Hiroshima: History, Ethics and Memory

Leo Maley III and Uday Mohan

Hiroshima: History, Ethics, and Memory
Wednesdays, 6:30-9:00 p.m.

Course objectives

This course focuses intensively on one complex and wide-ranging topic: the decision to use atomic weapons against the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the fifty years of cultural "fallout" in the United States arising from that decision. Students will critically evaluate readings representing a variety of disciplines and perspectives. We expect that students will do the assigned readings and actively participate in seminar discussions. To help sharpen these discussions, students will prepare a 1 page response to each week's readings. Students will also write two 3-4 page critical reflection papers, and one final 10-12 page essay. The critical reflection papers should identify key issues that cut across the readings, briefly discuss the reasons for major points of agreement or disagreement with the readings, and note how the readings have added to your understanding the issues. In the final essay students will respond at greater length to one theme or topic from the course.

Course Readings

September 6: Introduction.

September 13: The decision to use the atomic bomb--what we now know (part I).

September 20: The decision to use the atomic bomb--what we now know (part II).
Alperovitz, The Decision, pp. 221-420.

September 27: Hiroshima: August 6 and after.

October 4: The decision to use the atomic bomb--what we were told (Stimson and Truman).
Alperovitz, The Decision, pp. 421-530.
October 11: The decision to use the atomic bomb--what we were told (more Truman, Byrnes, Groves, "Managing History," "The Complicity of Silence," and Questions and Theories).
Alperovitz, The Decision, pp. 531-668.

October 18: Historians.

October 25: The Scientists.
Freeman Dyson, Disturbing the Universe (Harper & Row, 1979), pp. 30-31, 50-53.

October 25: The scientists, continued.

November 1: Was it ethical? Different approaches.
John Dower, War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War (Pantheon, 1986),
pp. 54-57, 185.

November 8: The media.

November 15: The Smithsonian and the Enola Gay.
Historians' Committee for Open Debate on Hiroshima, letter to I. Michael Heyman, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, July 31, 1995.
Selected editorials and columns from various newspapers: August-September 1994.
November 22: Was it legal?
November 29: Memories and "Voices."
Zoe Tracy Hardy, "What Did You Do in the War, Grandma?" Ms. (August 1985): 75-78.
Rachelle Linner, City of Silence: Listening to Hiroshima (Orbis, 1995), pp. 36-54, 79-99. (Also read chapt. 3 or chapt. 5)

November 29: Memories and "Voices," continued.
December 6: Hiroshima's legacy.
Linner, City of Silence, pp. 119-126.

December 13. No class. "Exam study day."

December 20. Final essay due.