

War without mercy

Name

Institution

War without mercy is a historical book written by Professor John W. Dower in 1986. It is one of the books that have been widely praised by the press for its invaluable contribution to history. For instance, the New York Times has hailed it as being among the most essential and original publications about the war that occurred between the United States of America and Japan. In *War without mercy*, Dower writes about the despicable misuse of power and racial scopes during the second world war in Asia. He also describes the impacts of military policies and reconstruction in the Pacific region.

Summary

Dower divided the book into four parts each covering a different aspect of the war. In the first part entitled "the patterns of a race war," he talks about the role of racism in the war. The attack on Pearl Harbor American to react with hatred against the Japanese. For instance, restaurants put up signs saying that they "poison both rats and Japs" (Dower, 1993, p. 82). They advocated for genocide against people of this race as shown in quotes like "Kill Japs, kill Japs, kill more Japs" on page 36 of the book. Various high-profile bodies advocated harsh measures for the "the extermination of the Japanese in toto" (Dower, 1993, p. 53). Dower notes that the Germans never received such harsh sentences despite committing many atrocities in Europe because they were considered as part of the white race. The American's hatred towards the Japanese was stronger than towards the Germans who they still considered people despite being "horrible and deadly as they were" (Dower, 1993, p. 70). The Japs, on the other hand, were "subhuman and repulsive" like cockroaches or mice (Dower, 1993, p. 70). In the book, Dower purports that racism was responsible for the internment of thousands of Japanese citizens while the Germans or Italians who committed similar crimes went free. At some point, the Americans treated the people from Asian more ruthlessly than even the Russians; they killed surrendering soldiers, sunk civilian ships tortured

prisoners of war and killed wounded soldiers. They treated the Japs worse than they would animals. The book also depicts the racist nature of the citizens of Japan, who referred to themselves as the master race. However, theirs was not embedded in color or physical appearances but self-glorifications.

The second part of the book entitled "War in Western Eyes" covers the stereotypes and views of Japan by the Americans. Before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the US had had interests in the West Pacific for a long time to quench their thirst for imperial possessions and overseas markets. There was a concept called the "yellow peril" that argued that if the vast brown and yellow people in the West Pacific united into a single authority, they could conquer America. At that time, the Japanese did not seem like a major threat as they were seen as being physically weak, unskilled and unable to build a culture of their own. However, this perception changed in 1941 when they bombed the Pearl Harbor, killing many Americans. The latter saw the attack as a personification of the "yellow peril" and retaliated by spreading propaganda and negative publicity about them. They used animal imagery to dehumanize the Asians and gave them demeaning labels like monkeys for being "little men" (Dower, 1993, p.108). They also used labels such as children, midgets, insects, and vermin that needed extermination. The authors note, "It is, at least for more people, easier to kill animals than fellow humans" (Dower, 1993, p.79). The Americans used this concept to justify the killing of the Japanese, as " they did not feel pain" (Dower, 1993, p.130). As if the verbal stripping were not enough, the Americans treated the Japanese in the most inhumane ways possible. As Dower states, this kind of treatment was humiliating and it "reinforced the impression of being less than human" (Dower, 1993, p.74). They dragged them out of their homes, rounded them like cows and locked them up in sheds that resembled those of animals before relocating them to camps.

Dower then shifts focus from the American's point of view to that of the Japanese. In the third part of the book titled "War in Japanese Eyes," he writes about how the latter viewed themselves as superiors who were "pure in all practical senses (Dower, 1993, p. 230)." The book's account perpetuates the idea that Japan had positioned itself as a master race and the leading country in the West Pacific region and did not solicit support from other Asian nations in their fight with the US. The Japanese considered themselves the descendants of the Sun of God mandated to "assimilate all other races into Nipponism (Dower, 1993, p. 243)." They saw the war as their ultimate destiny to liberate Asia from the oppression by the West. However, this belief caused them to become complacent and estimate the powers of their rival. According to Dower, "they grossly underestimated the material strength and moral fiber of the other side" which led to their defeat (Dower, 1993, p. 223). They had an illusion that they were invisible and the Americans were weak and soft, which caused them to adopt poor practices. For instance, they became careless with their codes and papers because they assumed that the Americans "could not figure out how to read them." (Dower, 1993, p. 224). Japan lacked serious intelligence analysis of economic and psychological nature. Its Imperial Army focused more on the Soviet Union and China in gathering intelligence, ignoring the significant powers of the time, Britain and the US. The Japanese use media outlets to spread negative publicity against Americans just as they had done to them. In the end, propaganda and merciless killings drove the battle.

The last part of *War without mercy* is an epilogue that ties up the ideas in the preceding three main parts together to make a concrete conclusion. The author talks of how the cultural diversity in the two nations caused their citizens to misperceive and misinterpret the war as well as an attempt to justify their actions. He acknowledges that the Pacific war was ruthless with both sides being equally wrong or right and accuses the establishment of intellectual elites for fanning the racial

prejudice. According to Dower, the impact of racist animosities between the two nations did not end with the war; it persists even today. He writes, "The balance of trade began to get out of hand between America and Japan" (Dower, 1993, p. 266). It continues to have a strong element of race as Dower an American congressperson referred to the former as "the little yellow men, you know, Honda" (Dower, 1993, p. 267). However, the communist revolution in China made Chinese "the incarnation of the Yellow Peril" (p. 264). "They became the unthinking horde" of Asia and a threat to the superiority of America and Britain (Dower, 1993, p. 309). Before that, the Soviet Union had inherited the racial hatred from Japan during the cold war for being fanatic and megalomaniac (Dower, 1993, p. 309).

Supporting evidence

In *War without mercy*, Dower discusses the role of race and power in the Pacific war and its impacts over the years. He writes about how the US and Japan spread propaganda and negative connotations about each other and used stereotypes to justify their actions. In his book, Dower describes the various methods used by both countries to spread propaganda about each other during the war. He also writes about how each nation perceived itself and its rival during and after the war. From the book, it seems that the main factors that drove these perceptions were hatred and fear of the other party dominating. Dower compiled many sources to produce the material in *War without mercy*. He combed through heaps of historical records such as news articles like *American Mercury* (p.97), *Newsweek magazine* ((Dower, 1993, p. 85) and the *Times* (p. 79) as well as propaganda films like *Destination Tokyo* (p. 80). The author also used military publications (p. 87) and entries in academic journals (p. 109). Drawing on Japanese and American songs like *To Be Specific, It's Our Pacific* ((Dower, 1993, p. 140), movies like *Dangerous thoughts* (P. 197), cartoons (P. 189), and slogans was also part of the research for writing this book.

Reflections

War without mercy is an exceptional book that tells of a sad, powerful and moving tale about America and Japan. It takes readers on a magical journey into history by revealing details about the Pacific War that had remained hidden for a long time. Any person required in comprehending the trends in war such as how trade wars have replaced the gruesome murders in the fields of Pacific should read it. The information it contains is particularly essential to the Americans and the Japanese as they are the primary victims. The Americans did not play fair; they violated many human rights like shooting surrendering and wounded soldiers as well as attacking civilians. The Japanese lost the war because of their sloppiness, poor intelligence gathering skills as well as racial superiority. Had they acknowledged their weaknesses and faults, maybe they would have taken extra caution and assessed the capabilities of their enemies that they did. In this book, Dower makes some cases of blatant chauvinism rather than racism. For instance, he depicts the Japanese as being racist despite their lack of biological superiority. He misinterprets their self-glorification and use of the terms *Nihon minzoku* and *Yamato minzoku* to imply racial connotations.

Reference

Dower, J. W. (1993). *War without mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War*. Pantheon Books.