Hiroshima: What do We or can We Remember? Understanding the Great Tao of Humanity through its Tragic Loss – Paper for Conference on Reconsidering Hiroshima/Nagasaki, Hiroshima, Japan, June 24-27, 2003.

Abstract: What is Hiroshima? What does the word Hiroshima sound to us, not just as Japanese, Americans, or Chinese but simply as humans? The more I ponder over the meaning of Hiroshima, the more I find the urgent need for us, as scholars and teachers, parents and siblings, to tap on the inexhaustible hidden wealth of meanings that instantly come to life with us every time the word Hiroshima is pronounced. It is the wealth of meanings that often proliferate through our diligent reflection upon past events as well as current situations. But charged as it is, can we really teach about Hiroshima/Nagasaki and make our students understand what Hiroshima stands for? Can we teach about Hiroshima regardless of who we are as instructors – Chinese-Americans, Filipinos-Americans, Korean-Americans, or Japanese-Americans? Is it possible for us to teach about Hiroshima by suppressing or faking any personal feelings and emotions that inevitably define and dictate us as cultural subconscious or unconscious? Can we teach about Hiroshima by avoiding the subtle but strong emotional elements that may simultaneously empower and affect our teaching? Is it possible for us to teach about Hiroshima not only as Chinese-, Filipinos-, or Korean-Americans but also as humans? These are the issues that often concern me, confront me personally and professionally as a Chinese native, naturalized American citizen, and scholar interested in cross-wall cultural dialogue and teacher of the humanities in China and in the U. S. for many years. For me, the issue of
Hiroshima is not an issue of whether we remember but what we remember, for what we remember, how and how well we want and can remember regarding this tragic human experience. Hiroshima was, is, should be, and will continue being the testing case of our very humanity regarding these what’s, how’s, and why’s. But while contemplating over the massive literatures and materials on Hiroshima/Nagasaki for the conference, the current courses I teach and the new one(s) in vision, and my second book on the paradigms and paradoxes regarding the necessity, difficulty, and possibility for cross cultural understanding, I find out, as outlined below, of which I can cover only parts 1, 2, and 10 in the 20 minute speech, in order to remember, to maximize our understanding of Hiroshima/Nagasaki,

1. We must learn how to contextualize our approaches by taping on the profound symbolic meanings of Hiroshima via various emotionally charged literatures and by avoiding, at the same time, the “victimization” narrative.

2. We must know that to contextualize means to teach not just the content but the context as well. It means to reconstruct the best way we can the very atmosphere, the very “race, milieu, moment,” from which the history emerged, happened, progressed, became “poisoned,” or further deteriorated. To understand the very context requires not to simply focus on the atomic bombings themselves but the peculiar humanity distorting and -destroying atrocities that had preceded but culminated as natural consequences in the form of these two catastrophic blasts, which now stand for the peculiar legacy of WWII, the indiscriminate killing and murdering of civilian as the “just” or “justifiable” means of warfare in an unprecedented scale and intensity.

3. We must realize that to understand the context also means to understand not only the pretext but also the subtext of the political rhetoric that justifies the just use of atomic bombs.

4. We must be clear that to contextualize our understanding with a focus on how and why the bombs are used is also to understand the chilling implications regarding how
technology comes to dehumanize us by creating its own momentum, its own rationale, its own tempting and compelling impacts on our decision making process.

5. We must be aware that to contextualize our understanding regarding whether, how, or why the bombs end the world or have saved lives is to perceive the decisive decision-making process, mechanism, mindset on the part of the Japanese as well.

6. We must be resolute that to contextualize our understanding also means to sensitize ourselves to the fundamental problems exposed with the catastrophic explosions regarding our consciousness, conscience, and philosophical and philosophical rationale.

7. We must know that to further understand the very content and context of Hiroshima/Nagasaki, we should also look hard at or into the racial hatred and moral indifference that preceded, promoted, and, according to quite a few scholars, such as Martin J. Sherwin and Stanley Goldberg, probably prolonged the “good war.”

8. We must have no illusion that to further understand the very content and context of Hiroshima/Nagasaki, we need to look hard into the culpable and paradoxical role of mass media and language.

9. We must be self-conscious that to contextualize our understanding means finally to understand the very irony or paradox regarding the fact, as Reinhold Niebuhr emphasizes, “the same power which encompassed the defeat tyranny may become the foundation of a new injustice.”

It means to understand the very context where the role of the accused and accuser, victim and victimizer, prey and predator, the virtuous and the depraved are easily or readily reversible.

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10. Conclusion: Reconstructing Hiroshima/Nagasaki for indispensable perspectives, personal strengths, and peace of world and humanity.

Hiroshima, does it ever sound the same to the Japanese, Koreans, the Chinese, or Americans? Does it ring similarly to the WWII veterans, politicians, or post-war and post-modern generations in Japan, the U.S., and other Asian countries? Is Hiroshima a heinous massacre of humanity? Does it imply a sinister or sincere rational decision or means in the name of “just war”? If it is rational, what is the rationale behind it? If it is justifiable, who justifies it? Should we still question ourselves regarding whether, how or how much racism was voluntarily or involuntarily involved in the decision making process regarding the bombing of Hiroshima/Nagasaki? Is it the only or the best alternative to end the Pacific War that was initially fought against the humiliating Western dominance and racism -- at least for many Japanese?

Without the bombing, would Japan suffer as much as North Koreans under the communist rule, as some Japanese have so rationalized themselves? What is the global implication of Hiroshima now since then? Is Hiroshima just another routine kind of tit-for-tat or eye-for-eye relay of warfare that accompanies human history since day one – only in an unprecedented scale of human cost? Is another Hiroshima, definitely the worst kind ever if not the last one, inevitable? It seems that we humans can never restrain ourselves in inventing, improving, and applying whatever technology available for us to initiate or advance our national interests -- until the doomsday of our own making. Is not Hiroshima the haunting Godzilla or Frankenstein of our much celebrated modernity? If our memory is as short and flawed as it always appears so, what do we or can we remember of Hiroshima? Does Hiroshima teach us anything positive about us as humans? Have we ever learned anything from the tragedy regarding current world situations? Does our memory of

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2 Also for many other Japanese, such as Honda Katsuichi, however, “Japan invaded China and Korea on the noble-sounding pretexts of reacting against the incursions and colonialism of the Western powers in Asia and liberating the colonies, but in fact, it was merely joining the Western attack on Asia” and his “view of the situation could [thus] probably be summarized as Japan invaded the Asian countries, but it was as part of a struggle with Western powers for supremacy in their colonies and semi-colonies.” See Honda Katsuichi. The Nanjing Massacre: A Japanese Journalist Confronts Japan’s National Shame. Ed. Frank Gibney. Trans. Karen Sandness (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999) xxv.

3 A Christian Science Monitor interview with a female Hiroshima bombing victim (source to be identified).
Hiroshima make our world a better place to live -- in all respects? Has our world been improved on geopolitics, environmental safety, ethnic/racial/global cooperation and understanding ever since? What have been consistently focused upon or repeatedly missing regarding the scope, kind, range, and/or depth of our memory of Hiroshima -- whether in the name of scholarly studies, scientific researches, political finger pointing, and/or nationalist mind-brushing?

