

## Book Reviews

The House of War

By John N. Cooper

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This awesome volume [The House of War, James Carroll, ISBN-13: 978-0-618-18780-5] is inordinately difficult to read: almost every page, I had to set it aside and contemplate the state of my own ignorance with regard to the most important political happenings of my time. I am a contemporary of Carroll. I lived through the time and shared many experiences similar to those he describes. But I had no idea the behind the scenes happenings that he, Carroll, was uniquely positioned to observe. The discovery just how blind and unknowledgeable I had been was wrenching. Every American should have the same discovery.

I confess Carroll is one of my favorite authors. I discovered him as a mystery writer decades ago and have followed his development from a novelist, to a respected columnist for the Boston Globe, personal essayist and now a solid historian. The House of War traces the progressive militarization of America in the context of the Pentagon and its occupants. From its groundbreaking, 9/11/41, just prior to World War II, through what I can only describe as the Kremlinization of our government - WWII, Korea, Vietnam, the Reagan years, Iraq War I and now Iraq War II. - Carroll delivers a minutely documented, thoroughly referenced history of the handing over of our government to our own brand of warlords. From a civilian controlled citizen army through the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act that established a professional Army of mercenaries to the present national security state, planted and rooted in the post-WWII anti-Soviet hysteria, this book traces the disasterous rise of American militarism.

Part of Carroll's perspective stems from his being the son of Joseph Carroll, one of the more significant Air Force Generals in the period from WWII to the early days of the Vietnam tragedy. James' difficult relationship with his father has been eloquently chronicled in his tribute to Joseph, "An American Requiem", [ISBN 0-395-77926-X], but the current volume weaves the thread of that relationship within the tapestry of Pentagon's co-opting control of America's foreign, and to a large extent, domestic policy and agendas. It is also his personal history from ROTC cadet in college, seminarian, parent and writer.

Along the way he documents America's moral and ethical decline from the initial reluctance to bomb civilian populations through Dresden, to the decision to nuke Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the ultimate acceptance of nuclear warfare as a Cold War given. The role played by such generals, as Groves and LeMay; administrators such as Henry Stimson; and politicians FDR, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Krushchev - who together pulled back from the Cuban Missile Crisis - Johnson, Nixon, Carter's feckless 'good intentions', and Reagan's "twilight zone of zany imagination .. guided not by a train of thought but by a trail of applause lines", who functioned "as Tinker Bell, spreading fairy dust", asking America "not to believe but only to pretend to." Gorbechev, who was the real hero of the end of the Cold War, and Bush I, and their entourages are brightly

illuminated. Clinton is treated sympathetically but angrily; there was so much he might have done to salvage nuclear-arms reduction but failed to.

Melville's Moby Dick is a recurring symbol for the Pentagon and the military, with Johnson, MacNamara and William Cohen in the roles of hapless Ahabs. Historical coincidences of 9/11's from 1906 (Gandhi's repudiation of the South African Asiatic Amendment Ordinance), through 1941 (the Pentagon's groundbreaking), 1944 (the bombing of Darmstadt), 1945 (Stimson's proposal to share nuclear weapons technology with the USSR to avoid an arms race), 1973 (the US's overthrow of the Chilean government), and 1990 (GHW Bush's declaration of 'A New World Order' following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait) figure large in Carroll's historiography, as does 11/9 (Krystallnacht and the fall of the Berlin wall).

Connection to, and parallels with, the current fiasco in Iraq are made through the now familiar roster of the 'Vulcans' (Rumsfeld, Cheney, Rice, Armitage, Powell, Perle, Wolfowitz) who, under Ford, even then sought revenge for the disgrace of America's loss of Vietnam. The administration of Bush II is evaluated in the context of historical threads reaching back far further than the Ford administration to James Forrestal's paranoid suspicions and fantasies regarding the Soviet Union. The mentality of the Pentagon elites in WWII and Vietnam, "the metapersonal dynamics .. the grooved thinking of the bureaucracy", is mirrored even now under the current administration's policies and 'leadership'. In any book of this sort, the endgame is by far the most difficult. Carroll wishes to put an optimistic face on the dismal history he has portrayed; but the trajectory of American militarization leaves little to inspire hope for, and confidence in, the survival of democratic governance in a supremely self-righteous warfare state bedeviled by the assumption of absolute rectitude. As Carroll puts it, America's presumption of moral and ethical infallibility must be reorganized by the recognition that "evil is that which makes us think we are innocent of it!"

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