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Introduction by Herbert P. Bix, Binghamton University-SUNY

Several years before the 1979 publication of his Harvard doctoral thesis, *Empire and Aftermath: Yoshida Shigeru and the Japanese Experience, 1878-1954*, John Dower had already earned a reputation within the fields of Asian and international studies as a pioneer radical historian and keen critic of U.S. cold war policies and the fraught relationship between the U.S. and Japan.

In numerous essays and books afterwards, such as his award-winning 1986 history, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, he went beyond the study of bilateral relations, the U.S. and Japan, to treat the problem of racism, past and present. Its special feature was his probing analysis of racial war words, imagery, and stereotypes so as to bring out the power relations between nations, classes and groups. This work changed American perspectives on World War II and rippled beyond America's Asian wars. More than a decade later, on the eve of a new, more savage phase of U.S. wars and overseas base expansion, he produced *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (W.W. Norton 1999), which dealt comprehensively with Japanese politics, society, and culture set within the U.S.-Japan relationship.

Cultures of War is a contribution to comparative political history, on a scale broader than his previous works. Researched during the decade of unrestrained American power run amok in Afghanistan and Iraq, it again focuses on language and frames many of the political forces and psychological factors at work in four events: imperial Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941), the U.S. nuclear destruction of Hiroshima (August 6, 1945), the al-Qaeda non-state-sponsored terrorist attack that occurred on September 11, 2001, and was not preemptive, and the U.S.'s attack and occupation of Iraq (March 2003), which was. It also draws comparisons between American military behavior in the Persian Gulf War (1991) and the ongoing Iraq War.

Cultures of War is essentially a book of illuminations on the recurrent failures of rulers and ruled at war. One of its major concerns is democracy and democracy's failure to function in states that either lack accountability or, through secrecy and other means, prevent citizens from participating in or even learning about matters vital to their security. Dower argues that whether ruled by monarchs or "imperial presidents," such states--and the U.S. most notably--cannot qualify as genuine democracies. This is well understood by the overwhelming majority of Muslim peoples throughout the oil-rich greater-Middle East, where American elites support neo-colonial frameworks of order based on military dictatorships and absolute monarchies. As Dower recognizes, the rhetoric of empire cannot hide the American rulers' historical hostility to democracy. They manifested their hatred of democracy for others under the guise of "benevolent assimilation" in the era of McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt, when U.S. troops killed "at least two hundred thousand Filipino civilians in the Philippines war" (p. 82), and they do the same in our own time--the era of "benevolent global hegemony," when our armed forces slaughter even greater numbers of civilians.

Another theme that Dower stresses from chapter to chapter, starting with his preface, is how policy makers' "wishful thinking," dreams, and delusions invariably trumped their rational assessment of factors in their lead-up to war. The dominant American ideology ideally sanctions "bedrock individualism," but what mostly prevails in crisis times is "herd behavior" (p. xxv). Dower believes "the 'herd behavior' and 'group think' that Westerners tend to ascribe to most non-Western societies . . . turn out to be universal phenomena that became manifest with dire consequences in the war of choice against Iraq" (p. xxiv). For him it is impossible to explain the behavior of Japan's top leaders in the 1930s and America's senior leaders today without taking account of their "failures of imagination," and "absence of transparency, accountability and plain common sense" (p. xxxii). This is as true for George W. Bush and his small, six-person, inner circle as it was for Japan's collective decision makers grouped around Emperor Hirohito.

Can we not say the same for Barack Obama and his equally small team of advisers when they decided to escalate in Afghanistan, retain permanent bases in Iraq, initiate secret warfare in Pakistan, intervene militarily in Libya's civil war, and increase military spending far above the average annual level set by Bush? And to do all of this against the wishes of most Americans?

Precisely here is where we first brush up against the question of American exceptionalism. Dower has *not* written a book about exceptionalism or uniqueness; his view of American behavior in the world is historicist. Yet at times he may give the impression that the U.S. is more than another nation in the flow of history, that it is a good nation gone astray and capable of self-correction from its failed wars. To what extent is that true?

"American veneration of force," self-righteousness, and arrogance are a third group of themes running through Dower's book. Kenneth Adelman, the neoconservative true believer and dedicated Israel supporter who served on Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's Defense Policy Board (p. 486n 185), used the term "cakewalk" (p. 439) to express his absolute certainty that the U.S. would easily conquer Iraq and go on to achieve its broader goals for the entire Middle East. Dower cites this example of over-confidence to highlight how the arrogance of Bush's policy makers triumphed over their rational calculations and drove them into war for reasons that had nothing to do with terrorism or weapons of mass destruction. And once in Iraq, over-confidence and arrogance led them to discount the many "red flags" (p. 121) that went up, suggesting that they had not thought through the aftermath of their military intervention and had no exit plan. Irrationality, I would add, was inherent not only in their ideological passions but in every action they took in violation of Kant's categorical imperative maxim.

From the very outset, the U.S. occupation, promising liberation, was a disaster for the Iraqis. Yet the Bush decision makers saw themselves as "moral and rational men" (p. 100) even as they spurned a diplomatic solution to their conflict with Iraq and ignored "bringing the United Nations into the picture" until events forced them to do so (p. 100). Their arrogance and ideological rigidity also manifested itself in bureaucratic turf wars between the State and Defense Departments prior to the invasion of Iraq, and these contributed to the debacle of Bush-style regime change. Unlike the occupation of Japan, the U.S. went into

Iraq without a plan or any “clear-cut concept of how it was going to proceed” (p. 346). That was surely a major failure of imagination, on a par with Japan’s failure to grasp what Pearl Harbor would look like from the American viewpoint or how quickly the enormous war potential of the U.S. could be brought to bear against their forces. Racism on both sides led to denigration of the enemy.

Dower divides his study into three parts, starting with the causes of U.S. intelligence failures when faced with imperial Japan (before its December 1941 attack on a U.S. military base) and failure to connect the dots of intelligence data in the case of al-Qaeda’s attack on the U.S. in September 2001. His analysis of Pearl Harbor and 9/11 as case studies of preemptive wars of choice in two different historical periods strongly underscores the importance of war rhetoric in shaping fatal outcomes.

Part Two explores terror bombing and the American change of attitude about the aerial killing of civilians before and after Hiroshima. Its six chapters focus on code words such as “Pearl Harbor”, “ground zero,” “Hiroshima,” and “shock and awe,” and how they came to be used to conceal reality and inhibit reflection on the past.

The six chapters of Part Three treat the U.S. occupations of Japan and Iraq, and American policy-makers’ loss of respect for the rules of law. Dower correctly traces this change of attitude back to the period immediately following Japan’s surrender, when the U.S. and all of its allies violated the Hague law of occupation as well as the Hague rules governing the treatment of POWs. The latter, discussed in Chapter 6, outlawed both the use of POWs in new wars entered into by their captors, and the use of POWs as laborers long after the original conflict had ended (p. 389). One is led to conclude that even when the Allies finally triumphed over the Axis, the era of disrepute into which international law fell in the 1930s never ended.

Dower’s larger thesis is that the errors imperial Japan committed, and the pathologies to which its leaders succumbed in the 1930s and early ‘40s, are especially instructive in the present era of U.S.-led aggression, when it is U.S. policy that openly flouts international law and engenders massive atrocity-producing situations by attacking and occupying Afghanistan and Iraq.

Comparing imperial Japan’s disdain for international law with U.S. disdain for “lawfare” and international fora, Dower points to the George W. Bush administration’s mistreatment and torture of POWs, which started when he mislabeled them “unlawful enemy combatants” and established torture and “extreme rendition” or torture by proxy as official U.S. policy (p. 373). Contemporary America’s barbaric behavior in the “global war on terror” gives saliency to World War II issues of war crimes and war prisons. Former President Bush personally authorized torture at the Guantanamo Bay prison complex but called it, euphemistically, “enhanced interrogation,” while lawyers in his administration produced justifications for abusing helpless detainees in “black site” prisons around the world. Torture and hypocrisy, the end runs around Congress, the theory of the “unitary executive” “freed from the constraints of both traditional and more recent international laws (p. 306),”

plus much else associated with Bush, never “peaked” (p. 360) during his reign, but have continued under Obama.

Some of Dower’s best chapters come toward the end, when he analyzes nation-building and neo-liberal economic ideology as manifested in the U.S. occupation of Iraq, conducted on the basis of “faith-based” policies and faith in brute force to achieve political objectives. This leads him to acknowledge, without exploring too deeply, “the inviolate nature of the national ‘security state’ that was spawned by World War II and the Cold War.” (p. 439). He likens the national security state to a “profane theocracy” (p. 440) or state governed by religious officials. At first glance, one might think more could have been done with the national security state concept. In fact, Dower perceives its key element at the formative stage when discussing the “imperial presidency” and President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s illegal decision to establish the secret Manhattan Project (p.249). It eventually cost about two billion dollars, but Roosevelt never reported its funding to Congress as required by the Constitution, thereby avoiding Congressional oversight.