Who are truly the victims of Hiroshima? Are they just the Japanese? If we cannot make our students see, whether they are from China, Japan, or Korean, whether they are Asian-, African-, Latino, or European Americans, that the victims of the Hiroshima are also the victims of the Pearl Harbor, “The Rape of Nanking,” genocide in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, and September 11, Hiroshima is twice victimized. As I have learned in the Pearl Harbor Memorial, if our students, regardless of their nationalities, political/ideological affiliations, are not taught to see “for whom the bell tolls” or heed a little such a dissident voice, as Lao Tzu personifies, “When the great Tao is forgotten … patriotism is born,”4 Hiroshima is twice desecrated. With in mind the cancellation of the Smithsonian’s Enola Gay exhibit and the summary firing of its principal administrator, which may well signify what or how much the general public in the U.S. were able or willing to see regarding Hiroshima/Nagasaki, what should I say to the student from Japan, who broke down during his presentation on St. Thomas Aquinas’s theory on “just war” for my Western Civilization class that I taught at the University of Kansas as TA, while accounting how his uncle died a kamikaze pilot? What should I say to the student, especially when he appeared not knowing anything, such as “The Rape of Nanking” and “comfort woman,” nor showed interests in learning about them? This student of mine was apparently one of many victims of the policy and/or culture of denial, which, according to Honda Katsuichi, “in contrast” with Germany where [“events at Auschwitz and other war crimes were revealed by the German people themselves,”] the Japanese were not told about such incidents as Nanjing Massacre for decades after the war.5 He is, in other

5 Honda Katsuichi, *ibid.*, xxv. However initially “ignorant” of the Japan’s war atrocity due to the policy of denial, Honda was ultimately awakened to the part of the denied history as if quite coincidentally or by fate through his personal witness as a war correspondent of “the cruelty of the U.S. forces to the common people
words, the representative victim of the policy and politics of denial as personified by people such as Mr. Ishihara Shintaro, a leading member of Japan’s conservative Liberal Democratic Part and the author of besting-selling books such as *The Japan That Can Say NO*, who not only denied Nanjing Massacre but also “suggest[ed] that the Chinese claims of a massacre at Nanking helped influence the U.S. decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki.”

What should I *then* say to the Korean student who sneered at the Japanese student so emotionally disturbed with his personal memory? What should I say to my friends in China when they still believe that the Japanese somewhat deserve the bombing while thinking that Americans are too powerful and too self-righteous to be humbled or self-policed themselves. Is there any *objective* way of teaching about Hiroshima with regard to its past, present, and future? Is there any meaningful way to read these names, such as Hideyoshi, Matthew Perry, and General MacArthur in connection and in perspective? While using John Hersey’s *Hiroshima* and Kenzaburo Oe’s *Hiroshima Notes*, should we also teach about Hiroshima/Nagasaki with such materials as Richard E. Kim’s *Lost Name* and Dennis Rock’s *The Ash Garden*? Should I include, or exclude, such materials as Iris Chang’s *The Rape of Nanking* and Honda Katsuichi’s *The Nanjing Massacre*, and the *New York Times* article, in which a former Imperial Army soldier, Mr. Shinzaburo Horie, was reported confessing and repenting of many war crimes he committed in China including bayoneting a Chinese infant and his participation in cannibalism on a 16-year-old Chinese boy? Hiroshima is, indeed, as Kenzaburo Oe points out in *Hiroshima Notes*, “like a nakedly exposed wound inflicted on all mankind.” But, “like all the wounds,” as Oe further emphasizes, “this one poses two potential outcomes: the hope of human

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7 “I can’t forget the fact that I ate a human being,” said Mr. Horie, a lean 79-year-old farmer whose hands trembled as he excavated his war memories. “It was only one time, and not much meat, but after 60 years I can’t put it behind me.” See Kristof, Nicholas D. “A Japanese Generation Haunted by its Past.” *The New York Times* (Wednesday, January 22, 1997).
recovery, the danger of fatal corruption.\textsuperscript{8} It depends on, in other words, how we treat it or how we “come to grips with \textit{any} facts that might require a reassessment of what we \textit{choose} to remember.”\textsuperscript{9}

1. \textbf{We must learn how to contextualize our approaches by tapping on profound symbolic meanings of Hiroshima via various emotionally charged literatures and by avoiding, at the same time, \textit{“victimization” narrative}}

Yes, indeed, Hiroshima challenges us with too many hard questions, which are often more than what we \textit{can} or are willing to handle, because Hiroshima has become our conscience, the indispensable part of our everyday cultural and political un/consciousness, and our soul searching and mind wrangling reflection on life and reality. Literally, confronted with crises both domestically and internationally at various levels and scopes, we do not commemorate Hiroshima every year but every day as parents, teachers, and humans, because Hiroshima is our history, reality, and humanity all alive. It is, as Murray Sayle puts it, the eternal city since August 1945 that has stood or “suffered \textit{for} Pearl Harbor, \textit{for} Japan’s fruitless alliance with Nazi Germany (the death camps, then newly opened, were all too well know), \textit{for} the anti-rational, death-obsessed ideology of the Japanese offer corps, \textit{for} the labyrinthine Japanese decision-avoiding process, \textit{for} the ill-thought-out Allied demand for unconditional surrender, \textit{for} the atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers against civilians and prisoners of war, \textit{for} the presumed misdeeds of some (but not all) of the people actually in the city, \textit{for} the monstrous, random cruelty of war itself.” It is the eternal city that “in the decades since, had had to carry the metaphorical weight of the Cold War, the morally stabilizing nuclear standoff. Now these problems, never themselves solved, have transmuted into dangers more diffuse but not much less menacing. It is a heavy load \textit{for} one unfortunate Japanese seaport to bear.” Indeed, “we ask Hiroshima to carry too many burdens”\textsuperscript{10} \textit{for} us, \textit{for} each of us. With reference to the content as well as context, this powerful concluding passage


highlights what, how, why Hiroshima should, or should not, be remembered for. Clearly, it should be remembered for soul searching, for true historical understanding, for everlasting world peace, but not for political finger-pointing, responsibility dodging, or weltering in victimization narrative. It is because with thousands of precious innocent human lives perished with two single blasts that it is so easy or tempting to overlook the crucial context while lingering on specific content — blurring the subtle line between genuine historical account and sentimental victimization narrative.

While Americans may find it hard to look beyond Pearl Harbor at what happened before the attack, such as America’s imperialist policies in Asia that preceded the Pacific war, Japan also “risks turning the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki into a “victimization” narrative, in which,” as John W. Dower points out, “the bombs fell from heaven without context—as if war began on August 6, 1945 and ended on August 9, and innocent Japan bore the cross of witnessing the horror of the new nuclear age.”\textsuperscript{11} This “victimization” narrative is exactly what has been consciously or unconsciously explored by both sides for whatever covert or overt political reasons. In Emperor Hirohito’s prescript of August 14, while without the word “surrender” ever used and with Germany’s defeat and the Soviet Union’s entrance into war, as Herbert P. Bix emphasizes, only “registered indirectly (with a single, vague phrase) saying that ‘the general trends of the world have all turned against [Japan’s] interest,’” “it was unequivocally clear, however, in using the atomic bombs to portray Japan as victim and savior: ‘Moreover, the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, whose destructive power is quite incalculable; it has taken many innocent lives. Should we continue to fight, [that bomb] would result in the ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation—even the total extinction of human civilization.’”\textsuperscript{12} Even Nagai Takashi’s heart-breaking \textit{The Bells of Nagasaki} may seem to border on the “victimization” narrative with regard to its peculiar emotional focus and perspective. But this time it is not Hiroshima but Nagasaki, “the only holy city in all Japan” that, according to the author, “kept the faith during four hundred years of persecution when

\textsuperscript{10} Murray Sayle, “Did the Bomb End the War? in \textit{Hiroshima’s Shadow}, ibid., 49 emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{11} John W. Dower. “Unconditional Surrender at the Smithsonian” in \textit{Hiroshima’s Shadow}, ibid., 342.
religion was proscribed and the blood of martyrs flowed freely”; it is “the only holy city in all Japan” that, as the author further stresses, stands out to be “one unblemished lamb…many millions who would otherwise have fallen victim to the ravages of war have been saved.” Emphasized with rhetorical questions, the author continues, “Is there not a profound relationship between the destruction of Nagasaki and the end of the War? Nagasaki, the only holy place in all Japan—was it not chosen as a victim, a pure lamb, to be slaughtered and burned on the altar of sacrifice to expiate the sins committed by humanity in the Second World War?” For the author, “before this moment there were many opportunities to end the war. Not a few cities were totally destroyed. But these were not suitable sacrifices; nor did God accept them. Only when Nagasaki was destroyed did God accept the sacrifice. Hearing the cry of the human family, He inspired the emperor to issue the sacred decree by which the war was brought to an end.”

