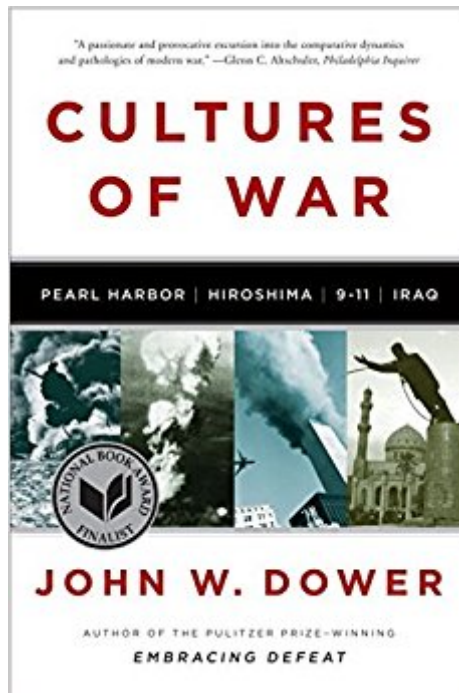




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# Cultures Of War: Pearl Harbor / Hiroshima / 9-11 / Iraq



## Synopsis

Finalist for the 2010 National Book Award in Nonfiction and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize: *“A thought-provoking . . . book about the way events echo and mis-echo down the corridors of history.”* Financial Times Over recent decades, John W. Dower, one of America’s preeminent historians, has addressed the roots and consequences of war from multiple perspectives. In *War Without Mercy* (1986), winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award, he described and analyzed the brutality that attended World War II in the Pacific, as seen from both the Japanese and the American sides. *Embracing Defeat* (1999), winner of numerous honors including the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, dealt with Japan’s struggle to start over in a shattered land in the immediate aftermath of the Pacific War, when the defeated country was occupied by the U.S.-led Allied powers. Turning to an even larger canvas, Dower now examines the cultures of war revealed by four powerful events: Pearl Harbor, Hiroshima, 9-11, and the invasion of Iraq in the name of a war on terror. The list of issues examined and themes explored is wide-ranging: failures of intelligence and imagination, wars of choice and “strategic imbecilities,” faith-based secular thinking as well as more overtly holy wars, the targeting of noncombatants, and the almost irresistible logic and allure of mass destruction. Dower’s new work also sets the U.S. occupations of Japan and Iraq side by side in strikingly original ways. One of the most important books of this decade, *Cultures of War* offers comparative insights into individual and institutional behavior and pathologies that transcend “cultures” in the more traditional sense, and that ultimately go beyond war-making alone. 122 black-and-white illustrations

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. In this fascinating study, a finalist for the 2010 National Book Award, Pulitzer prize-winning historian Dower (*Embracing Defeat*) draws parallels between the illusion-ridden Japanese top leadership prior to December 7, 1941 and the fecklessness and over-confidence of the Bush Administration after September 11, 2001. The author compares the post-war occupations as well, stating that "Wishful thinking trumped rational analysis in Tokyo in 1941 and Washington in the run-up to war with Iraq." Exploring "the similar rationales and rhetoric of Japan's war of choice in 1941 and America's invasion of Iraq in 2003," he looks at the way in which emotion-laden terms like "Pearl Harbor" and "ground zero" have been co-opted for the War against Terror. And similarly mistaken, in Dower's view, were the beliefs of both commands in the efficacy of bombings targeting civilian populations. Equally telling is his comparison between the occupation of Japan (and to a lesser extent, Germany) and the occupation of Iraq. After Japan's surrender, the U.S. military formulated a set of pre-determined goals based upon New Deal principles that laid the groundwork for Japan's extraordinary economic recovery. In Dower's view, the U.S. not only abdicated responsibility for the Iraqi occupation, but ignored the potential of the sectarian divisions that have erupted there. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This somber tome compares Japan's decision to attack Pearl Harbor in 1941 and that of America's to attack Iraq in 2003. In addition to assessing what planners were thinking, Dower analyzes how they came to believe their war would be both short and victorious. Indicting a range of intelligence deficiencies and bureaucratic breakdowns in each case, Dower critiques most cogently the cultural and even emotional mind-sets of the strategists. In both cases, he argues, a sense of injured innocence, an apocalyptic fear of the consequences of inaction, and contempt for the opponent prevailed, reinforced by selective appropriations of history. Dower particularly indicts proponents of invading Iraq for the analogy made to the American occupation of Japan. •Dower is an expert on the subject (*Embracing Defeat*, 1999). In extended corollaries to his main subject, Dower also discusses the firebombing of Japanese cities, the atomic attacks of 1945, and the destruction of the World Trade Center in terms of psychology, symbolism, and morality. A forceful indictment of warlike attitudes, Dower's work will spark debate about history and the Iraq War. --Gilbert Taylor --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This is my third book from professor Dower. And, like the others, it is superbly researched and written. Whether you are a historian or just interested in the history of Japan, and her significance on the greater region and the world, John Dower never disappoints.