Carrying his analysis forward in time and into the theme of economically driven policy, Dower grasps the symmetry between the strategic breakdown of Bush’s war and the breakdown of U.S.-style capitalism. In “Fools’ Errands and Fools’ Gold” (pp. 437-452), the excellent climax to the entire study, he addresses the mutual relationship between the government, motivated by power, and the big corporations motivated by profit and greed. Thucydides thought human beings in groups could not bring hubris under control. Dower, focusing on the decision makers in Washington and Wall Street and on the bloated, criminally corrupt financial sector, agrees.

Many analysts stress the close interrelationship between domestic economic drives and drives for power and control over others leading to war. They relate these phenomena to the overall institutional structure of the capitalist economy. Dower, a cultural and political historian, probes structure and the historical process in terms of elites and their decision making, noting that the Bush administration’s:

. . . rush to war involved illusions concerning not only military capabilities in general . . . but also the presumed beneficence and self-correcting resilience of a virtually unrestrained capitalism leveraged by unprecedented levels of debt. Illusory power and illusory profits went hand in hand. The disintegration of the financial system effectively dissolved the line between cultures of war and cultures of money—and in the process called attention to behavior pathologies at every level (p. 448).

But if, in the minds of policy making elites, the line between ideological and economic interests is often blurred and in Iraq’s case “dissolved,” is that not all the more reason to set the entire U.S. war and occupation of Iraq in an economic matrix, and to give more than cursory attention to the U.S. goal of securing overall control of the Iraqi oil fields? And why talk only about elites but not classes and class interests? Dower’s critique of the national security state could have gone further had he wedded it to the driving force of economic

monopolies and finance capital. In my view he is suggesting, without explicitly stating, that future researchers move precisely in that direction.

No one seriously interested in understanding the root causes of America's most recent failed wars can afford to ignore his study of policy makers intent on pursuing imperialist agendas and at every step misusing military and political history and trampling on domestic and international law.

How have Dower's readers responded to the many dimensions of his comparative history of decision making for war?

Michael Sherry, while noting that the book is "untidy," rightly praises the "chapters on the U.S. incendiary and atomic bombing of Japan and the start of the nuclear arms race" as "the wisest current treatment of that vexed history." He calls attention to Dower's assertion that Bush's practice of executive power would be called "dictatorship" when practiced by others. He affirms, too, Dower's observation that in unleashing vast destruction on their enemies, not distinguishing between combatant and non-combatant, the American atomic bombers, Osama bin Laden, and Bush all played God at a concentrated moment in time. Sherry ends with an important question: "Why do some nations or groups learn from defeat and others do not?"

Victoria de Grazia's sympathetic reading of Dower amplifies Sherry's question. De Grazia observes, "No moment churns up the primordial past as much as the need to rationalize the psychic and political prohibitions against committing murder on a grand scale." She goes on to observe that "Dower uses the odd word 'cherry picking' the past to refer to the 'evasions,' 'self-deceptions,' etc, suggesting a kind of insouciant ferreting around for compromised terms when, if we think of Sigmund Freud's reflections on war, . . . we might rather regard all of this mental activism as obsessional replays of historical traumas that are far deeper and uncontainable. Dower is at his least convincing when he implies that acting out war cultures is basically a behavioral problem, as if a good dose of common sense could provide a cure, or that frightful deeds are the function of a particular culture of modern war..."

So, de Grazia's question is: "Does Dower see in American imperium a particular notion of sovereignty involving global . . . rights [over space]?" She concludes that "the historical problem before us is not a generic or essential 'culture of war,' common to modern peoples, but . . . rather to understand the war-making culture specific to the United States." In other words, for her the problem is not cultures of war in general but a certain historical type of war-making culture.

By contrast, **James H. Lebovic** finds Dower's comparison of the U.S. war and occupation of Japan and its war and occupation of Iraq "unlikely" but workable. He notes "a vast sea of grey" that emerges from Dower's analysis but concentrates his brief comments on what he regards as the book's limitations, claiming first that Dower "frequently presents Japanese

behavior in the most favorable light and U.S. actions, in the least." Thus the moral onus falls upon the U.S. for crimes committed in the course of war more than it does on Japan.

Lebovic further criticizes Dower for failing "to establish the relative importance of factors that led the Bush administration into Iraq." Then, reverting to the Japanese, he again faults him for "dwell[ing] on the negative side of the occupation—its distortion of the Japanese government, economy, and society as they were made to serve U.S. interests." Readers of Dower can make their own judgments as to the aptness of these charges.

Bruce Kuklick, on the other hand, objects to Dower's "repeated use of analogies" or partial resemblances from which comparisons can be drawn "to convince readers of *The Truth*." A full decade into the Iraq war he asks, "How can Dower be so cocksure that Iraq failed? It is not over yet." Whether such objections are even to be taken seriously at all is, again, a determination for the reader to make.

Dower described the terrible consequences for Iraqis of the early occupation years and noted the "bloodbath of Muslim-versus-Muslim killing" that the U.S. occupation of Iraq "triggered" (p. 87). He recognized and painstakingly catalogued the countless euphemisms and rationalizations for the annihilation of Iraq civilian lives that American and British apologists put forth and were then picked up by Al Qaeda and Islamic scholar Sayyid Qutb and used to justify their own "just war" against the U.S. and Britain. Perhaps the key issue for Kuklick is U.S. military victory; for Dower it is the impact of the war on the Iraqi people and their society.

Phenomena that most historians overlook Dower's keen eye singled out, such as U.S. military behavior during the first Gulf War, when U.S. planes and missiles destroyed Iraq's "electric power stations and telecommunications centers; dams, pumping stations, water-purification facilities, and sewage-treatment plants; transportation networks . . . and factories producing everything from metals and textiles to medical supplies" (p. 88). Dower also registered the massive increase in child and infant mortality that resulted from post-Gulf War economic sanctions on the Saddam Hussein regime. Thus he cited (p. 92) the British medical journal *Lancet*, which "in December 1995 . . . concluded that 'since August 1990, 567,00 children in Iraq have died as a consequence' of the UN-sanctioned embargo." He then traced the international debate on sanctions, which was really a debate on how Americans create "havoc and suffering" on peoples "from a safe distance" (p. 93), right up to the eve of the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq.

The best historians of the present offer careful readers a wealth of material for thinking about and acting to combat war and war crimes. Dower offers us both his central concept of "cultures of war," intending it to unify phenomena that others may see as disparate, and his practice of comparative analysis of "many cultures of modernity" (p. xx) over time. In search of the mainsprings of Japanese and American political behavior, *Cultures of War* takes readers on a journey through different worlds, over various stretches of time. In the process, it generates useful ideas for future research.

Participants:

John Dower received his Ph.D. in 1972 in History and Far Eastern Languages from Harvard University and teaches modern Japanese history and US-Japan relations at MIT. His numerous publications include *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, which was honored with several prizes; *Empire and Aftermath*, a study of the life and times of the diplomat and later prime minister Yoshida Shigeru; and *Japan in War and Peace: Selected Essays*. He also was the executive producer of a documentary film entitled *Hellfire - A Journey from Hiroshima*, which was nominated in 1988 for an Academy Award. His book, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, won numerous honors, including the Pulitzer Prize in Letters for General Nonfiction, National Book Award in Nonfiction, Bancroft Prize in American History, John K. Fairbank Prize in Asian History, Los Angeles Times Book Prize in History, Mark Lynton History Prize, and the L. L. Winship/PEN New England Prize.

Herbert P. Bix, professor of history and sociology at Binghamton University-SUNY, is a graduate of University of Massachusetts-Amherst and holds an MA and Ph.D. from Harvard University. He is the author of *Peasant Protest in Japan, 1590-1884* (Yale University Press, paperback 1992) and *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (HarperCollins, 2000), which in 2001 won the Pulitzer Prize for general non-fiction and the National Book Critics Circle Award. His many essays on war, empire, monarchy, and Japan-U.S. relations have appeared in leading journals in Japan and the United States. He is currently working on a study of war crimes.

Victoria de Grazia is Moore Collegiate Professor of History at Columbia University where she directs The European Institute. She has written on European fascism, cultures of consumption, and, more recently, on American hegemony in Europe. Her book on *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth Century Europe* has been widely translated. She is currently finishing a book titled "The Sentimental Fascist" about morals and manners in Mussolini's Italy and working on a bigger project on the "Idea of Soft Power"

Bruce Kuklick is Nicholas Professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania. He has written a number of books including *The United States and the Division of Germany* (1972); *The Rise of American Philosophy* (1977); *Churchmen and Philosophers: From Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey* (1985); *The Good Ruler: Herbert Hoover to Richard Nixon* (1988); *Puritans in Babylon: The Ancient Near East and American Intellectual Life, 1880-1930* (1966); *A History of Philosophy in America, 1720-2000* (2001); and *The Blind Oracles: Intellectuals and War from Kennan to Kissinger* (2005) which was featured in an H-Diplo roundtable in September 2006. Kuklick is writing, with Emmanuel Gerard, a book on the assassination of Patrice Lumumba.