2. We must know that to contextualize is to teach not just the **content** but **context** as well. It means to reconstruct the best way we can the very atmosphere, the very “race, milieu, moment,” from which the history emerged, happened, become poisoned or further deteriorate.

To avoid the inherent tendency towards “victimization” narrative while reconstructing Hiroshima/Nagasaki for further productive understanding, we must find ways to understand and teach not just the **content** but **context** as well. It means to reconstruct, the best way we can, the very atmosphere, the very “race, milieu, moment,” from which the history emerged, happened, progressed or deteriorated. Otherwise, any “perception of the significance of Hiroshima and Nagasaki,” which could be “starkly different [as] conveyed in the triumphant American narrative [and that of Japan’s],” as

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13 Nagai, Takashi. *The Bells of Nagasaki*. Trans. William Johnson (New York: Kodansha International/USA Ltd., 1984) 107-8. Indeed, according to many, such as Robert Jay Lifton & Greg Mitchell, “Criticism of the attack on Nagasaki, which has always exceeded that of Hiroshima, has centered on the issue of why Truman did not reserve for himself the authority to order each atomic attack separately; and in any case, why he did not step in and stop the second mission after the success of the first to allow Japan a few more days to contemplate surrender (especially because the Soviet entry into the war was imminent). The first bomb was apparently sufficient to speed the surrender offer…” See Robert Jay Lifton & Greg Mitchell. *Hiroshima in America: Fifty Years of Denial* (New York: G. P. Putman’s Sons, 1995) 161-2.
Dower warns, “clearly has the potential to become myopic and nationalistic.”

To understand the very context, as many have also pointed out, thus means not to simply stay closed on atomic bombings themselves but the peculiar humanity distorting and destroying atrocities that had preceded but culminated as a natural consequence in the form of these two catastrophic blasts, which have since stood for the unique legacy of WWII, the indiscriminate killing and murdering of civilian population as a “just” or “justifiable” means of warfare in unprecedented scale and intensity. “In contrast to the response to the war in Germany and Japan, and even to the ongoing debate in the United States about the uses of atomic bomb,” argues Mark Selden, “there has been virtually no awareness of, not to speak of critical refection upon, the U.S. bombing of Japanese civilization in the half year prior to Hiroshima,” which was, indeed, the prelude of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. To fully understand the very context of the atomic bombing, “the systematic American bombing of Japanese non-combatants,” Selden further emphasizes, “must be added to a list of the horrific legacies of the war that includes Nazi genocide and a host of Japanese war crimes against Asian people.”

Like Murray Sayle, who considers that it is “the firebombing that cleared the moral path for the use of atomic bomb,” “the massive American conventional bombing of Japanese noncombatants,” for Bix, is the “actions that qualified as atrocities,” although “it is not known if Truman was troubled by [it].” On this vital issue, Dower clearly agrees with his simple reference to Tokyo tribunal, in which Justice Radhabinod Pal of India’s “controversial opinion not only challenged the fixation on Japanese or Axis atrocities in vacuo, but also called attention to the fact that, in the war in Asia, the portrait of the enemy as a perpetrator of atrocities really began and ended with bombing of civilians – by the Japanese in China, starting in 1937, and by the United States in Japan in 1944 and 1945, culminating in the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.”

“Because air raids against civilian populations had become so commonplace by the end of World War Two,” Dower

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14 Dower, “Unconditional Surrender at the Smithsonian,” ibid., 342.
15 Mark Selden, “The Logic of Mass Destruction” in Hiroshima’s Shadow, ibid., 60.
16 Sayle, “Did the Bomb End the War?” in Hiroshima’s Shadow. ibid., 49.
17 Bix, ibid., 524.
18 Dower, War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War (New York: Pantheon, 1986) 37-8. “In the single sweeping dissenting opinion at Tokyo tribunal,” as John W. Dower points out, Justice Radhabinod Pal of India not only “dismissed the charge that Japan’s leaders had engaged in a conspiracy to
argues, “it is easy to forget how shocked the Western powers were when the Japanese began bombing Chinese cities in 1937, and how much Japan’s actions at that time served to convince most European and Americans that this was a race and nation still beyond the pale of civilization.” But it is not so easy to forget how quickly the western powers, shocked as they might have appeared initially, adopted the same strategies of atrocity that they accused their enemies of committing. Nor is it easy to reconcile what Robert Edgerton points out, “Yet in November 1941, weeks before Japanese planes attacked Pearl Harbor, the U.S. Army chief of staff, George C. Marshall, ordered his aides to prepare plans for ‘general incendiary attacks to burn up the wood and paper structures of the densely populated Japanese cities.’”¹⁹ Indeed, as war goes on, the accusers quickly turned out to be as ferocious as the accused, if not more. “When U.S. planes finally had the opportunity to bomb Japan in late 1944,” says Edgerton, “the initial attacks largely avoided civilian centers, but when these high-level bombing raids proved to be ineffective and costly, the U.S. Army Air Corps in May 1945 turned to low-level incendiary raids on Japanese cities.”²⁰ This is exactly why it is so tragic about the WWII, in which the role of the accuser and accused, victim and victimizer, the innocent and the guilty are so readily reversible, or atrocity could be so easily adopted in the name of efficiency -- with an inflated or inflaming rhetoric that became as flexible as the moral principle that often appeared so readily disposable or adjustable.

3. We must realize that to understand the context also means to understand not only the pretext but also the subtext of the political rhetoric that justifies the use of atomic bombs.

To understand the context thus also means to understand not only the pretext but also the subtext of the rhetoric that justifies use of atomic bombs. Although there is no definite answer to the questions “Is it necessary to drop the bombs?,” we, as well as our students, are entitled to be informed of the major arguments that constitute or contribute commit atrocities” but also “went so far as to suggest that a strong case might be made against the victors themselves” with “the decision coming from the allied powers to use the atom bomb” (37)

to the very content and context of Hiroshima/Nagasaki bombings. For Barton J. Bernstein, 500,000 U.S. lives saved with the atomic bombs is total post-war myth. He argues that “the myth of 500,000 American lives saved … seemed to have no basis in fact,” since “no U.S. military planners between May 1945 and the Hiroshima bombing, or even after Hiroshima that year, would have put the number over 2000,000, and many place it much lower—near 40,000.” Although, as Bernstein further argues, “the destruction of this myth does not resolve the pressing question of whether using the atomic bombs on Japan was morally justified or not,” it does help illuminate very nature of Hiroshima blasts as “a campaign of terror bombing.” For “at least recognizing that most pre-Hiroshima military estimates ranged between about 200,00 and 46,000 may help Americans understand the thinking of their leaders who, in 1945, welcome the use of bomb on Japanese cities in what was clearly a campaign of terror bombing.” “Perhaps in the aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki,” continues Bernstein, “Truman developed a need to exaggerate the number of U.S. lives that the bombs might have saved by possibly helping render the invasion unnecessary.” Granted that “it is probably true, as [Truman] contended repeatedly, that he never lost any sleep over his decision,” it is because, as Bernstein puts it, “believing ultimately in the myth of 5000,000 lives saves may have been a way of concealing ambivalence, even from himself.” “The myth,” for Bernstein, “also helped deter Americans from asking troubling questions about the use of the atomic bombs.”

Reconstructing Hiroshima/Nagasaki may thus mean, as we can see from Bernstein’s argument, “the destruction of [the] myth” for motives or responsibilities beneath, behind, beyond what we would like to face or acknowledge.

To understand the context vis-à-vis pretext and subtext of political rhetoric also mean to understand how the bombings are used as part of political and diplomatic strategies other than simply saving American lives. The bombs were not only used to save lives but also explored, as many have argued, for sending warnings to the Soviets and, in addition, for revenge on a hated enemy. “In thinking about the prospective of use of the bomb, American leaders, especially Stimson, had anticipated that its use on Japan

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20 Edgerton, ibid., 316.
might well also intimidate the Soviet Union and help to compel a change of Soviet behavior and move toward some form of international control of atomic energy.” As the war drew close to its end in 1945, “for Stimson, as well as for Byrnes and undoubtedly Truman, anti-Soviet aims helped confirm the long-run assumption, inherited from the Roosevelt years, that the bomb would be use. The prospect, savored before Hiroshima, that the use of the bomb on Japan might well help to cement the peace, was a tasty bonus.”

