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Essay # 2 Violence and War Final Draft
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Hiroshima: The End of Innocence

For many alive in the United States today, the end of innocence is marked by the November day J.F.K. was assassinated. Perhaps the innocence truly ended a few years earlier, when the U.S. dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan in the summer of 1945. In his 1981 essay "Hiroshima", John Berger takes us to the unimaginable horror Japan experienced when this bomb was dropped on innocent civilians at the end of World War II. He is motivated to write his essay by an article, written by an old friend in early 1980, about the possibility of a third world war featuring nuclear weapons, as well as the terrifying notion of history repeating itself a scant four decades later. A book that has languished unopened on his desk called "Unforgettable Fire" also plays a major role in his essay.

For Zoe Tracy Hardy, the author of the 1985 essay "What Did You Do in the War, Grandma?" just doing something "real" to help end the war was motivation enough to seek work at the Glenn L. Martin Company, builder of B-29 bombers, in May, 1945. Hardy was just eighteen years old when she joined the ranks of "Rosie the Riveter" in her quest to "help finish the war" (126). Unbeknownst to her at the time, she became part of the crew responsible for building the "Enola Gay", the warplane that actually dropped the first atomic bomb on the Japanese port, Hiroshima. Little did Hardy understand then, when she started her new job, that her own innocence would also be at stake.

Hardy writes primarily about the preparations for ending the war and the moral implications of using atomic weaponry, and Berger primarily about the aftermath, and thus the consequences of the immorality of a nuclear attack. They share the same feelings of repulsion, anger and outrage over what was done, in retribution, to the Japanese for bombing Pearl Harbor. Hardy and Berger both feel an overarching and desperate need for strict moral controls, and a worldwide government agreement regarding the production and detonation of nuclear weapons. Berger notes that "Hiroshima was perpetrated by the most powerful alliance in the world against an enemy who was already prepared to negotiate, and was admitting defeat"(529). Hardy characterizes the bombing as "kicking a dead horse – brutally"(132). Both writers would like nothing more than to put the atomic "cat back in the bag" so to speak, but are aware that is not possible, now that atomic bombs have actually been deployed in war. Berger comes to his strong position against nuclear weapons through a wealth of experience and the wisdom age can afford. A British adult, and professional art critic, Berger's opinions are well thought out over time, not formed during the impulse of war as Hardy's were. As a European, Berger also has the advantage of objectivity in forming his views about the actions of the United States.

Berger asserts that "Nobody can confront the reality of 6th August 1945 without being forced to acknowledge that what happened was evil. It is not a question of interpretation, but of events"(529). The unfolding of those events that same day forces Hardy to come to grips with the evil the U.S. has just succeeded in unleashing on the world. She acknowledges that "President Truman has made two things clear: the bomb had created a monster that could wipe out civilization; and some protection against this

monster would have to be found before its secret could be given to the world"(131). The ambiguous referral to "some protection" from "a monster that could wipe out civilization" can have no other effect than terror on her young psyche. For the first time in Hardy's short life, she "feels a rush of terror at being out in the night alone"(131). In the throes of her shattering innocence, she empathizes, through radio accounts, with the agony, suffering and death caused by the bomb to the Japanese victims half-way around the world. Hardy reads everything she can "looking for some speculation from someone about how we are going to live in this new world"(131). By using the word "live", Hardy clearly understands the crucial need to have rules about nuclear weapons to simply survive. She wants some sort of guarantee that this will never happen again and civilization will not be wiped out. Hardy soaks up accounts of the horrific atrocities of radiation poisoning and lets the facts of the seemingly endless suffering it causes sink in. She tries to sleep, but visions of the bomb haunt her relentlessly. The realization of the magnitude of immorality about what has occurred is felt in her uneasy conversation with her co-worker Mildred, when Hardy blurts out anxiously "do you think we should have done this thing ?" (132). By "we" she mainly means the United States, but her own gut level guilt is there as well. Her own true feelings of guilt fuel her writing. Several days later, after Japan's unconditional surrender, Mildred confirms Hardy's fear: they had in fact worked night and day to finish the now notorious "Enola Gay" warplane, and helped unknowingly "launch scientific monsters that would catapult us all into a precarious "strange new world"- forever" (133).