Interesting deconstruction of the Bush era propaganda which used WW2 language for marketing ( includes justifications on religious, "moral", historical rationals ) of the Iraq invasion/occupation. Roots of WW2 and denial by both the Americans and Japanese of what is going to happen ( or as much as anyone could foresee futures ) if country X attacks country Z. Long drive listening companion, on my third listening. Wealth of history in this work.

The author presents a most intellectually stimulating argument concerning nations that have developed a real culture for war. It should come as no surprise that the US, known earlier as the United Colonies, have had a well defined culture for making war from its very inception. Prior to the Revolutionary War we were decimating entire nations of Indians. And then comes the Revolution in which our independence was won by war. Then the War of 1812, the Mexican War, and the Civil War simply fed our appetite for war. Then the Spanish American War, WWI and WW II, then come Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and now ISES. We can't keep our guns in our holsters because we have a culture to wage war predicated on a standing army, a large munitions-industrial complex, and a culture of war that dictates that America must continue waging war. Even Jefferson stated that the tree of democracy needed to be watered by the blood of her patriots. Fight first then try to figure out an end game. Our culture has allowed America to win the war and lose the peace in many cases and fight without a clearly defined outcome. And finally the atomic bomb was developed to save millions of American lives by keeping us from having to invade Japan during WW II. Truth be known, the Japanese citizens living in Nagasaki and Hiroshima were simply guinea pigs to show what the power the bomb could do to humans. This was to be a warning to Russia not to tread on the US. I doubt we ever would have invaded Japan. Like Germany, they were beaten. Read this book with an open mind and a great deal of interest. The fact that it may go against your belief and your culture doesn't make it wrong. You decide for yourself. Great reading! REW

interesting read. nice job dower

A great historian, according to my understanding, is one who examines ALL primary sources for the topic, understands ALL of them, and then forms conclusions based on ALL of them. To the extent to

which John Dower has not lived up to this ideal, the one-star reviews are valid. However, I believe that John Dower is a sufficiently accomplished historian to have lived up to this ideal extremely well and sufficiently well to warrant five stars. I appreciate the last line in his book. After discussing our culture of groupthink, herd mentality, stovepiping, imbecility, selective loss of memory, etc., he says that constructive change and deep cultures of peace will come, if at all, incrementally; and that is where hope must reside. Maybe one more increment will happen in my lifetime. We need governors, a president, Congress, and Supreme Court that have the intellectual capacity to absorb this book and lead us in that direction.

John Dower has made significant contributions to our understanding of the War in the Pacific and the cultural context in which it occurred. In *Cultures of War*, he puts our more recent experiences of 9/11 and the War in Iraq in an historical context that is so often been lacking in our public discussions and understanding of recent events. The book reads well and is a significant in presenting a coherent frame for seeing the United States in at the end of the postwar period.

“*Cultures of War*” is thought-provoking but several items needed work. I’ll never win a Pulitzer by prattling “group-think is no cure for group-think.” John Dower demonstrated group-think with “rocket-propelled grenade launcher” on page 136 and by repeating the notion that the main reason for Truman authorizing the use of nuclear weapons on Japan was to keep the USSR in line. The “RPG” in RPG-7 translates as “hand-held anti-tank grenade launcher,” not as the common backronym “rocket-propelled grenade.” Want to be really confused? During World War Two the USSR fielded two RPG’s, the RPG-40 and RPG-43, and both were hand grenades; back then, “RPG” stood for “hand-held anti-tank grenade.” No rocket, and the launcher was Ivan’s strong right arm (horrible thing that a good leftist had to use the strong right!). That’s a minor example of group-think; “everybody calls it a rocket-propelled grenade” and “everybody” is wrong, even if it does describe the RPG-2 (fielded in 1949) and RPG-7 (fielded in 1961). Poor Truman •betrayed by Stalin. Japan was talking peace while the first bombs fell on Oahu. Airfields first, then Battleship Row. Japan was seeking peace all through the war. Trouble for Japan was that Japan attempted to broker a peace through the “neutral” USSR. Stalin was party to both the Cairo

(1943) and Potsdam (1945) declarations and those peace terms were unpalatable to the Japanese government. Peace feelers were extended to the "friendly" USSR before Curtis LeMay launched the firebombing raids that burned out more than 60 Japanese cities. Part of the blame extends back to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (3 March 1918) and fears that the Russian Bear would drop out of World War Two just as it had in the Great War. The simplistic "Unconditional Surrender" formula was group-think. It was the lowest common denominator. Japan was doomed to being occupied. Yet the Japanese strategy of filling American coffins until the infantile USA gave up and accepted Japan's generous peace offers wasn't a total pipe dream. Even with falsified public opinion polls in 1940 and 1941 (courtesy of the BSC) there was a significant pacifist/isolationist element AFTER Pearl Harbor, and war weariness was obvious as early as the fall of 1942 even though "we have yet begun to fight!" War weariness was a significant if unrecognized factor in the decision to use nuclear weapons on Japan. Poison gas was considered and rejected several times but was a done deal for invading the home islands because Japanese resistance was expected to be worse than anything to date. Nobody was looking forward to storming the beaches of Honshu. The original air war plans of Air Marshal Giulio Douhet for air war over 1920's Europe included a mixture of 10% high explosives, 30% incendiaries and 60% Lewisite gas in an effort to avoid repeating the blood-soaked stalemate of the Western Front trenches. That bloody stalemate was repeated on several Japanese islands including Okinawa, but with greater US firepower on isolated garrisons cut off from all hope of reinforcement and resupply that trench warfare lasted only a matter of weeks instead of years. War weariness is a forgotten factor today - evidence of group-think. I had other problems with "Cultures of War." What is a "weapon of mass destruction?" Page 27 states; 'Weapons of mass destruction were certainly available in superabundance to the protagonists in World War Two. One need only consider the toll of the war globally - at least sixty million dead - to be reminded that mass slaughter did not require nuclear weapons.' Saddam's air force fled to Iran - mostly--prior to the invasion. Saddam launched multiple ballistic missile attacks during the initial phase of the invasion. A dozen Al Samoud II ballistic missiles were found south of Baiji, Iraq on 21 July 2003. Post-invasion there were THOUSANDS of calls for chemical weapon disposal teams. If none of these were weapons of mass destruction, then Adolf Hitler had no weapons of mass destruction either. Take your pick. Or the anti-Bush faction can admit that they

were stupid enough to believe that Saddam was handing out nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles to bin Laden and company. Iraq had long been designated a "state sponsor of terrorism," a label that could have been applied with equal justice to the United States. Not all terrorists were al Qaeda! There is also this nasty little fact: blockades are acts of war, whether they're called sanctions or quarantines or boycotts. Unfortunately, too many people in public service have talked themselves into believing that it is war ONLY when the other nation does it. The fight started when he hit me back! I was REALLY bothered when the museum ship CV-11 Intrepid was called a "battleship." The Intrepid is an Essex-class aircraft carrier! Can't tell a battleship from an aircraft carrier? On page 119 the lower photo is captioned: "April 9: U. S. marines cover one another with assault weapons as they take over one of Saddam Hussein's palaces in Baghdad." Say what? "Assault weapons" are civilian toys unless you are speaking of the Rifleman Assault Weapon (RAW packs 2 pounds of high explosive in a five-inch round ball and projects it nearly a mile) or the Shoulder-launched Multi-purpose Assault Weapon Mk153. I see an M16A2 rifle, another M16A2 rifle with a mounted M203 grenade launcher and the butt of the third weapon may be the M249 Squad Automatic Weapon, but I don't see any RAW or SMAW. Or how about this: at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, one bomb (modified 16 inch naval gun shell) dropped from a Kate torpedo bomber from 10,000 feet altitude in the level bomber role caused more than half of the fatalities during that raid. That bomb detonated one of the magazines aboard the Arizona. It was one of three wonder weapons that the Imperial Japanese Navy for that operation. The midget submarine doesn't get much glory but was used in other operations. The modified torpedo and the converted 16-inch shell were not used elsewhere. Minor points but enough to bother me. These points look easy to fix but then, I haven't published a book. Four stars is perhaps low but calling the Intrepid a battleship is hard to overlook!

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