But “It was an added reason for American leaders to implement in August 1945 the long-held assumption that the weapon would be employed on a hated enemy.”

For Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, “One way of grasping Truman’s complex motivation is to return to the concept of “demonstration.” “Trinity,” they argue, “was a demonstration for American decision makers,” because “the impulse toward using the weapon on Japanese cities had to do with a further, much more concrete, demonstration for the weapon’s effects on structures and people, with at least three significant audiences in mind: the Japanese, Russians, and the Americans.” “The Japanese,” according to Lifton and Mitchell, “always remained the primary audience, the ones who would be overwhelmed by the weapon and quickly surrender,” while “the Russians increasingly became an audience with the growing antagonisms between the two countries in 1945 about postwar policies.” “For an American audience,” also according to Lifton and Mitchell, “there was a need to justify the two-billion-dollar bomb project.” But, overall, “given the extraordinary daily pressures from all directions—and the way in which we function psychotically—these “audiences,” conclude the authors, “inevitably merged in Truman’s mind.”

However defensive or conservative as he is regarding his position on Truman’s decision, Robert J. Maddox also suggests that the bombing is not decided simply on saving American lives. He argues, “until newly could documents show otherwise, the available evidence points to the unremarkable conclusion that Truman approved using the bombs for the reason he said he did: to end a bloody war that would have become far bloodier had an invasion proved necessary. A cessation of hostilities,

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22 Bernstein, “Seizing the Contested Terrain of Early Nuclear History” in Hiroshima's Shadow, ibid., 186.
23 Ibid., 186.
after all, was not the ultimate goal, as some historians seem to assume.”²⁵ He also argues, “To say that Truman used the bombs to save American lives is not to imply that he and the men around him were unmindful of the implications nuclear weapons would have on world affairs and on relations with the Soviet Union in particular.”²⁶

4. We must be clear that to contextualize our understanding with a focus on how and why the bombs are used is to understand the chilling implications regarding how technology comes to dehumanize us by creating its own momentum, its own rationale, its own tempting and compelling impacts on our decision making process.

Reconstructing the context with focus on how and why the bombs are used, there are even more chilling implications regarding how technology comes to dehumanize us and create its own momentum, its own rationale, its tempting impacts on the decision makers. It is arguable whether Truman was motivated to the use of atomic bombs as he was “concerned with high American casualty projections” or whether he was mentally prepared by “the massive American conventional bombing of Japanese noncombatants—actions that qualified as atrocities.”²⁷ But, “[once] armed with a new doomsday weapon,” according to Bix, “Truman lacked the patience and foresight to wait,” although “for him the alternative to dropping the atomic bombs would have been to wait for the effects of the Soviet ground attack in Manchuria and Korea, combined with the conventional bombing and shelling of the home islands, to become intolerable to Japan’s leaders.” This observed impatience or frustration intensified with availability of the doomsday weapon is also suggested in Maddox’s argument, regarding “the problem … how to deal with this unprecedented new force while trying to cope a bewildering variety of war-related issues that clamored for attention on a daily basis.” For Maddox, “In hindsight it is easy to say that the quest for neutralization through international control should have rendered any other considerations inconsequential. All but the most credulous, however,

²⁶ Ibid.
²⁷ Bix, ibid., 524.
had strong reservations about trusting the despotic Soviet government to act in good faith on a matter of such potential danger.” Thus, “the possibility of using America’s nuclear advantage in the short run to secure other goals naturally appealed to politicians frustrated by what they regarded as Russian’s obstructive behavior.”28 “The development and deployment of the bombs,” as Dower sees it, “also became driven by almost irresistible technological and scientific imperatives—what some scientists later referred to as the ‘technically sweet’ challenge of the Manhattan Project. J. Robert Oppenheimer later confided that after German’s surrender on May 8, 1945, he and his fellow scientists intensified their efforts out of concern that the war might end before they could finish.”29 With the demise of Nazi Germany and therefore the fact that “the original justification for moving to a new order of destructive weaponry had evaporated,” the weaponry itself had [not only] begun to create its own rationale” but also a Godzilla inside/outside its makers.30 “Secretary of War Henry Stimson, the elder statesman who took deep pride in his moralism,” also according to Dower, “observed at one point that it was essential to try the new weapon out on a real target.”31

This heart-disturbing urgency for making use of the atomic bombs becomes such a momentum of its own and so well personified, as Stanley Goldberg implies, by General Leslie R. Groves and his War Department superiors, who “took all steps possible to ensure that the atomic bomb played a role in bringing the war to an end.” “Indeed,” according to Goldberg, “Groves and those from whom he took orders were fearful that the war would end before the atomic bomb was used.” For Goldberg, “it is doubtful that the United States would ever have had to invade Japan. But the point is a moot one, at best, a matter of counterfactual speculation. What the evidence does suggest is that the United States was determined to use the atomic bomb on Japan before the Japanese given the chance to surrender.” Goldberg argues, “prior to August 9, the U.S. position was that the unconditional surrender was the only acceptable basis on which Japan would be permitted to give up. After the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it no longer seemed

28 Maddox, ibid., 155.
29 Dower, “Unconditional Surrender at the Smithsonian,” ibid., 340.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.,
to be so important. The United States now allowed that the Japanese might keep their emperor.” Goldberg also stresses, “Some of President Harry S. Truman’s advisors, as well as General Groves and some in the War Department, were probably very concerned that the Japanese might try to surrender before they could use both kinds of atomic bombs. Only then could they permit the Japanese to give up.” Thus referring to Martin J. Sherwin, Goldberg concludes emphatically, “the implication is that rather than shortening the war, the existence of the atomic bomb program probably lengthened it.”

However controversial such arguments might be, our students should be so informed nonetheless. They should be entrusted with all controversial but relevant information for their own critical judgment.

What is further chillingly significant regarding the atomic bombings is, as Murray Sayle points out, the mechanic, automatic, or “inhuman” ways the bombings were set to work. “NO ONE EVER MADE A POSITIVE DECISION to drop the bomb on Hiroshima, only a negative one: not to interfere with a process that had begun years before, in every different circumstance. Truman later described it as ‘not any decision that you had to worry about’ … and Truman never contemplated, or even heard suggested, any delay, or any alternative to the bomb’s use on a Japanese city.” As Sayle also points out, “Some scholars—especially those not of the wartime generation—have found it hard to believe that the act that launched the world into nuclear war could have come about so thoughtlessly, by default.”

According to Robert Jay Lifton & Greg Mitchell, “There was no presidential directives—or decision by anyone else—specially related to dropping the second bomb.” For them, “The atomic weapons in the U.S. arsenal, according to the July 25 order, were to be used ‘as soon as made ready,’ and the second bomb was ready within three days of Hiroshima.” Clearly, “Nagasaki has been termed a victim of automated atomic warfare, but that is not precisely accurate, for the assembly line (as we will now see) was subject to fits and stars, and Truman could have shut it off at any time.”

Also according to Lifton and Mitchell’s account, “Many years later, Groves would explain that Truman or Stimson could have stopped the Nagasaki

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33 Sayle, “Did the Bomb End the War?,” ibid., 49.
mission with a single word. But until he heard that word, he was running the show. Similarly, Martin Sherwin has commented, “If Washington had maintained closer control over the scheduling of the atomic bomb raids the annihilation of Nagasaki could have been avoided.” But neither Truman nor Stimson was overseeing those bombing arrangements. Authority had devolved to military and technical people—that is, to Leslie Groves. After learning of Nagasaki, as we have seen, Truman quickly ordered that no further bombs be dropped without his express permission, to give Japan a reasonable chance to surrender, and to restore his control of the process.”

