Clarion Review

History

Kaleidoscope View of a Mad, Mad World
Martin Olson
AuthorHouse
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★★★☆☆
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"America is like a son growing up and taking over the family business," comments Martin Olson in his condensed history of the twentieth century. "As in all families where the son inherits the business, he has forgotten or perhaps did not study the past history so he goes about making mistakes thinking that he is better and smarter than his parents."

Kaleidoscope View of a Mad, Mad, World, which was originally written in 2003, is in part a sequel to Iron Shoes, which was also "told to" Peter Mars. In the earlier book, Olson claims that President Richard M. Nixon "sold out his country" to the Japanese. He alleges that Nixon, who provided legal counsel to Japanese business interests in the 1950s, solicited campaign contributions from his clients in return for a promise to use his office to forgive a secret postwar debt known as the MacArthur Notes.

To get to that story in *Kaleidoscope View of a Mad, Mad, World*, however, Olson first recants a greatly condensed version of the 1941 classic *Design for Power: The Struggle for the World*. Written by two prominent historians, *Design for Power* shows how mistakes made by war-weary democracies in the 1920s and 1930s enabled fascist and communist dictators to rise to power and engulf the globe in another cataclysmic world war.

Olson begins each of his seven chapters on the seven great powers of World War II with a citation from *Alice in Wonderland*. He equates each of the Axis and Allied nations with a character from Lewis Carroll's tale, including Humpty Dumpty for Japan and Alice for France. While the French chapter is disappointingly brief and dismissive, those on the other major combatants and how they found themselves on the road to war are solid history. Olson is unforgiving in his scathing attacks on the various interwar British governments whose leaders'

minds, to borrow a phrase from Emerson, were “in a state of arrested development.” Olson’s best and longest chapter in this section is on the United States, where he provides a look at heroes, villains, and buffoons.

Olson eventually runs out of material from *Design for Power* and provides his own take on the war and postwar years. His section on Korea is good, and his section on Vietnam, in which he explains how America’s war there had its roots in the resistance to Japanese occupation during World War II, is even better.

Olson very much wants the young American “son” to understand history, and to not make the mistakes of the European “father” in taking over the “family business” of running the world. Unfortunately, he runs out of steam at this point, and the last forty pages of the book are a hard-to-follow ramble. Olson’s concluding section about what he would like to do with the MacArthur Notes, if the money was recovered, is interesting and noble but out of place, and makes for a weak wrap-up.

Despite its failings at the end, this book is still a kaleidoscopic view of a mad world, and it is worth a read.

Mark McLaughlin