

Hardcover: UK

CD Reviews

Displaced in the aftermath of World War II

BY PETER PRESTON
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

In the months after the end of World War I, some 40 million people died amid a worldwide flu pandemic. Three million perished from typhus; 5 million Ukrainians starved to death. No more battles, but no food, no medicine, no shelter, no resistance, either; just milling chaos. The fighting had ended, but its baleful, destructive legacy lingered on. And the question for the Western allies, immersed in another world war some 25 years later and brooding on consequences long before Hitler admitted defeat, was whether they could do better second time round.

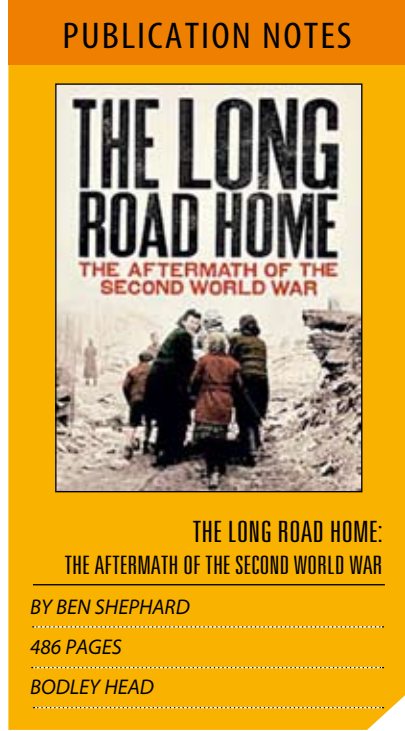
Ben Shephard sets out to provide the answers of formidably researched history. He can't pull every strand together: There were millions of human stories. The challenge to the embryo "world community" of allied concern and its chosen solution, UNRRA — the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration — was likewise immense and infernally complex. For not everybody wanted to go home — or even knew where their true homes were.

UNRRA's tally of "displaced persons" included Poles, Ukrainians, Balts, Russians and many more who'd kept Hitler's factories turning as Germany ran short of infantry to hold the frontline. Some were forced labor, some willing volunteers. Some were happy enough to go back to Poland, some would do anything to avoid living under encroaching Soviet communism. Ukraine, then as now, was split two ways, one side looking east, the other West. The Balkan states were their usual mess. Italians, once Mussolini departed, proved neither friends nor foes, but a burden. Germans driven from their farms in Poland and Czechoslovakia flocked to find safety in their beaten, battered fatherland. And then, of course, there were the Jews.

In part, but only in part, Shephard charts the founding of Israel and, fascinatingly, sets it in a context few politicians (or readers) would recognize six decades on. How did UNRRA deal with the horror of the Holocaust? It didn't. Nobody in the 1940s talked about holocausts. One Fabian Society report managed half a paragraph mentioning 2 million Jewish deaths in 26 pages examining Europe's displaced persons.

There was the casual anti-Semitism of General George Patton as his conquering army scythed across Europe. The Jews he found and freed were, he declared, "lower than animals." There was, still more surprisingly, an antipathy in the White House that would set Washington imploding today. "The Jews," President Truman wrote in his diary, "are very, very selfish. They care not how many Estonians, Latvians, Poles, Yugoslavs or Greeks get murdered or mistreated as long as the Jews get special treatment. Yet when they have power, physical or political, neither Hitler nor Stalin has anything on them for cruelty or mistreatment of the underdog."

Shephard's strongest suit as he chronicles these and other explosions of frustration or prejudice is that he leaves in all the raw edges and profound contradictions of the shattered world of the 1940s; he doesn't try to smooth them into some conventionally heroic narrative. Remember, Harry Truman was also



the most powerful friend of Israel's creation. Patton reflected a widely prevailing opinion in top US military circles (and, frankly, much of US society). Britain's sometimes saintly Labour government struggled might and main to fob off David Ben-Gurion and keep Chaim Weizmann's softer brand of Zionism in time-consuming diplomatic play.