5. We must be aware that to contextualize our understanding regarding whether, how, or why the bombs end the world or have save lives is to look into the decisive decision-making process, mechanism, mindset on the part of the Japanese as well.

But for all that has been said, did the bombs end the world or save lives after all, as our students would ultimately ask? To contextualize our understanding in this respect requires understanding the decisive decision-making process, mechanism, or mindset on the part of Japanese as well, which is itself, as Bix describes, a politically and culturally intricate response regarding the overall war context. For Bix, who considers emperor’s role in decision-making process pivotal, it is “quite possible” that the emperor, “the helmsman […] refus[ed] to see, let alone, fore[told] the catastrophe, [with his] spurning rational judgement,” because “as late as May 5 the emperor was still hoping for a victory on Okinawa and radioing the Thirty-second Army, via radio message, that “We really want this attack to succeed.” As Bix also points out, “blinded by their preoccupation with the fate of the imperial house, and committed to an optimistic diplomacy vis-a-via

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35 Ibid.. For Sayle, “Equally, many have found it incredible that the Potsdam talks were almost exclusively taken up with conflicts over Germany and Poland, and that the still ongoing war against Japan was not mentioned in any one of the main sessions but merely tacked on as an afterthought. Understandably, a hidden link has been suspected: that Hiroshima was in some sense intended as the opening blast of the Cold War” (49).

36 For Bix, “At no time did the Japanese military ever exercise ‘complete dominance, over the political process or the conduct of the war, as Grew had maintained. As the war dragged on after the fall of the Tojo cabinet, the senior leaders of the army and navy became increasingly beholden for their positions of power to the court group and the moderates around the throne” (519).

37 Bix, ibid., 486-7.
the Soviet Union, those leaders let pass several opportunities to end their lost war.” Indeed, “Hirohito and his inner war cabinet—the Supreme War Leadership Council,” emphasizes Bix, “could have looked reality in the face and acted decisively to sue for peace during February, when Prince Konoe made his report and both he and Foreign Minister Shigemitsu warned the emperor that the Neutrality Treaty offered no protection; the Soviet Union would not hesitate to intervene militarily in the Far East once the situation turned favorable in Europe.”  

On the other hand, however boldly increased was criticism targeting at imperial house nationwide, as Dower further stresses, “even immediately after the American dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, and the Soviet declaration of war on the eighth, people generally clung to the hope of a final victor, and thus to the belief that their ‘divine land’ was indestructible” and “mobilized in the service of death, the collective memory of the ‘divine winds’ (kamikaze) that would save Japan helped to maintain the will to fight on.” Thus, “The twin psychological shocks of the first atomic bomb and the Soviet entry into the war, coupled with Kido’s and emperor’s concern over growing popular criticism of the throne and its occupant, and their almost paranoiac fear that, sooner or later, the people would react violently against their leaders if they allowed the war to go on much longer—these factors finally caused Hirohito to accept, in principle, the terms of the Potsdam Declaration.”

As to the inevitable question, “Would Japan’s leaders have surrendered more promptly if the Truman administration had “clarified” the status of the emperor prior to the cataclysmic double shocks of the first atomic bomb and Soviet entry into the war? Bix’s answer is “Probably not.” But, like many historians, Bix does not downplay the

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38 Ibid., (521)
39 Dower, “Sensational Rumors, Seditious Graffiti, and the Nightmares of the Thought Police” in Japan in War and Peace: Selected Essays (New York: New Press, 1993) 102. In the same passage, Dower argues, “To some degree, this happened. Japanese soldier and sailors fought tenaciously and astonished the world with their ethic of no-surrender. When beginning in October 1944, the desperate Imperial forces adopted kamikaze suicide tactics as formal policy, it appeared that this was indeed a people prepared to fight to the bitter end. Only a handful Western intelligence specialists, led by individuals in the Foreign Morale Analysis Branch of the U.S. Office of War Information, argued that this was not so. By 1945, these analysts concluded, Japanese morale was cracking badly and the country was beset by serious internal tension.”
40 Ibid., 496.
41 Ibid., 519.
impact of the bombings, nor does he underestimate the other decisive factors, such as soviet entry. Japanese leaders, according to Bix, “were likely to have surrendered in order to prevent the *kokutai* from being destroyed from within. The evidence suggests that the first atomic bomb and the Soviet declaration of war made Hirohito, Kido, and other members of the court group feel that continuation of the war would lead to precisely that destruction.” It is because, as Bix emphasizes, “they knew that the people were war-weary and despondent and that popular hostility toward the military and the government was increasing rapidly, along with popular criticism of the emperor himself.” “More particularly,” also according to Bix, “Kido and Hirohito were privy to Home Ministry reports, based on information from governors and police chiefs all over the country, revealing that people were starting to speak of the emperor as an incompetent leader who was responsible for the worsening war situation.”

Thus, “partly to destroy that psychology” of the imperial court “caught in the grip of a failed and endangered ideology, were willing to sacrifice huge numbers of their own people in order to maintain their and their monarch’s power,” the bombs are used on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, “or, in the words of Amy Chief of Staff Gen. George C. Marshall, spoken in 1957, [to] ‘shock them [the leaders] into action’ – that Truman and Marshall justified the dropping of the atomic bombs.”

But whether, how, or much impact that bombs might produce on the “psychology” of the indecisive imperial court, Bix leaves very significantly ambiguous messages as he refers to two imperial prescripts issues by the imperial house. It is obvious that “Hirohito sought to justify his decision to surrender by citing the dropping of the atomic bombs,” However definitely “the broadcast of his August 14 prescript became Japan’s first official, public confirmation of the bomb’s effectiveness.” But whether the emperor and his advisers ever really believed that,” it is, implies Bix, “unlikely.” For it is only three days later, on august 17, that Hirohito “issued a second ‘Prescript to soldiers and Sailors’ in all war theaters of Asia and the Pacific, ordering them to cease fire and lay down their arms. This time, addressing only military forces, he stressed the cause-and-

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42 Bix, ibid., 523.
43 Ibid., 525.
44 For Bix, “Hirohito’s surrender prescript was the first text to redefine his new national image as a pacifist, antimilitarist, and completely passive onlooker in the war—none o which he had ever been. It cleverly underscored both his ‘benevolence’ and his assertion of imperial sovereignty while obscuring his earlier reluctance to act concretely, on his own initiative, to end the war” (529).
effect relationship between Soviet entrance into the war and his decision to surrender, while conspicuously omitting any mention of the atomic bombs.”“The less-known August 17 prescript to the army and navy,” as Bix points out, “specified soviet participation as the sole reason for surrender, and maintenance of the kokutai as the aim. Dissembling until the end—and beyond—the emperor stated two different justifications for his delayed surrender. Both statements were probably true.”

6. We must be resolute that to contextualize our understanding also means to sensitize ourselves to the fundamental problems exposed with the catastrophic explosions regarding our moral consciousness, conscience, philosophical and philosophical rationale.

But whatever motivates are behind the bombs, how many lives (American lives) might be effectively saved, the actual answers will forever be subject to debate -- as our students should know. One thing, however, is clear in terms of what have been argued about, for, or against so far. Indeed, no nuclear “deterrence” would ever work, if it does not “depend upon some prospect of use” of nuclear arsenal, acknowledges Joseph Nye in Nuclear Ethics. “No end---however good, however necessary,” emphasizes Edgar R. Smothers, “can justify the use of an evil means.” “If the lives of the men in our armed services were an absolutely sovereign good—as the logic of the usual argument might imply,” argues Smothers, “the question would rise as to whether we should not have followed other policies before we got into war, and whether we should not have explored all possibilities of peace before we had won our unconditional surrender.” For Smothers, “it is a grievous wrong to sacrifice the life of a single human being, combatant or not, without just necessity.” Particularly, “no human life,” as Smothers further emphasizes, “is so sacred that it ought to be spared at the cost of destroying by positive, deliberate act another human being who is not culpably accountable as unjust aggressor or as sentenced criminal.”