James H. Lebovic is Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at the George Washington University. He holds a PhD in International Relations from the University of Southern California. He has published widely on defense policy, nuclear deterrence and strategy, military budgets and procurement, democracy and human rights, and

international conflict. He is the author of *Deterring International Terrorism and Rogue States: US National Security Policy after 9/11* (Routledge, 2007) and *The Limits of US Military Capability: Lessons from Vietnam and Iraq* (The Johns Hopkins University, 2010). He is currently finishing work on a book manuscript on the United States and nuclear arms control.

Michael Sherry is the Richard W. Leopold Professor of History at Northwestern University. His book *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* won the Bancroft Prize.

Cultures of War or Warmakers' Cultures?

In the past few years, U.S. historians who once expatriated their intellectual passions to analyze other nations' ills have returned to studying those of their own nation. They see American leadership as unhinged in the face of the decline of U.S. hegemony in its classic forms. Being practiced at dissecting the cataclysmic decisions that other great powers made as they went to seed, when they study America as a foreign land, they upend homegrown conventions about America's exceptional status in the world.

This is the case of John Dower, who tries to make sense of official America's reaction to 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq. He was spurred to write the book by a particularly monstrous paradox, namely that George W. Bush, his cabinet and apologists -- in order to legitimate his administration's unprovoked aggression against Iraq in March 2002, and then to bolster its global war on Terrorism-- embarked on a six-year rhetorical spree in the course of which they dredged up practically every high-minded rationale for making war produced over the course of the twentieth century. Dower was provoked by two particularly iniquitous abuses of official speak. One was the act of calling the attack on the Twin Towers "an infamy," as in "day of infamy." Franklin Delano Roosevelt famously used that phrase to denounce the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, (adding it as a last minute correction to his speech) to exclude the perpetrators of the attack from all civilized notions of honorability in warfare and to assert thereby the need for the total "war without mercy" which was the subject of Dower's powerful book from 1993. Almost immediately after 9/11, George W. Bush latched on to the word, the effect of which was to turn the terrorist attack into a declaration of total war first against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, and then to justify the United States's invasion of the sovereign state of Iraq.

The other abused figure of speech was "ground zero." That became official speak to sanctify the acres of rubble in downtown Manhattan piled up by the collapse of the Twin Towers, together with the upwards of 3000 Americans who died in the attack. The original "ground zero" was seen through the Enola Gay's bomb sights of the two medium-sized Japanese towns of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, neither of which had particular strategic value, where the American nuclear strikes pulverized 200,000 people. That is an old story, of course. Dower's point is that in the face of America's hurt and the enormous capacity of the country to garner sympathy both at home and abroad, the significance of the original event was in effect expunged. Its horror, which had been perpetrated by the United States against tens of thousands of civilians, was appropriated by the perpetrators in order to perfect the deployment of shock and awe strategies. Aside from reaffirming the notion that we still never have to say we're sorry because the ends were well-served, this usage implied that in circumstances of total war, it was completely justifiable that civilians could be and were collateral damage in warfare, but the U.S. was demonstrating both its military prowess and humanitarianism by making more and more perfect the targeting of airborne weapons.

Denunciations of these Orwellian abuses of language are only the start here. If I read John Dower correctly, he is responding valiantly (and at many levels validly) to injunctions of cultural critics who, from the moment the U.S. declared war on Afghanistan, as they heard the racially coded language, dehumanizing cyber-lingo, and calculated deceptions of U.S. officialdom, conjured up Walter Benjamin to give us historians a hand. If we were to understand the fast-moving incoherent present, we would have to forsake the conventional narratives shaped by historical time to "seize hold of memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger," and "grasp the constellation that one's own era has formed with an earlier one."¹ Dower does just that here in his way, zigzagging across time and space to compare the deluded hopes of Bush and Hirohito for instant victories, the self-immolatory impulses that drove both Kamikaze pilots and Al Qaeda bombers on their suicidal missions, and the realpolitik considerations about civilian casualties that are so staggeringly awful in Donald Rumsfeld's infamously cavalier statement that "things happen," but also in Winston Churchill's directives on blitzing defenseless German citydwellers.

The upshot is a far-reaching diagnosis of what Dower characterizes as "pathologies of war culture." Their symptoms are "fools' errands," "evasions", "self-deception," "murderousness," and "failure of imagination."² Time and again he returns to the fundamental "strategic imbecility" that acts to compound all of the above vices in forms of magical thinking that induce in their speakers both paranoia about their own invulnerability and overestimations of the power of the enemy. Dower's point is not just that the U.S. acts like other war making countries in all of these respects, but that the United States acts out these behaviors more egregiously by virtue of its claim to be on a special historical mission. This rightness of the mission has been reconfirmed by its many wins in the name of democracy and freedom. This posture began with the fire bombings of Tokyo and the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and survives down to the present in the elaboration of shock and awe military doctrine and projects for global policing by means of drone surveillance systems.

Poking into the proliferation of historical analogies, magmatic self-justifications, and the sloppy vernacular of ghostwritten presidential addresses, this capacious book, illustrated with a copious visual archive, does some big work. The time spent coaxing American liberal arts and history students through it would thus be well spent, if only to initiate reflection on America as the biggest all-time bomber in the history of the world. For Dower is definitely not doing cultural studies, which is to say, he doesn't treat language as having coded significance that can only be read in terms of its codes. Far from him are structuralism or postmodernism; he wants readers to understand the original sense of the word as an anti-constructivist social historian would, namely by juxtaposing the discursive perversions against the rude realities on the ground. Thus Dower's way to disenchant the

¹ Cited in Rosalind C. Morris, "Theses on the Questions of War: History, Media, Terror," *Social Text*, 72 (Volume 20, Number 3), Fall 2002, p. 151

² Dower uses these terms throughout his study in the text and chapter headings. For example, see pp. xxxii, xxiv, 33, 115, 125, and 433.

terminological paradox involved in the abuse, say, of the phrase "ground zero" is to contrast the hackneyed image of the former President of the United States, a notorious draft dodger, who, outfitted in work shirt and hard hat, poses with a shovel at the rubble piles in the crater of the Twin Towers with that of the blitzed, irradiated ground, tens of square miles of it, and to the fallen as they really fell in Japanese cities by the hundreds of thousands "scorched and boiled and baked to death (182)," to recall General Curtis Lemay's dismayed words. For a people whose culture of war has been formed on massive doses of hyper-reality, drawing on Hollywood cinema, the Super Bowl, internet war games, and television violence, Dower's literalism can't but be salutary. His insistence on contrasting the imagic power of words with the real effects of bombs may be especially salutary for American students, who in my experience, say, from reading with them Paul Virilio on *War and Cinema*, subscribe to his notion that "war is cinema and cinema is war." Having only a highly mediated image-driven notion of war-making, not having experienced the trauma of real war inside the American homeland (though, arguably, the trauma of the Cold War is very real in the national historical memory), the motion picture camera producing mass images becomes as terrifying a prosthetic device as the machine gun spraying mass murder. There is no real, only the hyper-real and the code.

By contrast, Dower wants to drive home the contrast between words and actions, and especially that in twentieth century war-making (and the first decade of the twenty-first century as well), political and military leaders were deeply mindful of the need to legitimate the air bombing of civilians. In 1943, as the Allied Forces improved strategic bombing, nobody treated as misguided the test of the inflammability of incendiary bombs, the goal being to terrify civilians, provoke their resistance to their rulers, and cause them to put pressure on their leaders to surrender. A whole science was built up around maximizing the results, whether by studying cloud cover to get clear sightings of city targets, looking for especially dense population concentrations for the sake of efficient use of materiel, and testing model row houses for inflammability, which for the sake of accuracy had the Japanese sets being built in flimsy wood and the German sets in brick and mortar.