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses" read the words on the Statue of Liberty. But the laws passed on Capitol Hill were quite different: Keep the huddled masses away. America already had strict immigration legislation and tough, inflexible quotas. Public opinion in 1945 was resolutely against easing such rigidities. Truman was a hero here, leading where he could have lain low, taking risks, even telling George Marshall he could claim the credit for the master plan that helped to rescue Europe because a "Truman Plan" would never make it through the Senate.

Just as dismayingly, the British, left as well as right, did not leap to help the homeless or defenseless. "Let them be displaced," said the *Daily Mirror*, complaining we'd taken in "most of the scum" from Europe and given others the cream. We don't want the "illiterate, the mentally deficient, the sick, the aged, the politically suspect and behaviorally disruptive" working here, said the *New Statesman*. And yet slowly, patiently, sometimes with judgment, often with luck, the problem was solved — or at least moved on to another stage and another generation.

Shephard does not draw pat lessons or modern conclusions from any of this. He is content to tell us what happened next, in detail, and often vividly. But you can't read *The Long Road Home* without jolts of sudden relevance — whether of political frailty, electoral insularity, or from registering the basic factors, such as existing immigrant communities to join up with, that make some migrations far more successful than others.

A good story or a bad one for mankind? In the end, more good than bad — but full of awful warnings. And, from Shephard, a riveting and often entirely fresh story, shrewdly assembled, very well told.



ALL ABOUT TONIGHT
Blake Shelton
Warner Brothers Nashville



31 MINUTES TO TAKEOFF
Mike Posner
J



DEJA VU
George Duke
Heads Up International

Blake Shelton is not a stoic like Trace Adkins, a sunbleached hobo like Kenny Chesney or an avatar of rural pride like Jason Aldean. He's not a guitar hero like Brad Paisley, a moody bruiser like Toby Keith or a repository of living history like George Strait.

What a relief that turns out to be. Shelton is among the most versatile of contemporary country singers, an amiable rapsallion one minute and a thoughtful brooder the next. His new EP, *All About Tonight*, is a variety-pack of country styles, each song a different pose for Shelton to try out, with varying success. (It's his second EP this year, after *Hillbilly Bone* in March.)

On *All About Tonight* he's soused, flirty and convincing: "Tomorrow can wait 'til tomorrow," he insists. But *Suffocating*, a slow dirgelike ballad about being stuck in the past, asks more of his voice than it's prepared to give.

That's because as a singer, he wrings feeling from emphasis and flexibility, not strength. On *Got a Little Country*, about seducing a city girl, he pronounces Manolo Blahniks "Milano Blahniks" though you sense he knows perfectly well what he's doing: The gaffe is funnier.

Really, mischief is Shelton's game — it's telling that the funniest song here is the one with his fiancée, Miranda Lambert. *Draggin' the River* is about a couple who fake a car crash in order to steal away for a secret wedding — a tale that would make Tim McGraw and Faith Hill blush.

— JON CARAMANICA, NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

At the beginning of *Deja Vu*, which arrives midway through Mike Posner's debut album *31 Minutes to Takeoff*, the 1990s R 'n' B greets Boyz II Men appear, performing some of their signature post-doo-wop, all slick, airy harmony and crisp fingersnaps. Twenty-four seconds later they're gone, and one second after that they're deeply missed.

At that point Posner's vaporous electro-soul returns to its natural state, unfettered by depth or texture. A vocal and emotional naif, Posner has an easy way with harmless melodies, which are all over this flat album, notable only for its odd choices: frat-boy come-ons ("Get Your Red Bull on/Cause I'm ready") and what's probably the first-ever sample of a Ray LaMontagne tune (*Do U Wanna?*).

Posner released a pair of mix tapes while still a student at Duke, from which he recently graduated. The sense of humor, however slight, that he showed on songs like *Drug Dealer Girl* is nowhere to be heard here. Instead, he toggles between petulant cad (*Gone in September*) and wounded child (*Save Your Goodbye*), convincing at neither. He has a grating voice, heavily nasal, with a seeming inability to wrap his lips around all of the necessary syllables, meaning that even when he's at his angriest, he sounds as if he's holding back.

