

BOOKS & THE ARTS

The Closed Shop

PATRICK SMITH

JAPAN'S WAR MEMORIES: Amnesia or Concealment?

By George Hicks.
Ashgate. 136 pp. Paper \$38.95.

JAPAN'S HIDDEN APARTHEID: The Korean Minority and the Japanese.

By George Hicks.
Ashgate. 171 pp. Paper \$38.95.

MOLDING JAPANESE MINDS: The State in Everyday Life.

By Sheldon Garon.
Princeton. 313 pp. \$27.95.

CARTELS OF THE MIND: Japan's Intellectual Closed Shop.

By Ivan Hall.
Norton. 208 pp. \$25.

ALTERED STATES: The United States and Japan Since the Occupation.

By Michael Schaller.
Oxford. 320 pp. \$30.

THE CLASH: A History of U.S.-Japan Relations.

By Walter LaFeber.
Norton. 508 pp. \$29.95.

This past summer Japan's Supreme Court handed down a startling decision after more than three decades of legal warfare over the Education Ministry's censors. Yes, the judge allowed, screening textbooks is lawful. Nothing new there: The courts always side with the ministry on this point. But then the judge ruled against the government for censoring references to Unit 731, the imperial army's infamous germ-warfare detachment. And that is new indeed. Masao Ono, the presiding justice, ended his opinion in typically tortured Japanese syntax, though his point could hardly be plainer: "It is requested that the Government refrain from intervening in educational content as much as possible."

Patrick Smith, a former correspondent for the International Herald Tribune, recently published Japan: A Reinterpretation (Pantheon).

Japan has an independent judiciary in name only—one reason the country cannot, by any careful reckoning, be counted a working democracy. Justice Ono's ruling doesn't change that, but it is a measure of what is changing in Japan. Unit 731 is large among the shards of history Tokyo has habitually refused to acknowledge. Its appearance in textbooks will be large, too—as a stain upon the official silence, and a triumph for those whose project it is to regain the past.

The man who took on the Education Ministry is named Saburo Ienaga. When I lived in Tokyo I called him the textbook warrior. As historian and author, Ienaga has tied the censors up in lawsuits since 1965. Eighty-four and infirm, Ienaga has probably seen his last courtroom, though

Barriers Japan uses to keep goods out must also be seen as walls by which the Japanese are kept in—in the dark, in the past.

other suits have followed his. And as he reminds friends and visitors, the point was never mere victory. "To expose—that's the point," he once told me. "To expose the past, to expose censorship in our supposedly democratic system."

Ienaga and the textbook wars feature prominently in George Hicks's *Japan's War Memories*. Hicks even dedicates the book to him. But there is something of Ienaga's quest in all six volumes under review. All of them are about accountability, honesty and the reclamation of history, and, like the frail professor, their authors attest to a Japan vastly different from the dull, conformist country we've always read about. There is a Japan of multiplicity and diversity, a nation that is, like any other, a field of contending forces.

It is odd to recall how easily Americans swallowed the "Japan" that Edwin Reischauer, Ezra Vogel and other postwar scholars concocted in the service of cold war ideology. There was no contention, no diversity—only happily harmonious na-

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tives. With controlled resentment, a Japanese writer once described this imaginary place as "a nation of smiling, equivocating, apologetic, and apolitical people interested primarily in commerce and consensus." There is an implicit charge of racism here—perfectly justified. And from the late forties to the nineties, that was it—a nation of "transistor salesmen," as de Gaulle unkindly put it. If you thought about it even briefly, no such country could possibly exist. Nonetheless, the nation that hummed like a Honda was fixed in our minds for almost half a century.

We called our Japan "Japan Inc."—blissfully oblivious to the offense of casting citizens as employees. We never saw much of what roiled beneath the surface. Surely there are worse places, but cold war Japan was the unhappiest, most contorted country I ever covered as a correspondent. Only now is it coming unstuck—a healthy thing. And only now are we beginning to look beyond the cartoonish "Japan as No. 1." These books seem to be part of a positive new trend among Western scholars; each in its way is intended to lift the lid.

Four of them are concerned with aspects of Japan-as-it-really-is. The striking thing about George Hicks's books is not the long, sad tale of how the Japanese elite acquired the habit of ignoring huge swaths of reality. Over the years they have denied much, from history—Unit 731, the Nanjing massacre—as well as the existence of their own minorities. But what stays in the mind when reading Hicks is how much resistance ordinary Japanese have put up against these denials.