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45 Bix, ibid., 530.
46 Ibid.
47 Lifton & Mitchell, ibid., 312.
Smothers, “remains a matter of the gravest concern, because it sanctions the denial, on
the most imposing scale, of the transcendence of the moral order and the intrusion of
national pragmatism in its place.” Yes, indeed, “if the temporary advantage of the United
States were the ultimate norm of morality,” as Smothers warns, “one could see no
decisive objection to our use of the atom bomb upon the ordinary population of an enemy
country—expediency alone would be norm enough. If, however, the ultimate norm of
morality is of a higher order, if it has to do with the rightness of man’s acts in relation to
God, then temporal expediency must accept the subordinate role that belongs to it.”

The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have thus exposed not only the
most irrational of our “rational” calculation in the name of securing national interests or
advancing democracy but also the fatal weakness in our system. For Reinhold Niebuhr,
who warns not only the threat of racial ideology but also that of moral idealism cherished
by many Americans regarding Hiroshima/Nagasaki bombings, “this type liberalism
would rather annihilate a foe completely than enlist the aid of any elements in an enemy
country which are not absolutely ‘pure’.” “The policy is usually accompanied by the
foolish hope,” Niebuhr emphasizes, “that if we can completely destroy we will also be
able to build a more ideal social structure out of these complete ruins.” For Niebuhr,
“there is not vainer hope in human history; and it is promoted by a peculiarly dangerous
type of ‘liberalism’ in which the imperial power impulse have become strangely mixed
with moral idealism. We will destroy nations in order to make “democracies” out of
them.” “Like the firebombing that cleared the moral path for them,” insists Murray Sayle,
“nuclear weapons accept, without reflection, the doctrine that the nation is a kind living
organism, open to attack anyhow and anywhere, as opposed to the democratic principle
that people are individually responsible for their actions.” Thus, “the use, or threat, of
nuclear weapons,” she emphasizes, “presupposes omniscient supermen who can never
make a mistake,” as is totally contrary to the fundamental principle of “Democracy [that]
accepts that our leaders are fallible human beings, like the people who elected them, who
all too often, in the biblical phrase, know not what they do—but who can be held to

49 Ibid..
account, can have second thoughts, can put mistakes right. No one can put past death right.”

Also for Sayle there are further serious political fallout regarding our tendency towards use of nuclear weaponry for political necessity or convenience. “Unfortunately for Americans, the bomb also appeared in 1945, to be the providential answer to an old problem, shared by all democracies.” It is because “when peace broke out, millions of men and women in uniform suddenly wanted to go home, all at once” while “the United States, as the world’s strongest industrial power, undamaged by war, now had global responsibilities that might call for military action anywhere on the planet.” But with “the armed forces [shrunk] to one and a half million; garrisons in what were judge to be far-off, unimportant places, like Korea, […] withdrawn, leaving only handful of advisers,” the importance of nuclear bombs became further inflated. They were not considered merely a force of deterrence but actual weapon to be reckoned with for combat. For “when Stalin tested American resolve by cutting ground access to Berlin in 1948, Truman responded by sending B-29s to the same bases in England from which Germany had been bombed.” While “the new Strategic Air Command, the successor of Grove’s pioneer nuclear force, made plans to drop two atomic bombs on each of seventy Soviet cites,” emphasizes Sayle, “diplomacy, and even strategy, had temporarily become superfluous, superseded by confidence in the miraculous mindless knock-out blow.” But “in September of 1949, the dream turned to nightmare when the Soviets tested their own nuclear weapon.” As a result, there was nuclear race on the one hand, “‘Keep your shirt on,’ as Oppenheimer advised his colleague Edward Teller, the ‘father’ of the hydrogen bomb,” and rampant McCarthyism on the other, “any city in this country could now, at least in imagination, be another Hiroshima. The United States began a hunt for spies and traitors; atomic scientists began denouncing one another; Oppenheimer himself was subject to a political show trial, disguised as a public hearing over his security clearance, which was denied. These are totalitarian attitudes, imposed by the nature of the atomic bomb itself, and they surfaced most dramatically in the shameful McCarthy era.”

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50 Sayle, “Did the Bomb End the War?,” ibid..
51 Ibid., 49, emphasis added.
7. We must know that to further understand the very content and context of Hiroshima/Nagasaki, we also need to look hard at or into the racial hatred and moral indifference that preceded, promoted, and probably prolonged the “good war,” WWII.

Indeed, to further understand the very content and context, we must also look hard at or into the racial hatred and moral indifference that preceded, promoted, and probably, as Goldberg argues, prolonged the war. Culminated with the two humanity destroying blasts, the Pacific War as part of the “good war” was, nevertheless, fought with intense racial hatred. It is the “good war” poisoned by rampant nationalism and racial supremacism often via the penetrating influences of mass media, with each side equally culpable of the same crime it accused the other side of committing. With cause and effect, victims and victimizers becoming so intimately reversible, the “good war” that could exonerate all actions of atrocity or none proved to be the most devastating with open and hidden racial hatred intensified through inflaming racial ideology and coupled with the most lethal modern weaponry. “When the struggle in Asia is taken into consideration,” argues Dower, “it becomes apparent that neither anti-Semitism nor white supremacism in it is wider manifestations suffices to illuminate the full impact of racism during World War Two,” because “in the United States and Britain, the Japanese were more hated than the Germans before as well as after Pearl Harbor.” “On this,” Dower emphasizes, “there was no dispute among contemporary observers” because “[the Japanese] were perceived as a race apart, even a species apart—and an overpoweringly monolithic one at that these was no Japanese counterpart to the ‘good Germans’ in the popular consciousness of the Western Allies.” But, “at the same time,” continues Dower, “the Japanese themselves dwelled at inordinate length on their own racial and cultural superiority, and like their adversaries, who practiced discrimination while proclaiming they were ‘fighting for democracy.’”

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Allied camp that this was an enemy that not only deserved to be exterminated, but had to be.” Consequently, “it is understandable that men in battle become obsessed with annihilation of the foe. In the case of the Japanese enemy, however, the obsession extended to many men and women far removed from the place of battle, and came to embrace not just the enemy’s armed forces by the Japanese as a race and culture.” Although “how pervasive such sheer genocidal attitudes became is hard to say,” public opinion polls in the United States, according to Dower, “indicated that some 10 to 13 percent of American consistently supported the ‘annihilation’ or ‘extermination’ of the Japanese as a people, while a comparable percentage were in favor of sever retribution after Japan had been defeated (“eye for an eye,” “punishment, torture,” etc.).” Also according to Dower, “in an often-quoted poll conducted in December 1944 asking ‘What do you think we should do with Japan as a country after the war?,’ 13 percent of the respondents wanted to ‘kill all Japanese’ and 33 percent supported destroying Japan as a political entity (the identical question asked for Germany on the same date omitted the option of killing all Germans, and found 34 percent of the American respondents in favor of destroying Germany as a nation).” In addition, “like the soldiers who confessed in 1945 that their goal had become killing rather than simply winning, even after the war ended and the Japanese turned their energies to the tasks of peaceful reconstruction, surprising number of Americans expressed regrets that Japan surrender so soon after the atomic bombs were dropped.” Similarly, “a poll conducted by Fortune in December 1945 found that 227 percent of respondents wished the United States had had the opportunity to use “many more of them [atomic bombs] before Japan had a chance to surrender.” Also, as “early as in 1943, Leatherneck, the Marines monthly, ran a photography of Japanese corpses on Guadalcanal with an uppercase headline reading ‘GOOD JAPS’ and a caption emphasizing that ‘GOOD JAPOS’ are dead Japs.” Clearly, this was the collective sentiment that had perpetuated the racial prejudice and hatred, like wild fire and Pandora’s box that incited and might have also partly accounted for the bombings.

54 Ibid., 52.
55 Dower, ibid., 79.
56 Ibid..
57 Like Dower, who clearly defines the racial hatred as one of the decisive elements of the Pacific War as a “war without mercy” and Honda Katsuichi, who argues, “Japan invaded the Asian countries...as part of a struggle with Western powers for [racial] supremacy in their colonies and semi-colonies,” Edgerton also
8. We must have no illusion that to further understand the very content and context of Hiroshima/Nagasaki, we should also look hard at or into the culpable and paradoxical role of media and language.