Sometimes, though, Posner feels the need to make things uncomfortably clear. On *Cheated*, he actually names the woman who he's lashing out against: Boyz II Men would never be so gauche.

— JON CARAMANICA, NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

Haven't we been here before? *Deja vu*, the new album by the pianist-composer-producer George Duke, answers that question in the affirmative. Proudly slick, it's a throwback to the sounds of Duke's early career, in the 1970s: funk, fusion, Stevie Wonderish soul and the milder stirrings of then-nascent smooth jazz. Neither a stretch nor a new strategy for Duke — *Duke's Treats*, from 2008, had a similar scope — it's a way to play to his strengths, and to the tastes of a core audience that has stayed with him over the years.

For all its familiarity, *Deja vu* is not a complacent album. Duke has seized the chance to dust off an arsenal of keyboards — Minimoog Voyagers, Fender Rhodes and clavichords — in the service of his vintage ideal. Some songs are impeccable period pieces: *Oh Really?* has him playing a Wurlitzer electric piano in unison with the guitarist Jef Lee Johnson, against a pocket funk groove. The title track, which features a Nord synthesizer solo meant to evoke soaring electric guitar, feels like his nod to first-generation jazz-rock bands like Return to Forever and the Mahavishnu Orchestra.

Elsewhere the album adopts more of an adult-contemporary gloss. *Stupid Is as Stupid Does* enlists a sharp horn section, with Hubert Laws on flute, Nicholas Payton on trumpet and Bob Sheppard on tenor saxophone, but never surmounts its own glibness. *What Goes Around Comes Around*, written with the saxophonist Everett Harp, sounds like hold music, or something heard in the waiting room at the dentist's office. *Ripple in Time* resembles an outtake from the Miles Davis album *Tutu*.

Those aren't the greatest lapses of judgment here. Duke sings on half of the tracks on *Deja vu*, in a style blandly geared toward Quiet Storm radio programming. His soggy lyrics on *Bring Me Joy* and *Come to Me Now* might have worked with a more remarkable singer. *You Touch My Brain* probably never had a chance, despite its strong approximation of a Parliament-Funkadelic groove. And *6 O'Clock Revisited* has Duke's voice multi-tracked like a one-man Take 6, cooing about a lover's untrustworthiness. As the title implies, it's a redo of an older track from his own discography. But he did it better the first time.

— NATE CHINEN, NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

Softcover: US

Bad vibes: Anti-gay message takes root in Japanese subculture

Marvin D. Sterling's new book offers thoughtful insights into Japan's take on all things Jamaican, but fails to properly address its homophobic ideology

BY BRADLEY WINTERTON
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

This is an academic study of the followers of Jamaican reggae music in Japan. It naturally makes for fascinating reading — the two cultures could hardly, you would have thought, be more different. But the Japanese are nothing if not ardent imitators in many fields, and nowhere more so than in music. And thus it is that Jamaican reggae, dancehall, and Rastafarian cultural manifestations generally have a significant following among some young Japanese.

It's all very admirable, you might think, a feature of an international youth culture, and even of a benign form of globalization — until, that is, you come across one horrific element in the situation. This is that Jamaican reggae and Rastafarian culture is vehemently, even murderously, anti-gay.

Being perceived as gay, or even being suspected of being gay, is literally life-threatening in Jamaica — it has been called the most homophobic society on earth. The

murder of gays is common, and several countries have granted Jamaican gays political asylum because of the real danger of death should they return home. In 2004 the founding member of the island's only ever gay rights organization, Brian Williamson, was stabbed to death at his home the day he was interviewed by a Human Rights Watch researcher. She arrived back on the scene to find a crowd dancing with joy and singing "Boom bye bye," a line from a Jamaican reggae singer Buju Banton about the need to execute gay men. "Battyman he get killed," they chanted, using the abusive term for gay men common in Jamaica.

