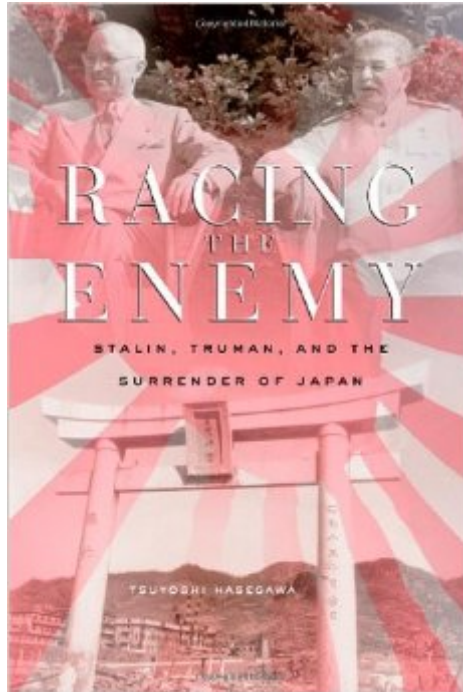


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Racing The Enemy: Stalin, Truman, And The Surrender Of Japan



Synopsis

With startling revelations, Tsuyoshi Hasegawa rewrites the standard history of the end of World War II in the Pacific. By fully integrating the three key actors in the story--the United States, the Soviet Union, and Japan--Hasegawa for the first time puts the last months of the war into international perspective. From April 1945, when Stalin broke the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact and Harry Truman assumed the presidency, to the final Soviet military actions against Japan, Hasegawa brings to light the real reasons Japan surrendered. From Washington to Moscow to Tokyo and back again, he shows us a high-stakes diplomatic game as Truman and Stalin sought to outmaneuver each other in forcing Japan's surrender; as Stalin dangled mediation offers to Japan while secretly preparing to fight in the Pacific; as Tokyo peace advocates desperately tried to stave off a war party determined to mount a last-ditch defense; and as the Americans struggled to balance their competing interests of ending the war with Japan and preventing the Soviets from expanding into the Pacific. Authoritative and engrossing, *Racing the Enemy* puts the final days of World War II into a whole new light.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a well written and documented attempt to produce a comprehensive account of Japan's decision to seek peace at the end of WWII. This includes the controversial topic of the importance of American use of nuclear weapons. Since at least one prior reviewer has used the "R" (revisionism) word, let me begin with with some brief historiographic background. Revisionism, unfortunately, is one of those words that has lost specific meaning and become a term of abuse. Any substantial work of historical scholarship presenting new information or a substantial new interpretation, like this

one, is revisionist by definition and the mere fact that the author has a new point of view is not an excuse to fling abuse. In the debate over the use of nuclear weapons against Japan, revisionism has a concrete, specific connotation. It is used usually to refer to the work of historians like Gar Alperovits and others who argue that the use of nuclear weapons was unnecessary, that the Truman administration knew this, and that bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki was an effort to intimidate the Soviet Union. In this interpretation, the use of nuclear weapons against Japan was the opening salvo of the Cold War, not the conclusion of WWII. Hasegawa is definitely not in this camp and politely, but firmly, consigns the revisionist camp to the trash can. The Truman administration employed nuclear weapons with the primary purpose of bringing the war to an end as fast as possible. The strengths of this book are Hasegawa's description and analysis of the role of the Soviet Union and his attention to the role played by figures, both in Tokyo and Washington, usually regarded as secondary figures. Hasegawa's interpretation is based in part of novel archival research.

Cold War expert Professor Tsuyoshi Hasegawa does an excellent job of addressing the still-asked questions about the end of World War II. At 60 years and counting, the guilt and hand wringing continue vis-a-vis America's use of atomic weapons against mainly civilian targets in Japan. Were "Little Boy" and "Fat Man" really necessary? What about the Soviets and their eleventh hour invasion of Manchuria, Korea, and Sakhalin? Hasegawa rightly answers these questions, yet downplays the impact of the atomic bomb in ending the War. He cites one official source that acknowledged a persuasive jolt from the Hiroshima bombing, even if it turned out to be in combination with the Soviet invasion -- a one-two punch, if you will. In any event, Hasegawa argues convincingly that neither action alone was decisive and that the Soviet offensive produced more dread than the destruction of Hiroshima. Also, his condemnation of the atomic bombings carries even more weight with respect to Nagasaki. Given the hindsight of Hiroshima, it was arguably criminal to resort to this second bombing. Like the first, it would prove to be indiscriminate in its effects and, as Hasegawa contends, it was politically motivated. Hasegawa's "Racing the Enemy" offers a broader view than the usual line about the atomic bombs ending the War. However, one ought not to fault President Harry Truman completely, for he no doubt faced a moral dilemma. Either way, atomic bombing or invasion, the buck would stop with him being responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, the majority of whom would be noncombatants.

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