Dower subtly addresses the awful manipulation of the civilians obliterated by bombing, starting from callous sovereigns who, by their war mongering, first, abandoned their subjects by packing them into dense, miserable urban housing, and then abdicated the most elementary duties of sovereigns, namely to protect their subjects' lives, by leaving them unprotected by radar and anti-aircraft guns. That their people were then exterminated like bugs in their hovels was in turn used to demonstrate the enemy's bestiality. In turn, the enemy, in this case, the Anglo-American allies, showed no restraint, except when it was dictated by realist considerations. Winston Churchill provides Dower with his most telling example. Churchill famously cautioned against terror bombings. But the most important consideration was that was "mere acts of terror and wanton destruction, however impressive, (need to be) counterbalanced by the recognition that if the British take control of an utterly ruined land, they would not be able to get housing materials for their own needs." (p. 174)

Withal, to search for behaviors general to belligerents as ascribable more or less generally to "cultures of war," doesn't take us as far as we need to go to understand whether the United States should be treated as embodying its own historically peculiar form of "strategic imbecility." More than other policymakers, war policymakers have to legitimate the huge rupture to civilization that armed aggression provokes. No moment churns up the primordial past as much as the need to rationalize the psychic and political prohibitions against committing murder on a grand scale. Dower uses the odd word "cherry picking" the past to refer to the "evasions," "self-deceptions," etc,³ suggesting a kind of insouciant ferreting around for compromised terms when, if we consider Sigmund Freud's reflections on war, we might, starting at the outbreak of the Great War, rather regard all of this mental activism as obsessional replays of historical traumas that are far deeper and uncontainable. Dower is at his least convincing when he implies that acting out war cultures is basically a behavioral problem, as if a good dose of common sense could provide a cure, or that frightful deeds are the function of a particular culture of modern war, as on page p. 156, where he writes "modern warfare breeds its own cultures and incinerating civilians is one of them."

Ultimately, Dower may well believe that American war making has some particular characteristics, beyond the signally racist features that were embodied in the war against Japan, which was the subject of his first major work. If so, would he want here to spell these out? Is its present-day war culture the result of its particular relationship to air power, for example? Or, conversely, is its obsessive use of air power the result of a notion of sovereignty that arose out of lording over large spaces, relatively detached from invasive enemies, neither the Canadians nor the Mexicans being that, so danger came not from the frontiers but from the heavens? Is there something about America's use of air technology, as Michael Sherry's 1989 book emphasizes,⁴ that made air power --and its defeat-- so worrisome? Or was it the rational desire to save its manpower? Does the problem of language overkill perhaps lie in U.S. democracy, which calls for exceptionally communicative verbiage from its leaders who have to go the extra mile to gain public support to legitimate foreign wars? Does Dower see in American imperium a particular notion of sovereignty involving global air rights? Something along that line could be argued, not just from America's domination over big spaces by frontier war-making, but also the pressure to build continental-wide communication systems, and the rise of global marketing as early as the nineteenth century. Something could be said about the vision of sovereignty that comes out of World War II, spelled out in the Truman Doctrine, that American freedom meant the right to passage everywhere. Look at the imaginary lens through which Americans saw Sputnik or the threat of Soviet ballistic missiles in Cuba, or the attack on the Twin Towers. Consider these rights over space together with the right of finance capital to go everywhere, with American-led notions of global security attached to drone-based cyber surveillance, hyper accurate from its manned outposts in Kansas or

³ See pp. xxvii, 109, 125-126, 211, 238, 442, 452.

⁴ Michael Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power; The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

Arkansas, with only small complements deployed on the ground comprising soldiers, communications specialists, and social workers to apologize to the locals for human error, which is inevitable, and make amends for their losses with psychological counseling and compensation.

In sum, my thought is not that the historical problem before us is not a generic or essential “culture of war,” common to modern peoples, but is rather to understand the war-making culture specific to the United States. That is a big agenda, but then John Dower is an extraordinary historian.

This is no ordinary work of historical scholarship. Dower has not written a history. Rather, the book consists of a series of comparisons among, and meditations on, the four events in the title. Dower wants his readers to alter their views of international politics, and particularly American foreign policy, by rethinking the relations among the events. He hopes to jolt his readers into a change of perspective, surely into a different sort of mindset. Conventionally, Pearl Harbor and September 11 are regarded as acts of non-western treachery. Instead, let us see Hiroshima and Iraq as demonstrations of unnecessary and premeditated western belligerence. Or let us look at the determinations to go to war at Pearl Harbor and in Iraq as dogmatic, short-sighted, and delusory exercises, the first by Japan, the second by America. Dower designs the analogical reasoning to juxtapose happenings usually kept in separate categories; the juxtaposition should produce insight.

Two themes run through the study. Though largely implicit, the first tells us that all recent cultures of war have strong similarities. Such cultures rely on absolutistic religious reasoning to set themselves and their goodness off from the evil of their enemies. These cultures offer a simplistic and prejudicial understanding of the past to warrant their endeavors; they engage in biased understanding of contemporary intelligence about their adversaries; and they indulge in romantic optimism about what their war making holds for the future. Finally, they ignore how wars, as a matter of course, embrace the killing of civilians. Dower additionally ruminates about what has gone wrong with American global decision-making, especially since 2001. These ruminations comprise the second and more explicit theme – a sketch of the unacknowledged but murderous domination and expansion of the West.

Dower does not base this book on the archives. But he has mastered the secondary sources, summarizes much of the professional literature, and relies on his own extensive original research of which experts will be aware. He invariably displays intelligence, scrupulous honesty, and careful reasoning. Yet the volume does not sit right with me, although it demands attention.

A minor issue concerns the plethora of illustrations. A project of “Visualizing Cultures” has recently attracted Dower, and this book has over 120 pictures. Some remain effective. General MacArthur and Emperor Hirohito side by side in September of 1945 still have the power to take your breath away. But the publisher has reproduced all the pictures in flat black and white, and they are often too small. Pictures originally in color lose their meaning and, for people like me, so too do those in Japanese characters. Many of the pictures just don’t have much interest. We have here a good idea gone awry.

I find the central issue in the repeated use of analogies. Dower chooses a technique that, I think, can provide illumination. Instead, in his eyes, he wants to convince readers of The Truth. Analogies can play tricks with us. Dower assails the parallels some policy intellectuals made between the (satisfactory) occupation of Japan and the occupation of

Iraq (which he sees as disastrous). Although the author does not neglect nuance and complexity, he argues that someone could only foolishly use the experience in Japan to conceive the aftermath of the war in Iraq. From Dower's conclusion, however, we need not draw the lesson that the United States should have stayed out of Iraq, or even done better planning. Any defender of the need for violent American behavior in the face of terrorism might claim that a triumphal occupation would simply have required that the United States initially lay on nuclear weapons in Iraq. Then the occupation would have succeeded.

When Dower correlates 9/11 to Hiroshima, he conscientiously notes the differences in scale of the two affairs, yet he primarily intends to make us grant the atrocity of Hiroshima. Nonetheless, the correspondence works differently for me. In the context of twentieth-century war and the slaughter of innocents, 9/11 occupies a comparatively minor place; the U.S. got off easily. Raising the likenesses between the World Trade Center and the delivery of the first atomic bomb *diminishes*, for me, the significance of Hiroshima. If it matches 9/11, what's the big deal?

Dower, however, does not just analogize, which would allow us to go back and forth to cast light on different interpretations. He does not just want to rattle the understanding of your general educated reader. Analogies for him really incorporate the true or false. His equivalences and musings point to beliefs that he zealously accepts. In several places he denigrates "moral relativism," and he repeatedly tells us that the choice to attack, say, Pearl Harbor or Iraq was produced by group-think and herd behavior; the cherry picking of information; and psychic denial on the part of decision makers. The resulting judgments went against "genuine" freedom, democracy, and independent thought. Dower marches with certainty on his moral ground, and is assured of how history rightly accompanies his walk. He has his way and the wrong way to make up our minds, and we recognize what causes what in history – if only people will remove from their eyes the cultural filters that deceive them.

Dower's premises display themselves in a troubling manner. Historians, I believe, can never give up on truth as a notion that *regulates* our conduct – we have got to seek the truth. We cannot ever presume, however, that it at any time *constitutes* our conclusions – we can never think we have it. Dower for me has far too much confidence that he has gotten a firm hold on the past and has a grip on the justice he finds associated with his impartial hold. These difficulties come to the fore in his examination of current situations like the occupation of Iraq. My historical thinking premises that from the outlook of history contemporary occurrences will always look different from the way they do now; otherwise why bother with history? Why go into the archives? Current knowledge of politics for an historian will always be suspect. Historians must stand off a bit in comprehending the recent past, and set themselves apart from policy makers. How can Dower be so cocksure that Iraq failed? It is not over yet. Where does he get his rock-solid views? Does he purport to know what would have happened had Saddam Hussein remained in power? Dower's security in his beliefs about how the contemporary world works – dare I say it -- equals George Bush's in the early years of the twenty-first century. The author might ponder the analogy between his political convictions and those of the ex-President.