Hicks's books (his first was *The Comfort Women*; see Susan Brownmiller, "Conscripted Into Shame," August 14/21, 1995) do not sing. But that isn't the point. Even though the writing is plain, everything is there. Hicks and those he credits as his assistants are first-class researchers, and his books stand as complete records of their subjects. *Japan's Hidden Apartheid* begins with the history of the country's Korean population and describes all the civil rights campaigns waged over the years to improve the standing of a minority that now numbers 700,000. *Japan's War Memories* is a chapter-and-verse account of the battles over the country's official "amnesia," which is not amnesia at all, but purposeful concealment, as Hicks calls it. He makes an essential point in the course of his account: Official Japan's refusal to accept its own past must be viewed in the context of the cold war and Washington's "reverse course" in Japan—specifically, its 1948 decision to halt purges of wartime political

and bureaucratic elites. So far as denying history is concerned, it is we who are No. 1.

In different forms, the historical question is bursting out among both Japanese and Westerners. I doubt even the nest of intellectual bankrupts at Harvard, where our cold war imagery was fashioned, would argue any longer that Emperor Hirohito was innocent of war responsibility. Ditto on the matter of the Koreans (and other minorities). Identity, belonging, the meaning of "Japaneseness"—it is all on the table now.

Sheldon Garon offers a grim view of Japaneseness in *Molding Japanese Minds*. This is an excellent book, partly because Garon has chosen his subject well and also because he handles it with balance and authority. Psychology and belonging—the vaunted group ethos and how it has been shaped—are a large part of what the scholars from Harvard obscured. They put it all down to "tradition" and "culture," disguising official manipulation and, not infrequently in the modern era, coercion. *Molding Japanese Minds* shows us that the persistence of Japan as a group society is a political question, having more to do with power than tradition.

Garon defines his subject as "social management," by which he means the efforts of both a strong state and the private sector to shape popular thinking and attitudes. This practice goes back to the feudal era, and explains why Japan has remained a hierarchical society while modernizing in so many other ways. The Japanese have called social management various things at various times: "social education," "spiritual mobilization" and so on. As it's practiced upon school-age children today, it's called "moral education."

"Teaching the masses to internalize appropriate values," as Garon puts it, was an essential feature of the prewar ideological state. It is the reason the Japanese were led so easily into war and why they have lived much of this century as what Garon calls "a nation at war in peace." Social management did not end in 1945. While the first half of *Molding Japanese Minds* is devoted to prewar examples of official interventions into daily life, the rest addresses the phenomenon in the Japan that Washington cast as a quiet little democracy at the other end of the Pacific. Garon thinks thought control—my term, not his—is a dying phenomenon, and I agree. The psychological emergence of the individual is among the distinguishing characteristics of Japan today. But as Garon notes toward the end of his rich book, the phenomenon he describes is not dead yet.

Garon may not be comfortable with the

term, but in essence he describes modern Japan as a corporatist society, and he's right to do so. Corporatism, to define it too simply, means the effacement of the individual by the imposition of group interests and identity. It is what the Japanese got after the war instead of a civil society—instead of a pluralist democracy. (That is why "Japan Inc.," though the term obscured more than it revealed, was nonetheless oddly apt.) Garon does not think ordinary Japanese are blameless in this; one of his themes is popular collusion in the corporatization of daily life. True enough. But that is testimony to the power of social management. It cannot be used to deny the presence of conflict or individual resistance in modern Japan—a point Garon acknowledges.

van Hall's *Cartels of the Mind*, had it come out, say, a decade ago, might have been read as just another take on the trade wars. It is that—partly. Hall writes with economy and grace about how Japan denies access to foreign attorneys, correspondents, professors and scientific researchers with the same systematic efficiency applied over the years to car parts, semiconductors, baseball bats and beef. He devotes a concise chapter to each of the professions just noted, explaining how each is part of the "closed shop" of his subtitle.

But we have to read Hall's book differently now—especially if we read him along with Garon. The closed shop is not just a trade issue. Many of the barriers Japan employs to keep goods and people out must also be seen as walls by which the Japanese are kept in—in the dark, in the past, in a society that in important respects remains primitive. The intellectual closed shop, then, is also a social and political issue, and Hall does a good job of connecting the dots, especially with regard to Japan's new and grand ambitions. "What prevents Japan's assumption of an enlightened world leadership role is, more than anything else, its overblown particularism," he writes. "Great powers in human history have all predicated their mandate (however presumptuous or self-serving) on some sort of universalism."

