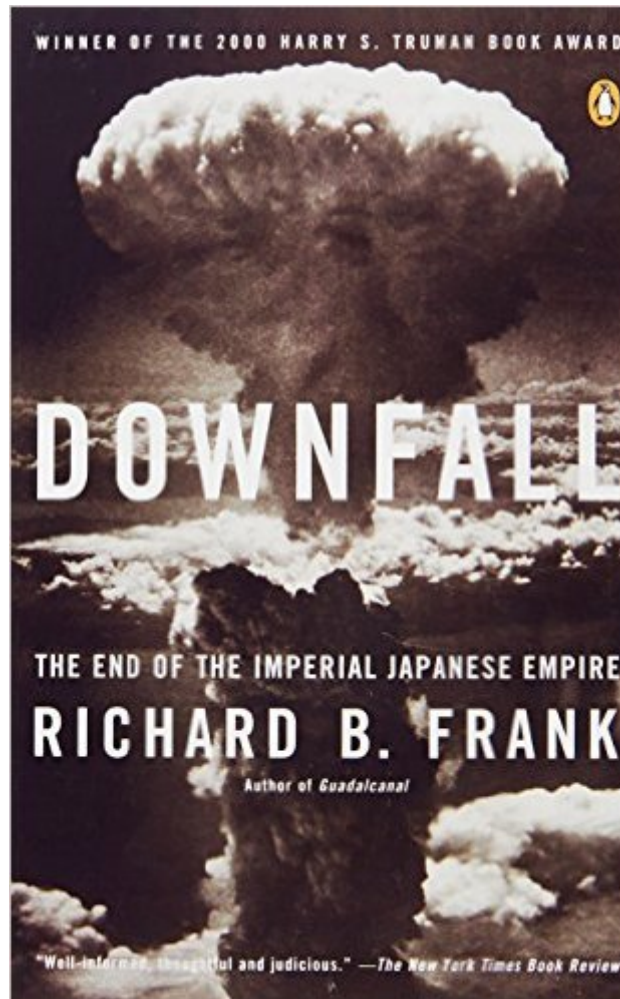


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Downfall: The End Of The Imperial Japanese Empire



Synopsis

In a riveting narrative that includes information from newly declassified documents, acclaimed historian Richard B. Frank gives a scrupulously detailed explanation of the critical months leading up to the dropping of the atomic bomb. Frank explains how American leaders learned in the summer of 1945 that their alternate strategy to end the war by invasion had been shattered by the massive Japanese buildup on Kyushu, and that intercepted diplomatic documents also revealed the dismal prospects of negotiation. Here also, for the first time, is a comprehensive account of how Japan's leaders were willing to risk complete annihilation to preserve the nation's existing order. Frank's comprehensive account demolishes long-standing myths with the stark realities of this great historical controversy.

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Customer Reviews

This book will become the standard against which all future study of the use of atomic bombs against Japan is judged. The author describes in detail the continuous flow of new information to both the military and government bureaucracies of Japan and the United States. That information, mixed with prevailing ideology on both sides, helped determine the course of the World War II in the Pacific during the summer of 1945. Among pieces of the whole picture which I was not aware of before reading this book are: 1. While the United States was intercepting diplomatic messages sent from Japan to the USSR attempting to achieve a negotiated peace through Russian intervention, it was also intercepting many more messages planning for the last ditch battle against the expected American invasion of Japan. An invasion that the Japanese - including the Emperor - expected to

end in a Japanese victory followed by a relatively favorable peace for Japan. (In fact, by August of 1945, Admirals Nimitz and King of the United States Navy worried that the planned invasion would end in a Japanese victory!)² The fire-bombing of Japanese cities was just as horrendous as the use of the atomic bomb, causing more deaths when done "correctly," and causing many more deaths in total than were caused by the use of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Plus, if General LeMay hadn't figured out how to "do it" right using B-29s and "conventional" weapons, he would have almost certainly been replaced by someone else, almost as fast as he replaced his predecessor. (His predecessor having failed to get much obvious destruction in Japan out of the B-29s at his command.)³

Was Hiroshima necessary? What about Nagasaki? Would the invasion of Japan really have cost the lives of a million American soldiers, or were the Japanese eager to give up? And hey, what about those Russians? People know amazingly little about the Pacific War, compared to the epic conflict between the white nations in Europe. Indeed, the first two weeks of August 1945 loom larger for the chattering classes than do the four years that preceded them--eight years if you date the war from the invasion of China proper--fourteen years if you consider that it started with Japan's annexation of Manchuria. I've been reading about the events of August 1945 for a decade, and I have to say that the analysis gets better as the years go by. Richard Frank's book is the best yet. Olympic: First off, Frank gives a good capsule description of Operation Olympic, the invasion of Kyushu planned for November 1, and Ketsu-go, the preparations being made to destroy the American invasion force at the beaches. Frank then brings up evidence that during the summer of 1945, the Japanese reinforcement of Kyushu was so fearsome that American planners were beginning to turn against the invasion. By October 15, they now believed, 625,000 troops would be defending Kyushu. On Luzon, Okinawa, and Iwo Jima, the Japanese had shown their willingness to fight almost to the last man, with death tolls running as high as 97 or 98 percent. Meanwhile, they inflicted casualties at the rate of one American for every one or two defenders. To me, that suggests 600,000 Japanese soldiers dead on Kyushu, and upwards of 300,000 Americans killed, wounded, or missing. No wonder Truman wanted the Russians in the war, and no wonder he dropped the atomic bombs. The Russians are coming!

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