The Atomic Bomb and the Nuclear Age

Mark Selden

The Atomic Bomb and the Nuclear Age
Sociology 480J/History 486K, Fall 2000
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This course explores the meaning of the nuclear age and the atomic bomb from multiple perspectives with particular reference to the United States and Japan, the United States and the Soviet Union, and the global context and implications of war, peace, security, and human survival. It considers the impact of the making and using of the atomic bomb on American and Japanese societies, including political, social, historical, technological, literary and artistic resonances, and historical memory. We range from the master narratives of nuclear technology, power politics and arms control to the personal narratives and responses of victims and citizens in the United States, Japan and globally. We consider the relationship between the atomic bomb and the cold war including nuclear terror and arms control and reduction during and after the era of U.S.-USSR confrontation, the nature and achievements of anti-nuclear and anti-war movements, the contemporary challenge of proliferation exemplified by the Indian and Pakistani bombs, and the plausibility of the nuclear winter and other doomsday hypotheses. The following paperback books have been ordered at the campus bookstore.

Books

Laura Hein and Mark Selden, eds., Living With the Bomb: American and Japanese Cultural Conflicts in the Nuclear Age. M.E. Sharpe.
Michael Hogan, ed., Hiroshima in History and Memory. Cambridge.
Kenzaburo Ōe, Hiroshima Notes. Marion Boyers.

Films:
Grave of the Fireflies, Godzilla, Fat Man and Little Boy, Black Rain, Them, Barefoot Gen, Atomic Cafe, Testament, Dr. Strangelove. Students are asked to prepare a term paper on a question related to one of the central themes of the course.

Syllabus
1. Before the Bomb: Power, and the Clash of Empires in World War II. 9.8
Supplement:
   2. Film and Discussion: Grave of the Fireflies (90 minutes). 9.15.
   In class screening and discussion on Japanese perspectives on World War II bombing.
   3. Medical and Environmental Aspects of Nuclear Bombs and Power Generation. 9.29
   Guest presentation by Alan Haber, Binghamton radiation biologist and former research scientist at Oak
   Ridge Laboratory. 9.29
   b. The Committee for the Compilation of Materials on Damage Caused by the Atomic Bombs in Hiroshima
   and Nagasaki, The Physical, Medical and Social Effects of the Atomic Bombings, 335-84, 395-409, 30-50.
   Film: Godzilla. King of the Monsters (2 hours)
   Supplement:
   Hibakusha Cinema. Hiroshima, Nagasaki and
   the Nuclear Image in Japanese Film, 54-74.
   4. The Atomic Decision: Why? 10.6
   b. Gar Alperovitz, Historians Reassess: Did We Need to Drop the Bomb? in Bird and Lifschultz, eds.,
   Hiroshima's Shadow, 5-21.
   Supplement:
   a. Essays by Sayle, Blackett, Bernstein, Sherwin in Hiroshima's Shadow.
   Film: Fat Man and Little Boy. Starring Paul Newman. (2 hrs)5. The Atomic Bomb, Japan's Decision to
   Surrender and the Dawn of The Nuclear Age. 10.13
   a. Barton Bernstein, "Understanding the Atomic Bomb and the Japanese Surrender: Missed Opportunities,
   Film: Testament (90 mins)
   and Visual Accounts 10.20
   b. John Dower and John Junkerman, eds., The Hiroshima Murals: The Art of Iri Maruki and Toshi Maruki
   AND/OR
   Japan Broadcasting Corporation, World Friendship Center in Hiroshima, Unforgettable Fire: Pictures
   Drawn by Atomic Bomb Survivors.
   c. George Roeder, "Making Things Visible. Learning From the Censors, in Hein and Selden, Living With
   the Bomb, 73-99.
   Supplement:
   Hiroshima and Nagasaki, xi-xxxx.
   Film: Imamura Shohei, Black Rain. Based on the novel by Ibuse Masuji. (2 hrs)
   Literary Representations. 10.27
   a. Novellas by Agawa Hiroyuki, Hayashi Kyoko and Nakayama Shiro, and poems in Kyoko Selden and
   Supplement:
   a. Essays in Selden and Hein, Living With the Bomb, 73-99.
b. John Hersey, Hiroshima.