Let me put my analysis in another way. In his great essay, "Politics as a Vocation," Max Weber distinguishes the politics of responsibility from the politics of ultimate ends, two opposed forms of public conduct. The first is roughly working within the system; the second takes personal ethical imperatives and applies them in politics. Weber also acknowledges a paradox when he grants that the two politics are, in the last analysis, connected. For me Dower too readily employs his own guaranteed ethic of ultimate ends in his assessment of the politics of responsibility. The ordeals of the last ten years have moved him to become more of an engaged intellectual. Many people take history as a good tool for such engaged tasks. More often, I believe, history becomes subservient to some individual's or some group's righteous persuasions.

Americans have not been able to appreciate things properly, Dower says, because "victors control the history books" (196). It ill behooves an historian whose critical volumes have won so many distinguished prizes to write this line. Among professional historians Dower has made a sympathetic understanding of the Pacific War possible; I have gotten my comprehension of Japan from Dower and teach his ideas to my students. The writers of history largely side with him. It is politics and popular perceptions of the past, in various national settings, that have vanquished professionals, and regularly do vanquish them. We have a hard question in when and if we should leave our Ivory Tower and campaign for our views in the market place. In my estimation we gain little by doing this, and we always lose a lot. I am not concerned that we lose a public debate or that we show that, even as scholars, we have politics. By losing a lot, I mean that we risk the complete contamination of our history with our politics.

Cultures of War stands as a major scholarly achievement, based upon a somewhat unlikely comparison – the U.S. war with Japan and the (second) U.S. war in Iraq, including the subsequent occupations of these countries. The book works, however, for that very reason. As Dower observes, U.S. policymakers and opinion-makers borrowed symbols and rhetoric from World War II to promote and legitimize a very different kind of operation in Iraq. But the war with Japan was perhaps destined to become a powerful frame of reference given the seeming resemblance between the September-11 attacks – surprise, costly, unprovoked – and the attack, sixty years earlier, on the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. As we know, even superficial resemblances are sufficient to trigger the full application of a historical analogy. Like December 7, 1941, September 11, 2001 became a moment of “infamy.” Once more, the United States was reputedly jarred from its innocence by an act of pure savagery; again, the United States was at war with an adversary that would go anywhere and do anything to accomplish its evil goals. The symbolic floodgates opened: the kamikaze pilots of World War II became the aircraft-borne terrorists of 9/11, the Ground Zero of Hiroshima and Nagasaki became the Ground Zero of the World Trade Center, the World War II Axis alliance became the “axis of evil,” the Munich appeasement became a failure to stand up to terrorists, and so on and so forth.

For Dower, however, the juxtaposition of the two cases does not reduce to a good versus a bad war or even a war of “necessity” versus a war of “choice.” In both wars, U.S. leaders and officials suffer under scrutiny. Like Bush administration officials who failed to plan adequately for the Iraq war, U.S. officials who failed to anticipate the Pearl Harbor attack, “were undone by the arrogance of despising a small enemy” (p. 59). In the course of war, both were reduced to committing acts of inhumanity – if not crimes against humanity – to accomplish their supposedly noble purposes. Thus, what emerges from Dower’s probing, articulate analysis is a vast sea of gray. War is not sparked by the vile or the virtuous but by pretensions of virtue in the face of evil; eventually, war’s leveling effect steals all who participate of virtue: the “victim” becomes the “victimizer.” To make these points, Dower provides a detailed and highly informative account of the thinking and prejudices behind the U.S. aerial bombing of Japan – an incendiary campaign of monstrous proportions that culminated in the nuclear incineration of two major Japanese cities. Likewise, he shows that the Bush administration exhausted the reservoir of international good will that ensued from the September-11 attacks, by going on the offensive against Iraq without the support and endorsement of the international community, and that the administration then engaged in a disruptive occupation that created an environment within which conflict could thrive.

Dower does not settle for obvious or stilted resemblances. He moves fluidly and adeptly between his cases to offer evidence and insights from a full range of vantage points. He grounds his analysis in a deep understanding of contemporary Japanese history and thus Japanese geo-strategic concerns, culture, state-societal relations, symbolism, and religious influences. But, despite the commanding virtues of the book, its strengths lead also to three limitations.

First, Dower works hard to place Japan's behavior in context – politically, militarily, and legally. As a result, he frequently presents Japanese behavior in the most favorable light and U.S. actions, in the least. Notwithstanding his occasionally harsh characterizations of Japanese wartime behavior, the effect, by implication, is to place the onus upon the United States for misconduct in the course of war. Examples abound. Japan's forcible conquest of Asia amounts to a transfer of control to Japan of European-colonized territories, necessitated by the resource strain imposed by the war in China; the Pearl Harbor attack has much to do with the U.S. failure to anticipate the attack, having greatly underestimated the Japanese; U.S. attitudes toward Japan reflect a deeply rooted racism whereas Japanese attitudes toward China had a racial basis but were attributable more fundamentally to a fear of instability and Communism, et cetera. At worst, Japan's misdeeds are equated with those of the Allied powers: "In theory, Japan's defeat liberated hundreds of millions of Asians who had been invaded, occupied, and oppressed by the emperor's men. In actuality, it paved the way for wars and occupations that involved the Allied victors themselves – and that hold a murky mirror, in their own way, to the invasion of Iraq and aspects of that later tragedy that are less unique than often claimed" (p. 377). In vivid detail, Dower describes the destruction of Japanese cities at the hands of U.S. officials who cared little about the resulting suffering, except for its contribution to victory. In contrast, he makes infrequent and passing reference to Japan's atrocities and almost always to place them in context. In the index, the page listings for Hiroshima and Nagasaki take up almost half a page; six references are included for Abu Ghraib – the notorious prison where Iraqi prisoners were severely mistreated by U.S. soldiers. But Nanking is referenced only twice – then, shorn of historic details. Dower's comparison case for Nanking is not Hiroshima – instead, it is My Lai, the unprovoked massacre of old men, women, and children in a Vietnamese village by U.S. troops. The point apparently is to establish a historical pattern of heinous U.S. conduct; an effect is to detract from the more useful point that the United States and Japan were on an equal moral footing.

Second, Dower could have done more to establish the relative importance of factors that led the Bush administration into Iraq. Was the prelude to the Iraq war, as he suggests, all about U.S. delusion and deception? After all, the Bush administration's concerns about Iraq had a factual basis: Saddam Hussein was a ruthless thug – who had repressed Shiites and Kurds and provoked two wars with neighboring countries – and helped, through his own uncooperativeness, to create the appearance that he had weapons of mass destruction. In my view, the United States was not wrong to focus on his transgressions or potential ambitions. He had once possessed horrible weapons and had not transparently disarmed and the international community had devoted considerable energy and resources to containing his ambitions. Indeed, a liberal case was made for going to war with Iraq, and the Bush administration acted eventually with widespread domestic political support. My point is not that the United States *should* have invaded Iraq but that, after reading the book, I still do not know why the Bush administration went to war (or why it shifted its policies and prepared for a stay of indefinite duration). Various explanations are presented in the book. These include the belief that Saddam Hussein was behind the 9/11 attacks and was a growing danger; a mind-set in which all U.S. adversaries were linked; a "mix of hard analysis, ideological fervor, apocalyptic fantasy, and sheer purblind panic" (p. 96); the

opportunity that the war offered Bush's conservative advisors to pursue the "radical foreign and military policy" that they had been seeking (p. 143); "group think" (a term that Dower uses to describe "herd" behavior and rigid conformity); and so forth. The suggestion, then, is that the invasion of Iraq was a foregone conclusion after September 11. But was it? If so, why Iraq? Why a year-and-a-half later? Why not another of its cohort in evil? With all of the information that is now available on the decision-making of the period, a relative assessment of decisional influences is in order.

Finally, it is not clear from Dower's analysis whether an occupation is ever warranted or can work effectively and fairly. Although Dower presents the U.S. occupation of Japan as a positive model of sorts – in its planning, organization, adroit utilization of host political structures, et cetera – he also dwells on the negative side of the occupation – its distortion of the Japanese government, economy, and society as they were made to serve U.S. interests. Occupation is obviously something bad in his thinking – equated, for instance, with the Afghan occupation that helped bring down the Soviet Union. Still, Dower skirts the issue of whether the United States should have occupied Afghanistan in response to the 2001 attacks. He also begs the question of whether the United States can actually recover from its mistakes, because he gives scant treatment of the Iraq war after the 2004 Abu Ghraib prison disclosures. Dower makes much of the cherry-picking of evidence by the Bush administration to support its war in Iraq, but he focuses his analysis almost entirely on the approach to the Iraq war and the initial stage of the subsequent occupation. Yes, the administration was guilty of original sin: once it blundered into war – and then sought, without planning or understanding, to remake the country – it had to accept the consequences. But some balance is in order. The Iraq war was not all about Bremer, Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld, and Abu Ghraib – a vainglorious effort to establish U.S. military supremacy, to bring democracy and marketization to Iraq, and to place it firmly in the Western camp. In its later stages, the war was about Petraeus, Crocker, and U.S. adaptation in war, attempts to apply counterinsurgency principles to stabilize the country, and efforts to instigate political compromises and reforms in Iraq over strong internal resistance. Just as Dower complicates the moral story of the U.S. war with Japan, this aspect of the Iraq war complicates the moral story of the Iraq conflict and must be told, regardless of how one might judge those actions.

