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History R1B
9/25/14

***War Without Mercy* Book Review**

In AP United States history class, we are taught the American bias- that America heroically liberates East Asia from Japanese occupation. *War Without Mercy* dismantles these stereotypes of World War II. John Dower's book *War Without Mercy* is an original undertaking that argues that racism fueled World War II, particularly in the Pacific Theater. Dower deems the Pacific War a race war, "a war that exposed raw prejudices and was fueled by racial pride, arrogance, and rage on many sides" (4). Dower shows that both sides were equally guilty of using racially charged propaganda to drive the war.

War Without Mercy seeks to enlighten readers about the dual-sided race hate during the Pacific War. Dower enters the psyches of both the West and the Japanese, showing the similarities between supposedly irreconcilable sides. By analyzing cartoons, movies, novels and speeches, Dower reveals the levels of racism the Japanese were subjected to in the U.S and vice versa. For example, the Americans homogenized the Japanese race, ignoring the possibility that there could ever be a "good Jap", a privilege reserved for the Germans. The West created images of Japanese as a simian race, portraying Japanese as primitive and inhuman. The Japanese were also considered immature, undifferentiated from each other and motivated by child-like desires to conquer the world. Western observers characterized all Japanese as instable and mentality ill, creating an image of Japanese fanaticism. Dower notes that the functional purpose of psychoanalyzing the enemy was to "rationalize and legitimize thereby one's own savage acts of reprisal and retribution" (141). President Truman, who ordered the dropping of the

atomic bomb, justified his act by calling the Japanese "savages, ruthless, merciless, and fanatic" (142). The Allied side acted on their propaganda, collecting trophies of disembodied Japanese soldiers, and calling for their extermination of the vermin.

The Japanese used similar strategies, promoting the Yamato race as the "master race" and dehumanizing the West as "Others." Japan claimed that the West's insatiable hunger for world conquest made the war inevitable. By fermenting national pride, Japan created hate for the other side." Japan distributed pamphlets to their soldiers, called *Read this and the War is Won*, defining the enemy as Americans and Europeans. The soldiers' duties were to "liberate Asia from the white man's prison... All of you Asiatics who have groaned under the yoke of the white man, unite!" (207). Color played a key role in the wartime propaganda of Japan. Japan considered itself superior to the other yellow races, and thought of its own "whiteness" of skin as a symbol of the country's purity, cleanliness, and power. For example, in Japanese cartoons, Japanese were depicted as light-skinned and supreme while the people of Southeast Asia were portrayed as dark-skinned and ugly. Japan referred to the West as "darkness, which was being dispelled by the light of Japan" (213). This spiritual purity affected Japan's wartime policy. Dower says, "The Japanese were indoctrinated to see the conflict in Asia and the Pacific as an act which could purify the self, the nation, Asia, and ultimately the world" (215). The ultimate act of purification was committing self-sacrifice to free Asia from the West's darkness.

Japan also created clear distinctions between itself and the West- pure versus polluted. In wartime depictions, Americans were demons that "had to be exorcised- and in the midst of all-out war it was often argued that they had to be utterly destroyed."

(245). The Japanese government espoused extermination policies, pointing to the lynchings of Blacks in America as evidence of the White American's inhumane nature and need to be cleansed from the earth. In addition, Dower analyzes *An Investigation of Global Policy with the Yamato Race as Nucleus*, highlighting its message of racial superiority. Specifically, the book suggested an implementation of eugenic programs to preserve Yamato superiority. Through Dower's analysis, he demonstrates that the rhetoric of Japanese wartime propaganda instigated a war fought for racial ablation.

Through an analysis of both the West and Japanese sides, Dower shows that the race hate was dual-sided. Both fronts employed racist tactics to commit hate crimes against the "Other." Dower claims that through such race hate, the enemy and self were distanced which facilitated killing. The war was truly without mercy.

Dower also explores the Western psyche, analyzing the dichotomy of the subhuman and superhuman complex attributed to the Japanese. The image of the subhuman, Japanese ape became widespread in popular American and British media. The trope of Japanese as louse also inflamed extermination sentiments. Such depictions of the Japanese led to "this linguistic softening of the killing process [which] was accomplished most often through two general figures of speech: the metaphors of the hunt, and of exterminating vermin" (89). Killing Japanese became synonymous with killing vermin.

Astounded by Japanese military prowess, the West also deemed the Japanese as "a more formidable adversary than the Germans..." (99). Dower believes that the dichotomy of subhuman and superhuman reveals that the "Japanese were rarely perceived as being human beings of a generally comparable and equal sort" (99). Japanese were inhuman and separate from the West, simultaneously subhuman and superhuman.

However, Dower fails to address the inherent tension between subhuman and superhuman. Dower labors to show that the Japanese characterized the West as demons and gods, while the West viewed the Japanese as superhumans and animals. Dower saw this separation from oneself and the enemy as dehumanization. Does viewing the enemy as superhuman or as gods really dehumanize them? Aren't superhumans and gods put to a higher pedestal than humans? Do such attitudes lead to extermination policies as Dower suggests? Dower claims that viewing the enemy as subhuman and superhuman leads to a lack of identification, but doesn't delve into how such polar opposite terms affect wartime mentality.

A unique contribution is Dower's analysis of Japan and the West's post-World War II from "peace to war" relationship. Dower explains this transformation through the malleable nature of Japan's portrayal in US media and vice versa. Through a description of *Leatherneck's* September 1945 issue, which was published after Japan's capitulation, Dower brings this phenomenon to light. The magazine "introduced a subtle and significant metamorphosis: it depicted, in full-color illustration, a smiling Marine with an appealing but clearly vexed monkey on his shoulder, dressed in the oversized uniform of the Imperial Army" (302). The racially charged image of a primitive ape disappeared, replaced by a more benign face of racism to fit the Americans' post-war policies of paternalism. On the Japanese side, the malleability of their propaganda led to a similar switch of strategy. The Americans were portrayed as demons with human faces, making Japanese and Americans seem closer to each other than apparent at first sight. In post-World War II Japan, Japanese philosophy of "proper place" aided Japan's transition to defeated power, and its idea of purification led to purging of traditional institutions.

Dower concludes that racist undertones still exist, coloring the emergence of Japan as an economic power as devious and undeserved. Dower points out that returning to the events of World War II is painful, yet essential and inevitable. Studying the past is the only way to understand the world today.

Overall, *War Without Mercy* is a transformative read for anyone interested in challenging her understanding of World War II in the Pacific Theater. *War Without Mercy* evades the conventional narrative of World War II, instead focusing on how racial tensions drove the war and led to war crimes. Ultimately, readers will feel the reward of going beyond the perfunctory knowledge of World War II, and understand the importance that race played in a war that still affects our nation.