Berger's essay not only reinforces Hardy's revelations, but extends them as well. At the heart of Berger's writing are first hand accounts by the people of Hiroshima of the

after effects of the bomb on August 6, 1945. The virtual hell of radiation poisoning and the tortuous death innocent people endured because of this atomic evil are captured forever in drawings and paintings done by Japanese survivors and witnesses to the devastation that was Hiroshima. The artworks, nearly 1000 pieces in all, were created for a 1974 Japanese exhibition, and subsequently published in the 1981 book "Unforgettable Fire". The appeal for art was worded: "Let us leave for posterity pictures about the atomic bomb, drawn by citizens"(525). The terror, agony and fear expressed in these renderings are eerily palpable, and sickeningly vivid. After finally opening and poring over his volume of "Unforgettable Fire", Berger realizes that "images rather than words, can help us see through the mask of innocence that evil wears"(524) The "mask of innocence" Berger refers to is the purported U.S. desire to end the war, a purpose seemingly aligned with sparing lives, not killing and maiming thousands more. Berger's utmost concern upon his revelation is preservation of these images so that the devastating atrocities they portray never occur again. He writes: "The whole incredible problem begins with the need to reinsert those events of August 6, 1945 back into living consciousness"(524). The "incredible problem" is best stated by the George Santayana truism "those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it." War history needs testimony from the victims to be fully understood. Berger believes that "the facts of nuclear holocaust have been hidden through a systematic, slow and thorough process of suppression and elimination …within the reality of politics." Berger further asserts that the testimony of the victims has been "torn out" of history; that the true facts of nuclear holocaust have nothing to do with textbook dates and statistics, or political and military

strategies but are found in the "monstrously vivid"… "images of hell" that the *hibakuska*(Japanese survivors who have seen hell) experienced.

Berger may have watched in outrage as the U.S. blew up nuclear warheads in the Mojave Desert (a short 60 miles away from Las Vegas) and elsewhere, in the spirit of scientific testing, every few weeks throughout the late 1950's and early 1960's. In fact the blasts, and resulting mushroom clouds from the tests, which could be seen and felt for hundreds of miles, became part of the attraction of a trip to Las Vegas. The "atomic age" was translated by the media, with the complicit help of government propaganda, to be both modern and glamorous, certainly not something to fear. This modern reality upholds Berger's argument that the true facts of nuclear holocaust and its consequences have been "torn out" of the historical record.

A Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was formulated and then ratified October 11, 1963, by Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States. The ban prohibited, for primarily environmental reasons, detonating bombs in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water. There has never been a successful ban on nuclear warfare, although the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, which was opened for signature September, 1996 would accomplish that goal. To this day, eleven more nations are needed for ratification.

While these two essays center on the same broad subject of the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima, and though both essays were written decades after the bombing during the height of the cold war with the Soviet Union, there is another glaring similarity: outrage. Hardy's first hand account of "helping to finish the war" is filled not only with her memories of the horror she unknowingly helped create and her guilt-ridden feelings about

having had a hand in something so morally reprehensible, but her outrage about having been used as an unwitting pawn by the morally bankrupt U.S. military. Her previous understanding that "Ordinary 19 and 20 years old girls were not, not in the United States of America, required to work night and day to help launch scientific monsters" has been voided (133). Her initial naivete has also disappeared. She now sees reasons, moral and otherwise, to question not only authority, but seemingly patriotic friends like Mildred. Near the end of her essay, Hardy asks herself:

> If [The President] had asked me whether I would work very hard to help bring this horror into being, knowing it would shorten the war but put the world into jeopardy for all time, how would I have answered? I would have said, No. With all due respect sir, how could such a thing make a just end to our just cause? (133)

The view that the world has been "put into jeopardy for all time" implies she knows that the cat is irrevocably out of the bag. Hardy needs to believe that the jeopardy can be controlled in some stringent, moral manner. The argument Hardy's writing makes is more compelling because it is an account of her own personal coming of age experience. She is relieved to read in later newspaper accounts that "serious questions about the morality of *Americans* using such a weapon were being raised by some civilians of note and some churchmen"(132). She realizes the moral gap that will always exist "between me and people like her (Mildred)"(133). At the end of Hardy's essay, when she recounts seeing the "great, uncomprehending brown eyes" of an old cow, her subsequent sobs seem to mourn not just the death of her own innocence, but the death of the innocence of the entire world (133). Her emotions here are raw and imminently relatable.