It is also clear that the Pacific war was waged not only with the most lethal racial ideology coupled with the most devastating modern weaponry but also via the most dangerous propaganda, of which the mass media played a crucial part. War might be over, but the impacts or remains of racial hatred deliberately and/or involuntarily fanned through propaganda via mass media for war or combat “mobilization” may remain deep and permanent beneath the scalp of the general public. Other than deliberate propaganda from both sides, there was also propaganda that often resulted from “carelessness” with further potentially harmful influences on the public. “Quite apart from the basic judgement as to the necessity of and reasons for the bomb’s use,” as Car Alperovitz points out, “why the public is generally ignorant of so many of the basic facts discussed in the expert literature remains” an issue, a serious issue “that modern press is responsible for.” “For one thing,” continues Alperovitz, “the modern press has been careless in its reporting. During the 1995, Enola Gay controversy at the Smithsonian, few reporters even bothered to seriously consult specialist literature, or to present the range of specific issues in contention among the experts. Instead, historians who still remain unqualified defenders of the decision as dictated solely by military necessity were often cited as

suggests how racial profiling or “racist denunciations” that Japan inevitably learned from the West along with the “technological parity” may partially explains why the whole world has witnessed Japan’s such “baffling and disquieting” or “inexplicable” “sudden transformation from a country that epitomized military chivalry to one that embodied the depths of armed depravity” or its “abrupt shift from chivalry to bestiality.” Although Edgerton is obliged to admit, “Japanese troops and civilians rarely displayed the courtesy and kindness to Koreans that they shown to the Russians during 1904-05, nor were they any kinder on Taiwan, but at the same time their conduct received little attention in the West,” he emphasizes, nevertheless, “earlier in this century the West celebrated not only Japanese bravery and skill in war but also their chivalry and kindness.” According to Edgerton, “During the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, the soldiers of Japan fought with such exceptional bravery that their Western allies applauded them. When compared with the soldiers and marines from Austria, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States, these men from Japan were found to be the least likely to murder, rape, or otherwise brutalize the Chinese.” Thus, with such world acclaimed virtues, “in 1904 and 1905, ‘plucky little’ Japan, as she was known [then and ‘money’ as she was thus labeled later in WWII], decisively defeated ‘mighty Russia’ in a series of land and sea battles larger and bloodier than any yet seen on earth.” Even more ironically significant, some Western observers of the war in 1904-05, such as the British commentator, who “predicted as a new triple alliance
unquestioned authoritative sources. Many reporters repeated as fact their myth that ‘over million’ Americans would have perished or been wounded in an invasion of Japan.”58 In contract with “historians [who] were the first to challenge the official version of Hiroshima, starting in the mid-1960’s, and the debate among scholars remains vigorous today,” the media, however, deplore Lifton and Mitchell, “rarely question the prevailing wisdom” while “creative artists—especially filmmakers, painters and fiction writers—have often explored the nuclear threat but have disregarded the specific subject of Hiroshima almost entirely.” Thus, “the overall response,” conclude the authors, “reflects what Michael Kammen has called the American inclination to minimize memories, and causes, of conflict, and achieve at least the illusion of consensus.”59

Besides, also according to Lifton and Mitchell, “since the late 1940s, media coverage of Hiroshima has followed a consistent pattern. For special commemorations—the major anniversary years—the decision to use the bomb, and its effects, receives considerable attention.” But “in ‘off’ years, Hiroshima is rarely mentioned, except around August 6, and sometimes not even then.” “Reporting on Hiroshima, for the most part,” as Lifton and Mitchell continue, “has been rather undistinguished, marked by an almost total absence investigative journalism.” “News coverage,” as the authors see it, “has been almost totally reactive” and “revelations about the decision to use the bomb, and its human effects, have come almost entire from historians and independent researchers … [because] journalists mainly have been content to report the findings of others, as published in scholarly journals or books. News analysis has been just about nil.”60 Even years after restrictions on journalists travelling to Hiroshima to witness the aftereffects of the bombings were lifted, the occasional “reports from Hiroshima—usually during the key ‘anniversary’ years—focused on reconstruction and renewal, not scars and recrimination.” It is because, “this was certainly the easier story,” as both authors emphasize, “and the more hopeful one; but it was also tragically misleading.” Referring

58 Gar Alperovitz, “Historians Reassess: Did We Need to Drop the Bomb?” in Hiroshima’s Shadow, ibid., 17-8. 226, 305.
59 Lifton & Mitchell, ibid., 264-5.
60 Ibid., 266.
to Mary McCarthy, they argue that “the lesson of Hiroshima was not how many survived but how many died—but the dead cold not talk to reporters.”61 Since “scholars, editors and journalists, and creative artists act as mediators of the Hiroshima narrative,” since “they do more than simply circulate information and images within the culture, for they have the freedom to express views of their own,” and since “so few Americans are familiar with history of the atomic bombings,” emphasize Lifton and Mitchell, the roles of mass media as mediators are cruel in shaping and forming public mind or “the mediators’ influence can be vast (as demonstrated by the Stimson and Hersey articles).” Clearly, lessons from Hiroshima will not be sufficiently learned until mass media mind and mend their ways as the pivotal mediators, as the trustworthy ears and eyes, if not the conscience, of the general public. We, as educators, therefore must do our best to offset or make up for what mass media has failed to do through our activities in the classroom.

But to be a better educator on the issue of Hiroshima/Nagasaki, there is one more hidden but urgent agenda to attend to in addition to the dubious role of mass media, that is, the business of language. Charged with meanings, the language we use is by means neutral or totally innocent, and within which the ultimate cause of the war may lay perpetuated. “Words matter,” as Dower emphasizes, referring to the phenomenal function of language during and after the war in Japan -- not only in inflicting hatred but also in helping heal war wounds. “As if a dam had broken, defeated Japan,” according to Dower, “was engulfed in words. The kaasutori magazines and the literature degeneracy were but currents in a great river of communication. People came alive through words. They crossed from past to future on bridges of language.”62 “Familiar words and slogans cushioned the shock of defeat, providing a comforting sense of continuity even when the very import of these words and phrases was turned topsy turvy.” “Defeat jokes,” as Dower points out, “flourished as satire became a weapon for dispelling despair. Bright, dipsy song lyrics lightened people’s days and encouraged hope in the future.” Also according to Dower, “Radio reached into every household with a startling range of new programming, closely guided by the American reformers.” Amid “a cacophony of

61 Ibid.
political rhetoric filled the air,” there were “serious publishing flourished, promoting liberal and left-wing ideas as well as a broad range of translated works that left the old ideologues sputtering and gnashing their teeth.” But, what is further significant regarding words, as Dower particularly emphasizes, is that they are often so charged with more connotations than the users could possibly intend. “Despite the fact that the editors of the 1950 book took care to include students from other universities among their writers, and despite their fervent antiwar and antimilitarist intentions,” emphasizes Dower, “they could not really shake off the past. Even the title of the collection carried ambiguous, muted echoes. Wadatsmi no koe – ‘the voices of the ocean’—was an evocative phrase from one of the militarists’ favorite books, the great eight-century poetic anthology Man’yoshu.” Thus, “these bridges of language, so crucial to maintaining a sense of identity and purpose, were awesome indeed, for they carried an ambiguous traffic. People used them to escape the past and move onto new destinations. At the same time, there was always the possibility—even the temptation—of crossing back.”63 This peculiar function of language is exactly what we should be fully conscious of while tapping on the profound symbolic meanings of Hiroshima via various emotionally charged literatures without simultaneously evoking the demons of the past or falling victim to the “victimization narrative” as previously discussed.