Film: Them (90 mins).
Supplement:
a. Wittner, One World or None. Volume 2.
Film: Barefoot Gen (90 mins).
10. The Indian and Pakistani Bombs and the Control and Abolition of Nuclear Weapons After the Cold War. November 17.
Readings to be assigned.
11. The Bomb in Japanese and American Memory (1) 11.24
b. Oe Kenzaburo, Hiroshima Notes, 11-71, 123-71 (and as much more as time permits).
Supplement:
Film: Atomic Cafe (90 mins).
12. The Bomb in Japanese and American Memory (2). 12.1
Supplement:
c. Seiitsu Tachibana, "The Quest for a Peace Culture: The A-Bomb Survivors' Long Struggle and the New Movement for Redressing Foreign Victims of Japan's War," in Hogan, ed., Hiroshima in History and
Memory, 168-86.
Film: Dr. Strangelove. Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb. (90 mins.)

13. Student Presentations of Papers and final discussion. 12.8

Reserve Book List
The Committee for the Compilation of Materials on Damage Caused by the Atomic Bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Physical, Medical, and Social Effects of the Atomic Bombings.
John Dower and John Junkerman, eds., The Hiroshima Murals: The Art of Iri Maruki and Toshi Maruki.
Jorn Gjelstad and Olav Njolstad, eds., Nuclear Rivalry and International Order.
Laura Hein and Mark Selden, eds., Living With the Bomb: American and Japanese Cultural Conflicts in the Nuclear Age.
John Hersey, Hiroshima.
Michael Hogan, ed., Hiroshima in History and Memory.
Japan Broadcasting Corporation, World Friendship Center in Hiroshima, Unforgettable Fire: Pictures Drawn by Atomic Bomb Survivors.
Edward Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, eds., History Wars. The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past.
Keiji Nakazawa, Barefoot Gen (two volumes).
Kenzaburo Oe, Hiroshima Notes.
Kyoko Selden and Mark Selden, eds., The Atomic Bomb. Voices From Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
Yuki Tanaka, Hidden Horrors. Japanese War Crimes in World War II
E.P. Thompson and Dan Smith, eds., Protest and Survive
Christopher Thorne, The Issue of War. States, Societies and the Far Eastern Conflict of 1941-1945
Lawrence Wittner, One World or None. The Struggle Against the Bomb.
Possible Research Topics (these are designed to stimulate ideas, not to restrict choices)
1. How many people died/were injured, as a result of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: who (e.g. nationality), when (immediately, within six months etc.), where (distance from the hypocenter), why (blast, radiation, psychological trauma)?
2. What is known about the medical, genetic, and psychological effects of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima/Nagasaki? What scientific and technological issues remain unresolved and why?
3. Why did the Truman administration use the bomb at Hiroshima? Nagasaki? How did it subsequently justify its decision to use the bomb (twice).
4. Was the bomb critical to ending the war? To saving American/Japanese lives? Discuss the issues in the context of the positions of Japan, the USSR, and the US.
5. Assess the dominant positions in the debate over the decision to drop the atomic bombs.
6. Why are the issues surrounding the dropping of the atomic bomb still so intense five decades later? Do the issues appear different when viewed from the US and from Japan?
7. What is to be learned from a review of Japanese and American literatures (or visual and other arts) on the atomic bombing?
8. Assess the impact of anti-nuclear movements (or official arms control efforts) on the development of nuclear weapons and nuclear power during and after the Cold War.
9. Make the case for (or against) the abolition of nuclear weapons (and/or nuclear power).
10. How can and should nuclear weapons be limited, reduced and eliminated? Assess the major proposals currently under debate concerning nuclear arms control and elimination.
11. How has historical memory of the bomb in the United States and Japan differed? Assess the master narratives and critical narratives in both countries and explain the differences.
12. Explain Japan's decision to surrender.
13. What has been the impact of the decision to use the bomb on subsequent international conflict? Did the bomb help preserve peace or exacerbate military conflict since World War II?
15. In what sense can the era from the final years of World War II be called the nuclear age?
16. In what ways, if any, do themes of racism illuminate atomic issues?
17. What is the significance of the fact that the U.S. is the only nation that has used the bomb?
18. Develop a "least worse case" strategy to deal with the problem of nuclear waste.
19. Evaluate some of the leading proposals for reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons.
20. Assess the nuclear winter hypothesis.