Berger's essay focuses on the consequences of the reality of the virtual hell radiation poisoning caused the people of Hiroshima. The temperature at the center of the fireball of the bomb was 300,000 degree centigrade (526). His essay has as evidence the artistic depictions of the vivid horror the Hiroshima survivors, the *hibakuska* endured and then re-created, as well as the feelings of outrage they provoke:

> This outrage has two natural faces. One is a sense of horror and pity at what happened; the other face is self-defensive and declares: *this should not happen again* (here). For some the *here* is in brackets, for others it is not. … This split of the sense of outrage into, on one hand, horror, and, on the other hand expediency occurs because the concept of evil has been abandoned… The concept of evil implies a force or forces which have to be continually struggled against so that they do not triumph over life and destroy it (529).

Berger, a British citizen, firmly believes that "the two bombs dropped on Japan were terrorist actions" (529). Berger's outrage at the innocent Japanese civilians having been used as nothing more than cannon fodder to teach the Japanese government a lesson supports his view. He further asserts that the epithet "terrorist" is logically justifiable. Berger does this "because it may help to reinsert that act into living consciousness today" (529). Even though it seems he feels that the call to triumph over evil has been abandoned, Berger still wants desperately to reinsert the images of Hiroshima back into the history books and back into a worldwide dialog. He has not given up on the idea of morality controlling evil outcomes. His argument reinserting the horrific images of hell as a moral control turns out to be quite effective. At the close of his essay, Berger states:

> Only by looking beyond or away can one come to believe that such evil is relative,

and therefore under certain conditions justifiable. In reality – the reality to which the survivors and the dead bear witness – it can never be justified (530).

Both Berger and Hardy agree that the evil of nuclear warfare can never be justified, and that some type of global control over the warheads already in existence (circa 1980) needs to guarantee they will never be used. In essence, Berger's essay seeks to lay blame. The personal revelations and guilt a naive Hardy experiences during the days after the bomb was dropped makes her writing the more effective appeal for the moral position against these weapons.

The issues Hardy and Berger both raise concerning the physical and moral consequences of the atomic bomb are certainly as relevant today as they were 60 and 25 years ago. The common knowledge that former third world countries such as India, Pakistan, and North Korea have nuclear capabilities of unknown size and sophistication is more than reason enough. However, on top of that knowledge, not knowing, after the breakup of the Soviet Union, the exact locations and amounts of nuclear stores – the same stores that proliferated at such alarming rates throughout the four decades of the cold war- is enough evidence to warrant an immediate global debate and push for ratification of the comprehensive agreement mentioned earlier. While the moral issues surrounding nuclear war and its consequences continue to need examination, there also exists a need for a forthright and accurate accounting for each and every one of the former Soviet warheads. Until there is a foolproof method or methods of control – moral or physical - over the warheads in existence right now, and an ironclad agreement on how not to ever use them, there will never be true world peace.

References

John Berger, "Hiroshima", in Fields of Reading: Motives for Writing, 7th Ed. Nancy R. Comely et al., (Boston, Ma: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004) pgs. 524-531

Zoe Tracy Hardy, "What Did You Do In the War, Grandma", in Fields of Reading: Motives for Writing, 7th Ed. Nancy R. Comely et al., (Boston, Ma: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004) pgs. 126-133

Endnotes

1. NARA-our documents
Citation: Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, July 26, 1963; Treaties and Other International Agreements Series #5433; General Records of the U.S. Government; Record Group 11; National Archives

2. Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (Nov. 17 2005) Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia (Nov. 29, 2005)

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