Most scholars of a certain age find their work diminishing—slower to emerge or downsized in heft. Not John Dower, the eminent historian of modern Japan and U.S.–Japanese relations. Addressing questions that have engaged him throughout his career, and propelled by his anger over American war making since 9/11, Dower has produced a whopper of a book in both length and intellectual substance, including 100 pages of dense endnotes drawing on voluminous scholarship and primary sources.

Cultures of War is an untidy book. Dower juggles so many themes and stories that repetition is unavoidable and easy summary impossible. It might be read as several smaller books nested inside a larger one. The chapters on the U.S. incendiary and atomic bombing of Japan and the start of the nuclear arms race could stand alone as the wisest current treatment of that vexed history. Dower’s comparison of the U.S. occupations of Japan and Iraq and his critique of how Iraq War policymakers misread, “cherry-picked,” and ignored the Japan story—“in this case, ransacking not raw intelligence data but history itself”—is another book. That “not a single American was killed” during the seven-year U.S. occupation of Japan (or of Germany) was the most obvious difference, though there were also strange similarities: the occupation, beyond Japan, from Korea to Indonesia, of a war-ravaged and decolonizing Asia entailed enormous carnage. “The only place in Asia where the guns were really stilled and peace prevailed was Japan.” Even readers who reject Dower’s comparative enterprise will find much of interest here.

Cultures is a loose, catchall term for what he’s getting at, for he examines not the stuff of culture broadly but the nitty-gritty of policymaking and decisions, which he sees as usefully understood in cultural, not just political, terms. Yes, in 1941 American and Japanese leaders made political and strategic calculations, which Dower attends to carefully. But beyond those calculations lay attitudes, assumptions, and stupidities that no policy history can be expected to explain. At the same time, Dower resists generalizations about entire cultures. For him, blame for war making does not rest on timeless Japanese, American, or Islamic attraction to war and destruction (he has no truck with those who contrast Western “rationality” to “an illogical ‘East’”). It rests with political and other elites and their responses to circumstances.

Dower compares the entries of the United States and Japan into World War II with the U.S. bombing of Japan, Al Qaeda’s and America’s war making before and after 9/11, and the Iraq War. He pays particular attention to torture and other alleged war crimes during the subsequent U.S. occupations. His effort to compare such things, *and* his conclusions, will infuriate some critics. But Dower is careful to show that comparison does not mean equivalence, only enough “convergences of a sort” among disparate acts of war and occupation to make comparison useful. As the book’s title suggests, for Dower there is no single culture of war across time and space and circumstance, even within one country. The

¹ This review originally appeared in *The American Scholar*, September 1, 2010, <http://www.theamericanscholar.org> and is reprinted with the permission of the author.

American culture of war in 2003 differed from that of 1941 or 1965. The robust American systems of war and occupation that grew out of World War II—fallible but full of smart people—had all but disappeared by the time of the Iraq invasion, when the U.S. government “bore only shadow resemblance to that of 1945.” Still, even different systems have things in common—above all, in Dower’s view, their capacity to produce strategic and moral “imbecilities,” not least because leaders grossly misunderstand or simply ignore their enemies, their own impulses, and history itself.

Among Dower’s gifts is a striking ability to embed provocative conclusions within such rich analysis that they cannot be dismissed as outrageous, however much they may outrage readers who skip the analysis. “In practice,” Dower argues, “the imperial presidency under George W. Bush was in certain critical respects more absolute, inviolate, impenetrable, and arbitrary than the militaristic government that took imperial Japan to war.” (103) Fox News won’t like that claim, nor Dower’s assertion that the “unitary executive” presidency that climaxed with Bush “amounted to what Americans call authoritarian governance when practiced by others, even dictatorship of a sort.” But Dower amasses too much evidence, analysis, and careful qualification (“in certain critical respects”) for such claims to be rejected out of hand.

Among many things that the war makers have had in common was their “arrogation of God”—their “abiding sense of a concentrated moment in which mortals found themselves playing God, both destroyer and creator,” as Dower writes of the scientists and policymakers who rushed to use atomic bombs against Japan (and as a shot across the bow to the Soviet Union). (223) To be sure, the Japanese who authorized war, the atomic bombers, Osama bin Laden, and George W. Bush arrogated God to different purposes, which Dower does not equate, and under different circumstances. But despite those differences, what fascinates Dower is how much they sounded alike and unleashed destruction as a consequence. Arrogation took varied forms, some nominally secular (“history begins today,” one U.S. official declared on 9/11), some expressing a “theocratic vision of good and evil,” as with bin Laden. Perhaps Dower takes expression of that arrogation too much at face value—surely at times it was a rhetorical gloss, an insecure leader’s nervous assertion of authority, or a cynical play to audiences, not a sincere belief. Still, Dower’s job as a cultural historian is to understand how language works, not to measure the sincerity of those who mouth it. And that arrogation went far, even among agnostic scientists, as with the “precious narcissism of [Robert] Oppenheimer’s aestheticism,” (270) as Dower acidly calls it. While scientists regarded the bomb’s effects as supernatural and hellish, “Visualizing hell on earth does not preclude finding it attractive. It may even invite drawing closer.” (269)

Ultimately this is a treatise on the madness of war and terrorism—the madness that precedes war, propels it once started, and gets left in its wake. Dower understands that madness as a cultural historian, not as a psychologist, but his evidence suggests that leaders and systems were often also plain mad, as in crazy-deluded or demonically possessed by the power they wielded and the ideals they proclaimed. In turn, their victories bore them only short-term benefits: for Japan, a few years of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, then destruction; for the Americans (and the Allies), the defeat of

Japan, then a globe-imperiling orgy of nuclear weapons. Al Qaeda had the delicious satisfaction of seeing the Twin Towers fall and America humiliated, yet it seems not an inch closer to the goals it professes. For the United States, the most war-prone nation of the post-1945 era, war making has been frustrating at best, dismaying at worst: the Korean War ended in stalemate, the Vietnam War in defeat, and the first Gulf War in an outcome that pleased few, while the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan now seem endless and inconclusive. Only intervention in the Bosnian and Kosovo wars produced some satisfaction, a reminder that wars of limited goals and means succeed more often than those of megalomaniac goals and titanic means. Even political benefits have been scant: every president who engaged in major war making after 1945 found his presidency and his party soon discredited.

Why, then, did the United States persist at war, when so little was accomplished and so much horror inflicted? Its primary response to frustration and defeat in war has been, apart from a post-Vietnam pause, to double down—to try war again, usually invoking World War II, even as previous failures get swept aside. Now President Barack Obama has done so in Afghanistan. This failed instrument of policy has shown remarkable persistence. One reason for it was that no U.S. failure entailed the national humiliation and occupation that Germany and Japan experienced. America has suffered defeat too lightly, just as it wages war too cavalierly, to force a strong reexamination of its culture of war.

Still, the persistence is fascinating. Why some nations or groups learn from defeat and others do not is another book. Dower would be the one to write it. “Cultures of Defeat” would be a fitting sequel to *Cultures of War*, pointing toward “the possibility for shared cultures of peace and reconciliation,” that “distant shore that lies opposite the cultures of war.” (452).

Author's Response by John Dower, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

For readers unfamiliar with *Cultures of War*, let me preface my response to the reviewers with a background comment on two matters. The first concerns how my treatment of war as a congeries of “cultures” involves going beyond obvious differences that set antagonists apart ideologically, strategically, and tactically, and looking more closely at mindsets and actions that cut across national, social, and doctrinal confines. Using “culture” in this manner runs against the fashionable conventions of clash-of-civilizations thinking, in which “culture” is societal and inherently boundary-imposing. This is unsettling to those who find comfort in clearcut distinctions: Us-versus-Them, The West and the Rest, America’s “exceptionalism” in both material might and singular virtue. On the other hand, we do not hesitate to speak of corporate (or popular, consumer, sports, youth, bureaucratic, etc.) cultures, or cultures of corruption or influence or the like. Why not modern conflict as well, in all its modalities and pathologies?

