

The Atomic Bomb: Experience, History, Memory

Course Number: EAS 430/HIS 400

Term: Fall 1995

Instructor: Gerald Figal

Institution: Lewis and Clark College, Portland, Oregon

Course manifesto

With the recent 50th year anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, public discussion of the historical, political, social, moral, and scientific impact of this momentous event has reached a high pitch. Whether in commemoration events for war veterans, museum displays for public viewing, television documentaries, memoirs and literature by bomb survivors, or scholarly reassessments by historians, the topic has been rife with controversy that reveals many intersecting layers of meaning emanating from various viewpoints. The primary task of this reading colloquium is to trace out to the greatest extent possible these layers of meaning and varying viewpoints within the historical perspective that is afforded us. It is my hope that such a study will furnish us all with an intelligent, articulate, and informed historical understanding of the making, use, and postwar consequences of the atomic bomb as well as a basis from which to contemplate its meaning and impact for each of us in our everyday lives today. Ultimately, we should be able to exit this course with a deeper and more engaged understanding of the forces that culminated in the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings as well as of the unprecedented changes in human history which arose in their aftermath.

Course work

The bulk of the work for this course consists of short response writings, active class discussion, netsurfing, and presentations based on close and careful readings of course materials which cover historical studies, eyewitness accounts, literature, film, essays, museums, and current media coverage of 50th year commemoration events. You are required to design a plan for a historical museum exhibit on the bomb to be presented during the last week of class. In addition, you will all be involved with researching and annotating atomic bomb-related World Wide Web sites for the WWW Hiroshima Archive Project recently initiated by Mayu Tsuruya and yours truly in conjunction with Lewis & Clark College InfoTech. There are no exams. Since intensive reading and group discussion are the heart and soul of any colloquium, diligent preparation of readings, punctual attendance, and quality participation in class

are of the essence. That means inadequate preparation, in-class lethargy, tardiness, and unexcused absences will reflect negatively in your final grade.

Course materials

Required Books:

Duras, Marguerite. *Hiroshima Mon Amour*

Goodman, David. *After Apocalypse: Four Japanese Plays of Hiroshima and Nagasaki*

Lifton & Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: Fifty Years of Denial*

Lindee, M. Susan. *Suffering Made Real: American Science and the Survivors at Hiroshima*

Miner, Richard (ed.) *Hiroshima: Three Witnesses*

Nakazawa, Keiji. *Barefoot Gen* (volumes 1 and 2)

Nobile, Philip (ed.) *Judgment at the Smithsonian*

Sherwin, Martin. *A World Destroyed: Hiroshima and the Origins of the Arms Race*

Copy of Spring issue (v.19, no. 2) of *Diplomatic History* (Special on Hiroshima)

Recommended Book:

Treat, John. *Writing Ground Zero: Japanese Literature and the Atomic Bomb*

Reserved Readings (in Watzek)

An assortment of films shown both during and outside of scheduled class time.

Atomic Bomb-related sites on the World Wide Web

The Atomic Bomb: Experience, History, Memory Trajectory of Readings (subject to deviations)

Unit I: Making Meanings of the Making & Dropping of the Bomb

9/7 Intro: Debating the bomb after 50 years: history & commemoration at odds

reading: Excerpts on Enola Gay exhibit (handout)

ABC Special: *Hiroshima: Why the Bomb Was Dropped* (Peter Jennings)

9/11 The Manhattan Project: uneasy alliance of science, politics, and military

reading: *A World Destroyed*, Introductions; section I

9/14 Wartime plotting for postwar nuclear power

reading: *A World Destroyed*, section II

film: *The Atomic Cafe* (TBA)

9/18 Hot start to Cold War

reading: A World Destroyed, section III

9/21 film: The Day After Trinity (in class)

9/25 The Hiroshima narrative in American consciousness

reading: Hiroshima in America, Introduction and part I

9/28 reading: Hiroshima in America, part II

10/2 reading: Hiroshima in America, part III

10/5 reading: Hiroshima in America, part IV

film: Hiroshima/Nagasaki, August 1945=20

Unit II: Recording the Extraordinary: Atomic Art, Literature, and Theatre

10/9 The problems of writing the unimaginable

reading: Writing Ground Zero (pp. 1-81)

10/12 Bearing witness, unbearably

reading: Hara, Summer Flowers (Hiroshima: Three Witnesses)

10/16 Communal death/Death in life

reading: Ota, City of Corpses (Hiroshima: Three Witnesses)

film: Black Rain (TBA)

10/19 Impact beyond prose: atomic bomb poetry

reading: Toge, Poems of the Atomic Bomb (Hiroshima: Three Witnesses)

10/23 Impact beyond words: atomic bomb art

reading: "The Hiroshima Murals of Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi: A Note" (Hiroshima: Three Witnesses)

Dower, "Japanese Artists and the Atomic Bomb"

10/26 Dead serious comics

reading: Barefoot Gen, volumes 1 & 2 (all)

10/30 Staging atomic bomb experience & memory 1

reading: The Island (in After Apocalypse)

11/2 Staging atomic bomb experience & memory 2

reading: The Head of Mary (in After Apocalypse)

11/6 Staging atomic bomb experience & memory 3

reading: The Elephant (in After Apocalypse)

11/9 Post atomic (in)humanity

reading: Hiroshima, Mon Amour

film: Hiroshima, Mon Amour

Unit III: Postwar Fallout: science & public memory after the bomb

11/13 "This is only a test. . .": survivor surveys and atomic testing in the postwar world

reading: Suffering Made Real, One

11/16 reading: Suffering Made Real, Two

11/20 reading: Suffering Made Real, Three

film: Radio Bikini

11/27 Whose experience? Whose history? Whose memory?

reading: selections from Diplomatic History

11/30 reading: Nobile, "On the Steps of the Smithsonian" (in Judgment)

12/4 reading: "The Crossroads" (original Enola Gay script in Judgment)

12/7 reading: Bernstein, "The Struggle Over History" (in Judgment)

12/11 Design Your Own Atomic Bomb Museum Display

presentation/discussion of your plans and rationale for an atomic bomb exhibit

bonus film: Dr Strangelove; or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb