects readily accepted them. In addition, black markets emerged and were marked by the explosion of entrepreneurial skills, energy and on the negative side; violent crimes and gangs emerged as well. Another effect, as Dower writes, was the rise of an urban demimonde which was new and its main objective was to channel hardship and nihilism into deliberate decadence of lifestyles and the flourishing milieu of literatures filled with pulp hogwash and forced challenges of sexual and social traditional roles. Dower researched widely and has dug very deep to reveal what he calls "the bittersweet ambience of margins of life in a defeated land"

In this book, the author explores "the bridges of language". This shifts the idiom and imagery of a nation in transition. He successfully shows that the

language used in in some of the old regime books had empty content and got refilled with new meanings. In addition, the plasticity of the used language also created ambiguity. Dower stresses mostly the bridges of linguistic transformation and forward ways of looking of escape from the past. Nevertheless, darker events could still linger on. Phrases and words carried necessarily past the resonance and the possibilities of the movement of coexisting temptations of crossing back. This brings out John Dower to be very deft in his researches of the subject which he writes about.

Dower in his book considers “ virtuoso turnabout” of the intelligentsia of the Japanese when they decide to embrace democratization. Both during and before the war, the state of Japan seduced and bullied intellectuals to support and conform successfully. After this, almost no important intelligent opposition remained. However, Dower draws a picture which is rather complex. That is to say, on one hand, there were ideas which flourished in the past and had continuities in the present. On the other hand, there were very real breaks. Remorse and repentance were taken seriously. For example, Japan’s teachers got a transformation their title of “ drill sergeants” to “ fervent Guardians” of the new democracy. This also helps to explain the uncritical embrace of Marxism sorts in certain university sectors as life emerged. With the kind of language is used by John Dower, his sensitivity to the new breaks and the break from the past is evident. The continuities which are underplayed by most authors about the subject are not underplayed by Dower. The weight of the past makes young Japanese individuals to delay in marriage and to settle down at latter years. This is all about socio-cultural conceptions.

Many authors who have attempted to write about this subject have examined Japan's defeat and occupation experience from the point of view of the conquerors themselves. It is very rare to find an author who writes a piece of literature about this subject matter from the point of view of the Japanese experience. The political lives of the Japanese concentrate on the first couple of years of Occupation. It does not however stray into the "reverse course" which followed thereafter. MacArthur's regime is captured by Dower in the early years. MacArthur ran a neo-colonial state which was colored by supremacist and paternalism, yet also importantly idealism loaded with the spirit of democracy. MacArthur propagated the allowance of freedom of speech and expression and at the same time defeating Confederacy. This Confederacy was subjected to Yankee interlopers who struggled with their identities.

In conclusion, John Dower tackles his subject well. This book is deftly written by the author after a wide research into the subject matter and the details contained in the book are very wide. The reader is taken through the history of Japan and the makers of history themselves, their thoughts and the real happenings on the ground. This book is deftly written by the author after a wide research into the subject matter and the details contained in the book are very wide. The reader is taken through the history of Japan and the makers of history themselves, their thoughts and the real happenings on the ground.