Thinking of war in terms of deep cultures also provides a way to assess change (or its relative absence) over time. I began *Cultures of War* in 2001, in the wake of 9-11; found myself drawn in unexpected directions with the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq; and continued researching and writing until the end of the Bush administration. The project was always exploratory, and there were several reasons for staying with it so long. One was that this permitted seeing how the “war on terror” unfolded, most notably in Iraq. Additionally, the added work years provided an ever-accelerating flow of documentation about both Al Qaeda’s attack and the war in Iraq in the form of official reports, leaked memoranda, interview-driven journalistic studies, and insider accounts by both critics and defenders of the government’s intelligence operations and war-making. The cultures-of-war approach also accommodated bringing history into the picture to challenge the argument of belated war critics that the Bush administration’s policies were largely *sui generis* and against the American grain, a product of the president’s “gut feeling” *modus operandi* on the one hand, and, on the other hand, of a maverick “cabal” of neoconservative ideologues and unrealistic self-professed realists that surrounded him. The Bush war-makers may have been egregious in their shortcomings, but they were not particularly abnormal—and they carried a patriotic mainstream America with them until things fell apart.

E. H. Carr told readers (in *What Is History?*) to study the historian before they study the history, and it seems pertinent to also call attention to the years I have spent as an historian of modern Japan. This has made me (and, I believe, most of my colleagues in the study of modern Asia) acutely uncomfortable with the essentialist uses of “culture” inherent in clash-of-civilizations thinking. Why? Because such formulations postulate unchanging “values”; obscure diversity within the so-called great traditions; posit homogeneity where tension, conflict, and heterogeneity prevail; ignore the calculated manipulation or “invention” or “reinvention” of tradition by those who wield power; deny or downplay deep, multi-faceted historical change; and ignore the volatile kinetics of “modernity” itself. My own attraction to Japan as a student in the late 1950s and early 1960s was largely cultural in the old-fashioned sense of religion, literature, and the visual arts; and of books I

have authored, my sentimental favorite remains my first: an art book titled *The Elements of Japanese Design*. “Culture” in the traditional sense does not explain much when it comes to understanding Japan in the modern world, however, and clash-of-civilizations thinking—once close to gospel in explaining imperial Japan’s militarism and aggression—now has scant place at all in serious historiography of World War Two in Asia.

Cultures of War introduces this point of departure in its opening sections by taking on two exceedingly influential old-school pronouncements that placed Japan in a cultural box: one arguing that Japanese thought and behavior as reflected in its war-making could not be predicted “by any Western measuring rod,” an understandable deficiency given the nation’s recently feudalistic background; and the second, following from this, arguing that the Pearl Harbor attack, while tactically brilliant, amounted to an exercise in “strategic imbecility” unique to Japan and unprecedented in history. (The first observation came from Joseph Grew, the U.S. ambassador to Japan from 1931 to 1941, and the second from the esteemed American naval historian Samuel Eliot Morison.) For some years now, historians of Japan and World War II in Asia have been vastly more interested in Japanese “modernity” after World War I, and the breakdown of the world order that, accelerated by collapse of global capitalism in 1929, paved the way for the nation’s militarism and disastrous quest for autarchy and autonomy. September 11 and the ensuing U.S. war of choice against Iraq did not simply prompt me to compare President Bush and his small coterie of key policy-makers to Emperor Hirohito and his warlords. It led me to reread and rethink Japan’s decision for war in 1941—with all its strategic paranoia and fear-mongering, moral fervor, and hubristic wishful thinking—in the context of these concrete examples of contemporary American strategic folly. *Cultures of War* was not written as just a commentary on American ways of war.

My second prefatory comment concerns the structure of the book. Although this rests on a number of case studies—the Pearl Harbor attack seen from both the American and Japanese sides; the Anglo-American air war in World War Two that culminated in Hiroshima and Nagasaki; Al Qaeda’s terrorist September 11 attack, and the ensuing war of choice against Iraq; and the U.S. occupations of Japan and, six decades later, Iraq—the topical divisions and chapter breakdowns do not present these case studies as neat narrative capsules. Rather, the conflicts and occupations under scrutiny are dissected thematically. The patterns of American, Japanese, and Islamist war-related thinking and behavior that drew my attention are complicated and challenging, and the analysis takes the form of a kind of “cross-hatching” of dynamics and pathologies that cut across conflicts and antagonists. Comparing Islamist terror-bombers to the Japanese in World War Two was a popular (but misleading) response to September 11 among American commentators—and a major consideration that prompted me to think about what more genuinely incisive areas of comparison might be. Adding the United States itself to the comparative equation, however—rather than just placing September 11 alongside December 7, and Al Qaeda and the Pan-Islamists alongside the Pan-Asianist ideologues of imperial Japan, and the suicide bombers of 2001 alongside the kamikaze—obviously is unsettling to the disciples of clash-of-civilizations and American-exceptionalism thinking.

Michael Sherry reviews the book kindly, and captures much of the essence of my approach in a few concise phrases: that “comparison does not mean equivalence,” for example, and that “ultimately this is a treatise on the madness of war and terrorism.” He also describes the book as “untidy,” and I am afraid he may be right on this score. With this in mind, let me try to highlight here some of the key patterns of war-related conduct that attracted my interest. One is wars of choice, of which three are scrutinized in the book: Japan in 1941, Al Qaeda in 2001, and the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. A second addresses failures of strategic intelligence evaluation and projection, almost invariably coupled with gross failures of imagination concerning the nature, intentions, and capabilities of the imminent enemy. Here, the case studies are four in number: the United States in 1941 vis-à-vis Japan, in 2001 vis-à-vis Al Qaeda, and in 2003 (most shockingly and inexcusably) vis-à-vis Iraq; and imperial Japan in 1941, in initiating war against the United States and other Allied Powers with no serious deliberation about the psychological impact of a surprise attack upon Americans, or about the probable end game in such a dire confrontation. The shocker here, of course, is comparing the invasion of Iraq to Japan’s foolhardy, hubristic war of choice in 1941. A third area of comparison addresses Manichean “holy war” thinking and indoctrination on the part of imperial Japan, the Islamist terrorists, and the Bush administration—and the uses and abuses of “history” that accompany such propagandizing. These issues are all addressed primarily in Part One of *Cultures of War*, which is titled “Pearl Harbor as Code: Failures of Intelligence and Strategic Imbecilities.”

Professor Sherry regards the discussion of U.S. bombing policy in World War II as a strong, almost “stand alone,” part of the book, and I find myself agreeing with him here too. This long Part Two, titled “Ground Zero 1945 and Ground Zero 2001: Terror and Mass Destruction,” was the most emotionally exhausting part of *Cultures of War* to write, raises the most troubling moral questions, and encroaches most unsettlingly on American taboos and nostrums about “necessary evil.” I have written about the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in other places, and done web sites and even a film on this, but the treatment here is of a different nature. My point of departure was “terror bombing” and the argument—so widespread in America in the wake of the September 11 atrocity—that (1) this was proof positive of the clash-of-civilizations argument, demonstrating how Islam and the Muslim tradition, unlike the humane Judeo-Christian West, has no respect for human life; and (2) “terror bombing” is most appropriately analyzed as a tactic of non-state actors engaged in asymmetrical war.

To any serious student of World War II, and of the Anglo-American air war more particularly, this is nonsense. And to the few attuned to the language of nuclear devastation in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, the baptism of the World Trade Center ruins of September 2001 as “Ground Zero” was a sobering reminder that deliberately targeting civilian populations to destroy enemy morale has been standard operating procedure ever since the Good War against Nazi fascism and Japanese aggression. *Cultures of War* breaks ground here, in my view, in several ways. Part Two extends recent studies of the Allied air war against Germany to Japan, and documents the U.S. firebombing of sixty-four Japanese cities prior to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It clarifies that terror-bombing to destroy morale became an integral part of strategic bombing as the air war took off. (Included here is a photo of the “model” Japanese and German workers’ dwellings on which U.S. bombing

strategists practiced at the Dugway Proving Ground in Utah beginning in 1943, and reproductions of some of the “psywar” leaflets that were dropped on Japanese cities in 1945, warning, as one put it, that “every day of added resistance will bring greater terror upon you”—as if the men, women, and children in these doomed cities could possibly persuade the emperor and his warlords to capitulate.) In this milieu, the decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was largely procedural, since killing non-combatants was already routine. It was, at the same time, contested by some of the scientists in the Manhattan Project, and Part Two dwells at length on the many systemic, political, psychological, and ostensibly even “idealistic” and “humane” imperatives that made using the atomic bombs inevitable.

Others—Gar Alperovitz, Martin Sherwin, and Richard Rhodes distinguished among them—have written critically about the decision to use the atomic bombs. What sets the treatment in *Cultures of War* apart is discussing this as terror bombing and placing Hiroshima and Nagasaki in a broader context of Anglo-American psychological warfare that began against Germany and identified “morale” as a target just as important and legitimate as armies, navies, and military-related factories and installations. (The total number of German and Japan civilians killed in this air war was in the neighborhood of one million.) The discussion does not carry scrutiny of U.S. bombing of civilian populations into the Korean and Vietnam wars. It does devote some pages to the ways Islamist ideologues have rationalized such killing in the name of just, necessary, regrettable-but-inescapable war conduct.