So how does this go down in Japan? Japan is not a notably homophobic society, and in addition violent crime of any kind is comparatively rare. But because the young Japanese followers of Rastafarian fashions want to be as authentic as possible, and do everything that their Jamaican musical mentors do, they too, in addition to growing their hair

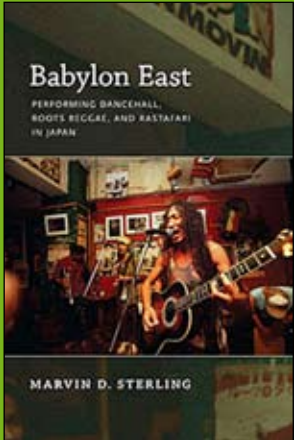
in dreadlocks, chant "Battyman fi bun," apparently chanted ad nauseam in Jamaican dancehalls. It means "Gays must burn."

It's all very well to say that perhaps these young Japanese would-be Rastafarians don't really mean it, that they shout such things on Saturday nights but then go home to peaceable, largely tolerant homes and think no more about it. But the sentiments on the lips of their MCs and DJs are nevertheless unambiguous. This author quotes one Japanese MC as introducing Banton's *Boom Bye-Bye* song as follows, here translated into Rastafarian English:

*So, all who no like battyboy,
Hand up inna di air now!
Me, I really love reggae!
And there is one thing I hate especially!
And that is: homos,
transsexuals, lesbians,
same-sex lovers!*

Marvin D. Sterling, an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at

PUBLICATION NOTES



BABYLON EAST:
PERFORMING DANCEHALL, ROOTS
REGGAE, AND RASTAFARI IN JAPAN
BY MARVIN D. STERLING
300 PAGES
DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Indiana University, has written an interesting account of this scene. His writing is admirably free of theoretical jargon, and he evokes Japanese partying scenes he has himself witnessed, conveying the atmosphere cool-headedly but also vividly. In the relatively short space he devotes to the homophobic element in the story he's clearly trying to be even-handed and just. At one point he says that the Japanese fans of this music cannot be absolved from blame for the cruel sentiments they give voice to simply by saying they are only imitating their Jamaican mentors. The weakness of the book, however, lies in just this academic nature of its approach.

On the one hand, academic works are not meant to be protest pamphlets. The ethos of the university is rightly one of observation and comparison. But it can be, and in this case should be, one of evaluation as well. The prevailing orthodoxy in American socio-literary academic circles is strongly pro-gay, or at least anti-homophobic, and so it seems

strange that Sterling, sane and objective though he undoubtedly is, should refrain from a more blanket condemnation of this culture. It does result in people's deaths, after all, not to mention the day-to-day living in terror of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of others in Jamaica itself.

This extreme Jamaican homophobia is not unrelated to other aspects of the country's cultural life, where women are strongly subordinated and male adultery and promiscuity generally are, reportedly, widely viewed as admirable qualities.

Examples in this book of Japanese reggae artists penning anti-gay lyrics include Nanjamen, who sings of an America "that enslaved black people ... that dropped the atomic bomb on Japan ... [and] where men marry men," as if these were crimes of equal standing.

Where the lethal Jamaican hatred of gays might have come from is briefly dealt with in this book. Contributing factors were undoubtedly the anti-sodomy laws

of the colonial British, and a law stipulating a maximum 10-year prison sentence for some gay sexual activities is still in place on the island. Nevertheless, it's hard to believe that the general antipathy to homosexuals in most of Africa today doesn't play some part in the evolution of Rastafarian culture in general, a culture that believes Jamaica is "Babylon" (i.e. the corrupt West), and the only true salvation lies in re-migration back to Africa, home of the movement's god-king, the benign and good-natured late emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie.

A campaign under the name "Stop Murder Music" was launched in the UK in the 1990s, specifically aimed at the anti-gay lyrics of Jamaican reggae. But to date it seems to have had little effect.

This, then, is an important book, but one that could have been a very different one. We can only hope Professor Sterling will make up for his sins of omission in less mild-mannered observations on the same topic elsewhere.