9. **We must be self-conscious that to contextualize our understanding means finally to understand the irony or paradox regarding the context where the role of the accused and accuser, victim and victimizer, prey and predator, the virtuous and the depraved are easily or readily reversible**

Involved in this particularly poisoned and polluted context as WWII, it seems that nobody could maintain his innocence or remain or immune from being infected by racial ideology and hatred. Without being fully conscious of these premises, pretexts and subtexts that constitute the very content and context, any scholarly study for constructive truth-finding dialogue could only become or degenerate into meaningless political finger pointing or self-exonerating rhetoric, since the role of victim and victimizer could be so

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63 Ibid.
easily reversible. As so much at stake, no one can actually set aside emotion and be purely rational. “Emotional issues,” of course, as Alperovitz emphasizes, “were also at work” in influencing our judgement, because “Time and again, the question of whether dropping the atomic bomb was militarily necessary has become entangled with the quite separate issue of anger at Japan’s sneak attack and the brutality of its military.” Indeed, “the Japanese people have an ugly history to confront,” as Alperovitz further emphasizes, “including not only Pearl Harbor but the bombing of Shanghai, the rape of Nanking, the forced prostitution of Korean women, horror of the Bataan Death March, and the systematic torture and murder of American and other prisoners of war.” But it does not mean that America is morally invulnerable, for “we American clearly do not like to see our nation as vulnerable to the same moral fallings as others. To raise questions about Hiroshima is to raise doubts, it seems to some, about the moral integrity of the country and its leaders. It is also to raise the most profound questions about the legitimacy of nuclear weapons in general.” Thus, “America’s continued unwillingness to confront the fundamental questions about Hiroshima,” for Alperovitz, “may well be at the root of the quiet acceptance that has characterized so many other dangerous developments in the nuclear era that began in 1945.” With this “quite acceptance,” we may not only face continuous nuclear threat but also involuntarily turn into sinister mockery any of our good-intentioned, wound-healing efforts, such as the Hiroshima maidens project, which looks like, according to Edmund Wilson, “We have tried to make up for our atomic bombs by treating and petting the Japanese women whom we disfigured and incapacitated.” With this “quite acceptance,” no matter how many victims whom we might have “treated” and “petted,” there would be thousand of or even millions of more who would be subject to the threat of being “disfigured and incapacitated” again. With this “quite acceptance,” we will only see how enemy may change, but enmity remains the same.

This is the “quiet acceptance” that will not only quietly parody moral judgement but also surreptitiously paralyze our ethical strength. “From the time of Hiroshima,” as

64 Alperovitz, ibid., 18-19.
65 Ibid., emphasis added.
Lifton and Mitchell underlie, “Americans have assigned themselves the task of finding virtue in the first use of the most murderous device ever created. We have felt the need to avoid at any cost a sense of moral culpability for this act.” As a result, “these efforts,” they emphasize, “have taken us to the far reaches of moral argument, to the extent of creating something close to an Orwellian reversal. And there has indeed been cost, one much greater than we wish to recognize.”

For both authors, while “Harry Truman provided in his own life a model for post-Hiroshima national behavior—one of edgy, often confabulatory insistence upon finding virtue in using that device on those two Japanese cities.” “But collectively,” they argue, “we have gone further than Truman in our struggle with not just feelings of guilt but with a larger view of ourselves as a decent people. We encounter continuous doubt about any possible virtue in the atomic bombings—among people elsewhere and, however unspoken, in our own minds as well.” Also according to Lifton and Mitchell, this is why “America has consistently opposed adopting a no-first-use policy, as well as international efforts to outlaw or eliminate nuclear weapons entirely.”

Also, why “American presidents, as we have seen, have threatened to use the bomb on numerous occasions.” This is why “one can speak ‘Hiroshima syndrome’ that prevents us from taking a truly moral stand on the weaponry, lest our 1945 actions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki become retrospectively unethical and unlawful—in the eyes of the world, and still more troubling, our own eyes as well.” “To do that,” conclude the authors, “we must retain what Ralph Lapp has called the ‘great void’ in which ‘Hiroshima … has been taken out of the American conscience, eviscerated, extirpated.’”

For Niebuhr, such mode of thinking “when … mixed with ethnic and color pride[,] may produce an intolerable arrogance.” “While taking pride in ourselves as ‘indeed the executors of God’s judgement,’” as he argues, we “might remember the prophetic warnings to the nations of old, that nations which become proud because they were divine instruments must in turn stand under the divine judgment and be destroyed,” especially because “the virtues of men have only a short-range efficacy.” As a result, “we may be virtuous in this context; and just in that relationship; and the instruments of divine judgement in performing such and such a peculiar responsibility.

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67 Ibid., 307.
68 Ibid., 313.
But this does not guarantee our virtue tomorrow.” It is because that “the same power which encompassed the defeat tyranny may become the foundation of a new injustice. If ever a nation needed to re reminded of the perils of vainglory, we are that nation in pride of our power and our victory. The Pauline warning fits us exactly: ‘Be not therefore high-minded, but fear.’”

10. Conclusion: Reconstructing Hiroshima/Nagasaki for indispensable perspectives, personal strengths, and peace of world and humanity.

With all that has been said, while allowing ourselves the necessity in arguing or debating truths on motives and consequences regarding Hiroshima/Nagasaki bombings, as scholars, students, teachers, or Americans of all ethnic backgrounds, we must find ways to personify historical and cultural context through tangible and “subjective” materials to make it possible for our students to visualize, to experience, to feel the pain inflicted on and endured by the victims. They must be, in other words, informed in such way as to be able to relate themselves to the otherwise abstract figures or data through literary, audio and visual materials, such as Nagai Takashi’s The Bells of Nagasaki, Hiroko Takenishi’s “Rite,” Donald M. Goldsteine et al’s Rain of Ruin: A Photographic History of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Richard Santoro’s “After the Cloud Lifted: Hiroshima's Stories of Recovery” (videorecording 1996) and “Hiroshima: Why the Bomb Was Dropped?” (ABC News videorecording, 2002). At the same time, they must also know how to contextualize the acquired personal experiences through organized presentations of leading arguments, which include discussion on the paradoxical role of mass media and language. They should also be enabled to see meaningful parallels or repetitions in the current events the echoes of history. For indispensable, not disposable, humanistic values and historical perspectives, our students should also re-learn, through these particular accounts of this unprecedented human tragedy, such classical wisdom as from John Donne that WWII has simultaneously destroyed and enlivened, “No man is an island, entire of himself; every man is a piece of the continent …. Any man’s death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for

69 Niebuhr. “Our Relations to Japan” in Hiroshima's Shadow, ibid., 277.
whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”70 Now it is indeed time, as Wordsworth would urge us, to recollect our emotion in tranquility, in perspectives, in earnest – against sentimentalism, cynicism, jingoism, and self-righteous idealism of all kinds, which often poach on students and instructors alike as we work on Hiroshima/Nagasaki narratives. We must know, as long as we have the nuclear weapons, we will tend to or be tempted to use it. As long as we see our national interests above humanity, we will have the motive and reason to use it. As long as we value one life as more important than another, we will forever find or justify our ways to use it. We must also know, “No end---however good, however necessary,” as emphasized Edgar R. Smothers, “can justify the use of an evil means.”71 Teaching about Hiroshima/Nagasaki could become quite depressing on both teachers and students, but we must deal with this emotional draining and morally and intellectually challenging issue, as Albert Camus suggested, to choose for ourselves and our future as our world is now stuck “finally between hell and reason,” “to plead even more energetically in behalf of a true international society: a society where major powers will not have greater rights than the small or intermediate size nations, where war—a scourge that has become definitive solely as a result of human intelligence—will no longer depend on the appetites or specific doctrines of this or that state.” Undoubtedly, “faced with the terrifying perspective which are opening up to humanity,” as Camus urges us, “we can perceive even better that peace is the only battle worth wagging.”72 Otherwise, the bombings, as Oe furthers, “may be the first harbinger of the world’s real end, in which the human race as we know it will be succeeded by beings with blood and cells so ruined that they cannot be called human. The most terrifying monster lurking in the darkness of Hiroshima is precisely the possibility that man might become no longer human.”73

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73 Oe, ibid., 182.

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