The third and last part of the book, titled “Wars and Occupations: Winning the Peace, Losing the Peace,” is a three-chapter comparison of the U.S. occupations of Japan after 1945 and Iraq beginning in 2003. Here “cultures of war” invites a many-sided sort of inquiry. One side involves “cultures” in a more conventional sense: the enormous differences between Japan in 1945 and Iraq in the opening years of this century. Japan’s relatively smooth postwar transformation from authoritarian rule and expansive militarism to democracy and quasi-pacifism rested largely on indigenous factors: U.S. occupation authorities cracked the old regime open in adroit ways that made it possible for these forces to establish themselves institutionally. Another side of the comparison, however, is the enormous difference between the U.S. military establishment of the immediate postwar years, with its disciplined sense of chains of command and responsibility for civil affairs in occupied areas, and the fractious, unruly, outsourced, non-transparent, and deeply corrupt military occupations the Bush administration introduced in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I have written a great deal about the occupied Japan elsewhere, drawing about equally on the Japanese and American documentary record. In *Cultures of War*, I asked some new questions. Was the occupation of Japan (as of Iraq) legal under international law? How were Japanese POWs treated by the victorious Allied Powers in the aftermath of Japan’s surrender (a natural question given the controversy about the Bush administration’s maltreatment of enemy prisoners)? And why do more than a few Japanese commentators today look back on the occupation (which dragged on from 1945 to 1952) as an ambiguous period, characterized by American cultural imperialism as much as by liberation? In this reengagement with occupied Japan, I also was struck by how extraordinary some

developments now seem, such as the simple fact that Michael Sherry calls attention to: that no American occupation forces were killed in Japan or Germany.

Victoria de Grazia and Herbert Bix are patient and generous in teasing out thematic strands or implications in the book, and I agree with both that the “cultures of war” concept as presented here leaves large questions unanswered where the United States in particular is concerned. Professor Bix frames this in terms of the “national security state” that I mention but do not scrutinize. Professor De Grazia finds me at my “least convincing” when implying “that acting out war cultures is basically a behavioral problem, as if a good dose of common sense could provide a cure, or that frightful deeds are the function of a particular culture of modern war”—and goes on to ask a series of questions pointing to the challenge of understanding “the war-making culture specific to the United States.” Professor Sherry implicitly points in this same direction in his characterization of the United States as “the most war-prone nation of the post-1945 era.”

What can I say? This is another book—indeed, many other books—and, ironically, it brings my interest in exploring comparisons that cut across national, social, and ideological confines to a contradictory end point: American exceptionalism. Obviously, this is not the “exceptionalism” of patriotic rhetoric, where America’s unprecedented might is married to incomparable virtue. Rather, it is the exceptionalism of a war-connected machinery that has no counterpart in history or in the contemporary world—a state-within-the-state that abjures transparency, invites corruption, is driven not only by external threats, and not only by technological imperatives, but also by its own internal momentum and pathologies. As Iraq and Afghanistan and “homeland security” more generally have made clear, this is also a staggeringly complex creation that is undergoing enormous transformation in the form of “privatization” and “outsourcing.”

At the same time, however, I would still insist on making a modest case for not throwing “common sense” and other “behavioral” issues out the window as too soft to have much critical value. The former is really code for one of the issues that came to fascinate me—namely, the myths, delusions, and irrationalities of ostensibly rational individuals imbedded in presumably rationalized bureaucratic organizations and spending their days making supposedly rational choices. Rationality and common sense are bedrock concepts in the clash-of-civilizations paradigm that so many Westerners cherish, and Joseph Grew’s old canard about non-Westerners lacking the capacity to think logically as Westerners do still has its legions of believers. Yet the Cold War, the postwar arms race, the Vietnam War (see the belated *mea culpa* of the late Robert McNamara), the conflicts that still engage the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan all have exposed the extent to which managers of the national security state, like their counterpart gurus on Wall Street, and like so many leaders in other times and places, tend to function as a secular priesthood engaged in no small measure of faith-based thinking that becomes widely accepted as gospel. What is often missing, clear in retrospect, is... well, common sense. That is not an end point, but rather a starting point, for thinking about institutional and individual behavior; but it is good, plain language that helps to refocus attention on the chimeras as well as hopes of “rationality” in our modern world, and to clear the decks for deeper comparative studies.

James Lebovic prefaces his comments on the limitations of the book with generous praise, and I thank him for this—and particularly for noting my attentiveness to “symbols and rhetoric,” my interest in “a full range of vantage points,” and the fact that what emerges from the analysis is “a vast sea of gray” rather than dogmatic assertions. I turned to doing history in the latter part of the 1960s after undergraduate and early graduate-school immersion in literature and the humanities, and the enduring influence of this is reflected in my focus on public and political language, on tragedy, and on ambiguity—and the need to somehow make order of a sort out of all this.

The “three limitations” Professor Lebovic finds in *Cultures of War* are reasonable. Let me respond to them in reverse order. I do not think that occupying countries in the wake of conflict is “obviously something bad,” and I have written at length here and elsewhere on its positive legacies in Japan. But defeated Japan and Germany were exceptional in their occupation-era successes; negative legacies carry to the present day even in Japan, and can not be ignored; and most occupations fail for any number of usually predictable reasons. While I did carry on research to the end of the Bush administration, this was in good part because this permitted access to the small flood of documentation that began to appear, once Iraq descended into chaos, concerning the truly appalling failures of foresight and planning that took place after 9-11 and continued long after the invasion took place. “Counterinsurgency” in Iraq and Afghanistan is another story (and in my view another hubristic one); and it is true that we do not know the future. That these so-called humanitarian interventions have unleashed horrors on both the invaded and the invaders, and with no clear end in sight, however, is undeniable.

Given the number of case studies and themes I wanted to address, I do not think I could have done much more on this score. (Partly for reasons of space, I excised a multi-chapter “Part Four” from the book manuscript, comparing and contrasting imperial Japan’s holy war and socialization for death with that of Al Qaeda and the Islamist terrorists.) One of the reasons the endnotes became so extensive is that I wished to direct readers to the many journalistic accounts and internal reports, declassified documents, and the like on which I relied. One passing thought in this regard, however, is worth keeping in mind: that we will never have the type of documentation about the administration’s response to 9-11 or decision to invade Iraq that was made available through the many official investigations of the U.S. failure of intelligence at Pearl Harbor, and, for Japan (and Germany) through the postwar war-crimes trials. Politics prohibits this.

Professor Lebovic’s most troubling criticism is that I frequently present “Japanese behavior in the most favorable light and U.S. actions, in the least.” I hope that is not the impression others will take from the book. In attempting to rethink Japan’s wars of choice against China in 1937 and, much more closely, against the United States and Western colonial powers in Southeast Asia in 1941, I accepted the argument that this was (in Morison’s phrase) “strategic imbecility,” and that Japan’s war conduct was atrocious. After the invasion of Iraq, the question I was prompted to ask about imperial Japan was: was such irrational policy-making and militarist behavior peculiar to the Japanese in the popular clash-of-cultures sense—was it “incomparable”—or did it reflect wishful thinking, denial, and delusion on the part of ostensibly rational men whose nationalistic and strategic

thinking was not particularly alien, or “non-Western”? At one point in the book, I assemble a list of the many arguments by which Japan’s warlords persuaded themselves that they had no choice but to choose war in 1941 and argued that, however risky, there were many reasons to hope that the outcome would ultimately stabilize Japan’s position in Asia. This was arrogant, hubristic, and delusory, but it was not peculiar.

That I dwell at length on incendiary bombing and the use of the atomic bombs, and mention the Rape of Nanking only in passing, is not because Japanese atrocities do not matter. It is because the rhetoric and symbolism of “Ground Zero” became a point of departure not as an example of “atrociousness” per se, but rather for lifting terror bombing out of the “non-state actor” and “Islamic barbarity” boxes and seeing it as a terrible culture of psychological warfare in an age of total war, with a genealogy that can be traced back to the strategic bombing campaign in World War II. The “sea of gray” is very conspicuous here, daunting and chilling and, for some, virtually forbidden territory. I think we must explore it.

I do not recognize what I have written in Bruce Kuklick’s broadside, and leave it to others to judge if the book really pretends to have grasped “The Truth,” or if it has only two basic themes, the most explicit of which is “the unacknowledged but murderous domination and expansion of the West,” or if it is too soon to be sure that “Iraq failed”—and thus, apparently, still too soon to write critically about the Bush administration’s war of choice and the terrible costs of this war-making that we have observed now for over eight years.

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