



Mary L. Dudziak. *War Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. 232 pp. \$24.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-977523-1.



Reviewed by Robert Kodosky

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

“A time for war, a time for peace?”--at least that is what Pete Seeger’s song “Turn! Turn! Turn! (to Everything There is a Season)” says. The old Seeger tune that the Birds later made famous cites biblical verse to suggest that clocks are naturally wound in turn by war and by peace. One marks time and then yields to the other, calibrating the human condition, from one season to the next. “Turn! Turn! Turn!” topped America’s music charts in 1965. It resonated with listeners who, after two decades of the Cold War keeping time, awaited passage into a new era measured by peace. That time failed to arrive. Wartime, whether set in Vietnam, El Salvador, Bosnia, Iraq, or elsewhere, continued to move the hands of America’s clock. Wartime, for Americans, came to constitute virtually all time.

This is hardly new, as Mary L. Dudziak, Judge Edward J. and Ruey L. Guirado Professor of Law, History and Political Science at the University of Southern California Law School, renders evident in her timely new book, *War Time*. Dudziak cites eligibility requirements for combat-service

medals and membership in American veterans’ organizations to reveal that such criteria “cause wartime to swallow much of American history” (p. 28). It turns out that the nation’s past has clocked far more time at war than Americans commonly imagine. Counting up the “small wars” and the so-called forgotten wars,” Dudziak shows war as “not an exception to normal peacetime, but instead an enduring condition” (p. 5).

Dudziak’s insight is a valuable one. It illuminates an American experience that is often left lingering in the shadows of national memory. The Second World War tends to steal the spotlight. A large-scale conventional conflict waged by powerful nations and punctuated by peace, World War II continues to highlight the imaginations of Americans as their nation’s natural state of making war. In *How We Fight: Crusades, Quagmires and the American Way of War* (2010), political scientist Dominic Tierney demonstrates how this limited conceptualization of war undermines national strategy. Dudziak emphasizes its impact on American law and politics, even as she shows that

“World War II was fuzzier around the edges” than Americans commonly remember it (p. 62).

In her book’s second chapter, “When Was World War II?” Dudziak illustrates the complexities of war’s time keeping. The Second World War neither began nor ended as abruptly as is widely perceived. Instead, it crept up slowly and exited incrementally. Dudziak carefully gauges the war’s parameters by considering official statements and court cases from the period. This enables her successfully to cite World War II, the very model for the “American Way of War,” as an “example of the way American war spills beyond tidy time boundaries” (p. 36). Congress terminated some Articles of War in 1947, but it left others intact. America’s legal state of war against Germany remained in place until 1951.

Dudziak’s work makes it apparent that situating America’s participation in World War II between the attack on Pearl Harbor and the atomic devastation rendered by the United States on Japan is both artificial and misleading. As Dudziak contends, this is a problem that transcends the accuracy of history textbooks. It presents a larger conundrum, one that *War Time* effectively elucidates. Packaging the Second World War as neatly tied at both ends reinforces traditional thinking about wartime that “legitimizes the exercise of war powers by making it seem their use is temporary” (ibid.). Moreover, it obscures the historical reality that reveals wartime to be an artificial construct and not a natural phenomenon.

The idea that there exists an ordained time for war and another for peace persists. Despite the “Cold War’s ambiguity,” a time when “wartime and peacetime coexisted or had merged together,” Dudziak cites continuing efforts to “fit that era into preexisting conceptual boxes” (p. 69). Scholars frequently posit it as an old-fashioned wartime “with a start, a finish, and repression in the middle” (p. 84). Dudziak offers good reason to be skeptical of this interpretation. Policy makers, not wartime, dictated events. They acted accord-

ing to a myriad of pressures, both domestic and external. In doing so, they initiated a new kind of time, that of the national security state.

The Cold War did not have an impact on America’s democracy in the same ways as wartime, with an opening battle and a concluding armistice. Instead, “it was a period of state-building akin to the New Deal Era” (p. 91). A new logic of governance facilitated the development of institutional structures and economic relationships that held vested interests in their own continuance. Dudziak, despite her emphasis on the mechanics of the national security state, is not swapping one type of determinism here for another. She makes clear that options existed. Most notably, she identifies that “Korea was the moment when the question of whether the nation was on a permanent war footing was answered in the affirmative” (p. 93).

Dudziak’s work shatters the illusion that war is a product of time. It shows that war takes its shape from political actors. In America, officials have come to conceptualize war as necessary for peace. They have rendered peace as “a justification for militarization,” a condition unable to exist without “war as its constant companion” (p. 134). Still, the idea of wartime as distinct and temporary retains its grip on the nation’s collective imagination. Policy makers then continue to invoke it successfully as an argument to rationalize extraordinary governance. But that is all it is. “Wartime is an argument,” Dudziak points out, it is not an “inevitable feature of our world” (p. 136). It demands a rebuttal, though, one that is thoughtful, compelling, and concise. *Wartime* delivers just that. Let us hope that it is not too late.

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