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The Palace File

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which reduced the enemy to a subhuman level.

Perhaps it was only through this reduced consideration of the enemy that the war could have progressed through such horrific proportions. In any case, victory was achieved in a "war without mercy." In his book, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, John W. Dower examines the evidence of this racial intensity between the United States and Japan. In a time when it appears as though the population of the world has gained a greater understanding of, and respect for, racial differences and diverse heritages, it is disturbing to read Dower's account and accept the fact that he is writing about very recent history. The war atrocities, the savagery in battle, the dehumanization of the enemy by both sides, and the very dimensions of the conflict, which Dower describes in comprehensive detail, are shocking and difficult to imagine. According to the author, however, these facets were unique to the Pacific war and are the products of racial differences which turned into racial hatred.

In addition to his examination of the war itself, Dower devotes a good portion of his text to an exploration of Japanese culture and the perception of the "Yamato Race" as the nucleus of a grand global policy by the Japanese. While this examination reveals some very interesting and enlightening aspects of Japanese society, Dower's conclusions will not surprise any student of Japanese history. There is, however, in the final chapter of this book, a subtle

foreboding over Japan's economic prowess and how that may once again spawn "patriotic anger" between the United States and Japan. If economic competition leads to conflict, just as territorial expansion did in 1941, Dower appears to believe that racial aspects of such a conflict may appear again. How prevalent these aspects become will certainly be an indication of how far the world has truly progressed over the past 40 years.

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Nguyen, Tien Hung and Schecter, Jerrold L. *The Palace File*. New York: Harper & Row, 1986. 542pp. \$22.95

This book chronicles the demise of the Republic of Vietnam. It is a distressing story. There is little that is new in it, but the detailed documentation of American guarantees to Saigon and the blend of anguish and outrage permeating its pages combine to leave the reader with a feeling of anger and shame, anger at what happened and shame for America's role therein.

Three themes are intertwined in this tale. One is about the decline and fall of South Vietnam, reaching high drama in the spring of 1975. The second deals with key personalities in the United States and South Vietnam and the part they played in the final debacle. The third is the South Vietnamese perception of what transpired—indeed, this is President Nguyen Van

Thieu's history of the last years of his country, told principally through Nguyen Tien Hung's pen.

One sees the slide into disaster beginning with an optimism that altered, pace by measured pace, into a sense of foreboding followed by an awareness of impending doom. To the South Vietnamese, the blend of Vietnamization plus negotiations utilized by the Nixon administration "competed with and undercut one another." The U.S. opening to Beijing meant to Thieu that "South Vietnam had metamorphosed from being an asset to a liability." The Paris Accords of 1973, which purported to achieve "peace with honor . . . [made] no provision for the removal of North Vietnamese troops [from South Vietnam]. . . ." It was understood in Saigon that "the threat of U.S. intervention was critical to deterring a North Vietnamese invasion." Thieu apparently believed that to be a credible threat, principally because of Nixon's earlier willingness to use force in the face of massive public and political opposition. Reinforcing South Vietnamese confidence in the American guarantee was the apparent existence of "a U.S. contingency plan to keep North Vietnamese targeting information updated even after the cease-fire."

We cannot know if such a threat would ever have been exercised had Nixon been President when, or perhaps, *if*, Hanoi had undertaken its grand offensive against Saigon. What is certain is that the Watergate scandal weakened the Presidency and

replaced Nixon with a weak and mediocre President. The scandal and its immediate consequences were not fully understood by Thieu. What was recognized in short-order was that Congress "had no time or inclination to deal with any other issue, let alone aid for South Vietnam."

These developments finally made an impression on Saigon. The authors describe how Thieu planned to relinquish virtually all of the two northern Corps areas in order to save the rest of the country, as "a reduced 1975 [U.S.] aid program could support only a truncated South Vietnam." The intensity of the ensuing Communist assault, initiated before that withdrawal could occur, was a shock to Saigon, although the attack itself apparently was not a surprise. The end was truly pathetic. As the authors put it, "Evening TV news programs showed terrified refugees struggling to flee Da Nang, the South Vietnamese Army in a shambles, and [President] Ford playing golf." On 30 April 1975, the war ended with the last Americans and some South Vietnamese scrambling for safety from the ruins of a war.

It is hard to be dispassionate about this portrayal of an American humiliation and a South Vietnamese catastrophe. One is struck by how personalized the Vietnamese leadership viewed policy in general and the United States in particular. Senses of reassurance, despair, and betrayal fluctuated according to the U.S. officials with whom Saigon was dealing. Nixon comes across in a

generally favorable light as a strong President who "had no illusions about Hanoi's intentions" and acted as best he could under the circumstances. Others do less well in this book. There is something profoundly unsettling about a photograph of Ford, Kissinger et al. sitting in the White House under a portrait of Theodore Roosevelt, while acquiescing in defeat and abandoning an ally. One senses that Nixon (to say nothing of Roosevelt!) would have done better.

The book itself is hardly a model of craftsmanship. It reads like a diary with some expanded narrative and documentation. The discussion lacks chronological continuity in places. The authors acknowledge the corruption that permeated the Vietnamese leadership, yet they downplay Thieu's own authoritarianism and corruption, to say nothing of the venality of his family. The text could also have benefited from the judicious application of a better editorial pen.

These caveats notwithstanding, one must nonetheless acknowledge the essential accuracy of the book's thesis. The United States pledged its support to South Vietnam before and after the Paris accords were signed, and the U.S. Congress—aided and abetted by Ford, Kissinger, and their cohorts—betrayed that trust. The extent to which U.S. policy was hostage to the vagaries of elections occurring at fixed intervals is driven home with exceptional force. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the U.S.S.R. and the People's Republic of China served Hanoi better than

the United States served Saigon; after all, whose flag now flies over Ho Chi Minh City? Averting a repetition elsewhere of this modern tragedy remains the first order of business for the United States.

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Evans, Ernest. *Wars Without Splendor: The U.S. Military and Low-Level Conflict*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1987. 160pp. \$27.95

A small book of even smaller success, *Wars Without Splendor* does, nevertheless, have some virtues. The first four chapters provide a brief but knowledgeable *tour de horizon* of the current state of revolutionary insurgency and terrorism. With somewhat less success, Evans, a professor of international relations at Rhodes College, Memphis, Tennessee, also discusses why he thinks low-intensity conflict is a major American foreign policy problem.

The second part of the book reviews the Nation's current and proposed capabilities for dealing with low-level conflict. Evans defines "capability" in strictly military terms, which indicates that he has drawn incomplete lessons from all the historical experience he cites in the first section of his book. Becoming more flaccid as it limps to a close, *Wars Without Splendor* offers no new concepts or even a thoughtful synthesis of old ideas in its two skeletal concluding chapters. Only a useful selected bibliography reminds