Too true. But what we usually miss in our relentless critiques of contemporary Japan is the extent of our responsibility for its failings. Japan is not a democracy because we preferred to work with war criminals and rightist thugs after the war. (The usual story: They were good anti-Communists.) Japan is a savage exporter and a closed market because we set it up that way (partly to keep it from trading with Mao's China). It is irresponsible on the global stage be-

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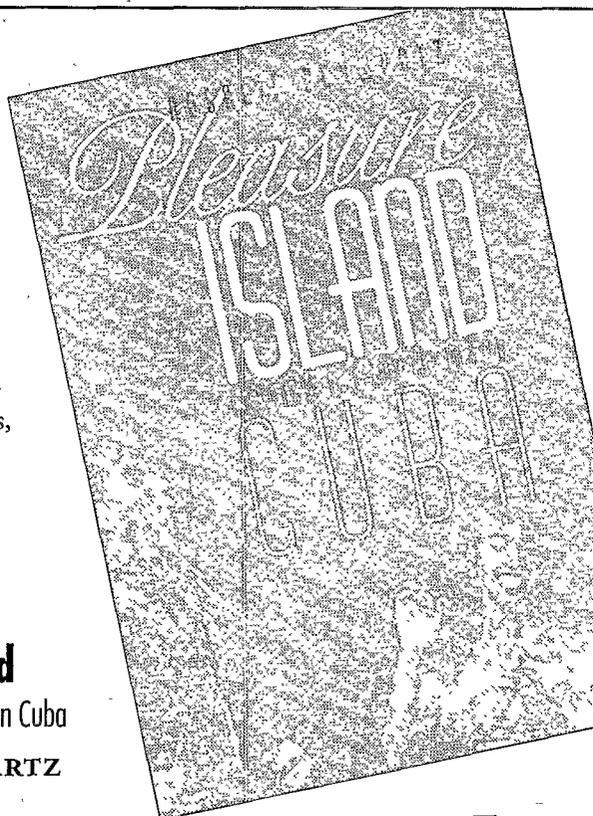
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cause we took away its sovereignty (and, with the recent reconfirmation of our defense arrangements, refuse to give it back).

These are among the themes of two excellent books on U.S.-Japan relations. They are explicit in Michael Schaller's very fine *Altered States*, a stone-honest accounting of all our grimy shenanigans on Japanese soil in the name of national security. They are implicit on every page of Walter LaFeber's *The Clash*, a survey of 150 years of diplomacy and the most ambitious of all these books. "The Japanese can neither love the Americans nor endure being loved by them," a British diplomat in Tokyo wrote in the early 1960s. LaFeber found this superb quotation. It is the essential burden of both books.

What comes across are the contradictions and the hypocrisy that have punctuated our bilateral ties. Perhaps because both Schaller and LaFeber are Americanists, not Japan scholars, the emphasis falls on the U.S. side of things. No sooner had we defeated the Japanese in 1945, Schaller tells us, than the State Department was praising Tokyo's wartime plan to establish

a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. We talked often of democracy, but if we believed anything of what we said, we wouldn't have subverted so many elections with covert campaign funds. John Kennedy had hardly been elected, LaFeber writes, when he began pressing Tokyo to take a larger global role. Over thirty-five years later we're still asking—and still keeping the Japanese from obliging us.

Failing to see Japan as it was, we failed to see ourselves. That is why these two books are good reading for anyone interested in either Japan or the United States as it has conducted itself abroad. In particular, we have hardly begun to assess our conduct in the cold war. As we go on our triumphalist way, we seem intent on avoiding any calculation of the damage—not only to other societies but also to our own. We do not possess an accurate picture of the world, to say nothing of how it views us. This cannot be healthy. One wants a huge, multivolume re-reckoning. That is what the world wants from us, and what we owe it. Maybe these books are something like a beginning. ■

The Cancer Sell

GAYLE GREENE

LIVING DOWNSTREAM: An Ecologist Looks at Cancer and the Environment.
 By Sandra Steingraber. Addison-Wesley. 357 pp. \$24.

"In all the years I have been under medical scrutiny, no one has ever asked me about the environmental conditions where I grew up," writes Sandra Steingraber in this powerful account by a woman who has lived with cancer since she was 21. "I had bladder cancer as a young adult. If I tell people

this fact, they usually shake their heads. If I go on to mention that cancer runs in my family, they usually start to nod. She is from one of those cancer families, I can almost hear them thinking." When Steingraber tells them that she is adopted and proceeds to describe a study of cancer among adopted children that found correlations with their adoptive families but not their biological ones—"At this point, most people become very quiet."

Why, she asks, are we so fixated on genes and lifestyle as explanations for cancer and so blind to environmental influences? Why, more than three decades

after Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* alerted us, does so much silence still surround the question of cancer's connection to the environment?

The educational brochures Steingraber picks up in doctors' offices advise people to exercise, limit their fat and alcohol intake, give up smoking and ponder their life history. To prevent breast cancer, women are urged to do self-examinations, get regular mammograms and be aware of the risks involved in postponing childbearing. Such advice implies that cancer is a product of individual choice, but as Steingraber points out, the food we eat is filled with carcinogens from the environment that are not freely chosen. As for early childbearing, the reason it decreases breast cancer risk—according to the leading hypothesis—is that the maturing of breast cells that occurs

Gayle Greene, who teaches at Scripps College, is finishing a biography of Dr. Alice Stewart and writing a book on cancer and the environment with Dr. Vicki Ratner.

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