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## Hiroshima on Peace Education and Problems with U.S.-Centric Historical Narratives in a World Without Survivors

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### **Abstract**

As time passes, the number of survivors from major world tragedies like the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki grows fewer and fewer. These survivors are a powerful resource for educating students of all ages about the importance of world peace. Drawing on the writing of Richard Moody and Frans Doppen, as well as Paul Ham, and Herbert Feis respectively, I outline the important role of *hibakusha*, or a-bomb survivors, in peace education at the secondary and collegiate levels. I explain how personalized survivor testimony provides an alternative, highly effective and necessary counterweight to teaching solely a U.S.-centric historical narrative with regards to the end of World War II.

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## Introduction

The year 2016 marked the 71<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In 2016 Keiko Ogura, an atomic bomb survivor, was 79 years old. Although Ogura and many other atomic bomb survivors or *hibakusha* have made a considerable effort through the years to speak about their terrifying experiences during the time and after the bombs were dropped, there are still many Americans who have never heard their collectively moving testimonies. Richard Moody points out in his 2006 dissertation on peace education in Hiroshima

that the testimony of survivors like the one by Ogura are “the foundation of peace education in Hiroshima and Nagasaki” (225). Unfortunately, one of the most powerful resources in peace education, the survivors of nuclear tragedy, will soon no longer exist. In order for future generations to develop cross-cultural human empathy, as living survivors become ever more scarce, it is the responsibility of educators, especially those who had the opportunity to meet *hibakusha* (a-bomb survivors), to help students recognize the possibility of multiple historical truths and complement these in their teaching with direct testimony from survivors.

## **On *Hibakusha* Education and the Multiple Narratives About the Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in U.S. Education**

Moody’s dissertation entitled *Peace Education Curricula in Selected Schools of Hiroshima and Nagasaki* provides a wonderful glimpse into the complex socio-historical and background that supports and maintains Hiroshima’s peace education program and its significance that Moody reports that it was the “local actions of teachers at

Nagasaki...” as opposed to the national government’s Ministry of Education that “provided the leadership for organizing the Peace Studies Association of Japan in 1973” (102). Moody’s

research suggests further that much of the early work of “*hibakusha* teachers...students, faculty and community residents,” including collections of autobiographical and fictional writing as well as films such as the 1951 dokudrama *Genbaku No Ko* [Children of the A-bomb], represented a positive first step. They fell short, however, of achieving substantial “structural and systemic peace education” (107). Ultimately, the local initiatives led by *hibakusha* and the cooperation between teachers and *hibakusha* were instrumental in creating and refining the peace education programs that exist in Hiroshima today. Moody’s findings show how it is the effort of those survivors and educators and not the national government that provided the foundational work for the peace education programs that exist today. As Moody emphasizes, testimony by *hibakusha* “...was important because they provided a human perspective to the atomic bombing...” (226). Thus, *hibakusha* have become the anchor by which the education of human empathy could take root, and their personal experiences enhance, indeed legitimize, the call for intercultural understanding and peaceful conflict resolution.

The national government of Japan, possibly due to the polarizing leftist history of peace education, was reluctant to endorse peace education officially. Moody quotes from official government sources that “...the Ministry [of Education] considers that it is not desirable to develop peace education” (102). This refusal of the Japanese government to reinforce peace education within the national curriculum provides certain advantages. Hiroshima’s supplemental or extra-curricular peace education is offered outside of the public school classroom; as a result, peace educators have more freedom to teach multiple historical narratives that the Japanese government might be tempted to deem controversial. For instance, Moody’s research that “...stated textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education do not mention the Japanese army’s actions in China and mentioned atomic bombings of Hiroshima” (102).

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only as events leading to the end of the war” (114-115). The Hiroshima Institute for Peace Education curricula include these events as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and instructional notes for teachers mention the Manchurian Incident as well; the 8<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum then explores Japanese imperialism in connection with the Manchurian Incident, even including the controversial forced prostitution of Korean women (known as “comfort women”) that is often elided by the Japanese government (Moody 115-116). This incorporation of perspectives, often absent in the materials approved by the Ministry of Education, demonstrates how the peace education programs of Hiroshima work to acknowledge multiple historical perspectives, including those critical of the Japanese government’s own past actions. Ultimately, this approach strengthens their message rejecting any nuclear conflict and effectively prepares students to engage in peaceful conflict resolution.

The city of Hiroshima is a shining example of how peace education is currently being used to teach future generations the values of international respect and multiple historical narratives as a necessary prerequisite to inspire human empathy and recognize different sides to the same story. By contrast, much of the world, the rest of Japan included, struggles to offer this kind of education.

One of Japan’s closest allies since the end of World War II, the United States, for instance, is known for having a culturally diverse population and would seem to be a likely candidate for having similar programs that promote intercultural respect and the understanding of historical truths. Unfortunately, at least where nuclear weapons are concerned, the case. In fact, according to Moody’s research, the idea of peace education

during WWI and WWII “‘was vilified as being subversive’ and . . . educators who advocated peace education were considered un-American” (104). Currently, there are efforts being made to

emphasize the relevance of multiple perspectives in history as an important step in developing peace education. One well-documented example is Frans Doppen's study of eighty-eight high school sophomores who were taught the significance of multiple perspectives in relation to the atomic bomb (2000).

Doppen's results indicate that there are still many students who believe problematic U.S.-centric historical narratives. For instance, in a pre-assessment activity designed to gauge the students' historical knowledge of the atomic bomb, one fourth of the students were "unable to list a single reason" explaining why the United States dropped the atomic bomb (Doppen 162). The three most popular answers given by the other three fourths of the student participants were, "...[t]o show American strength..." '...to end the war' and '[t]o seek revenge for Pearl Harbor'" (162). These are all problematic misconceptions that are the result of the remnants of dated and/or uncritical historical analysis that maintained pro-nuclear sentiments. These perspectives are ultimately detrimental to long-lasting peace. However, in Doppen's post-test given to the same students after a three-week course examining multiple perspectives of the atomic bomb, students' answers reflected a deeper understanding of why the atomic bomb was used. One example of this change in understanding why the atomic bomb was dropped is found in the increased frequency of the answer "...to obtain scientific results..."(163). This response rose from the fourth most popular answer in the pre-test to the second most popular answer in the post-test (163). The wide discrepancy in understanding between the pre-test and the post-test in Doppen's study could be a result of two competing perspectives of historical analysis. Herbert Feis, is dated and problematic and reflects the popular answers in D

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other perspective, displayed in the much more recent writings of Paul Ham, aligns more closely with the post-test answers of Doppen's students.

### **A Critical Assessment of Herbert Feis' and Paul Ham's Arguments on Nuclear Warfare**

Herbert Feis revised and re-published his work *The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II* in 1966. Originally published under the title *Japan Subdued* in 1961, Feis's choice of original title seems to indicate his pro-militarist analysis. The re-publication under a new title came with the addition of two new chapters: "By Shock: The Atom Bomb" (chapter 4) and "Comments and Conjectures on the Use of the Atomic Bomb Against Japan" (chapter 17)/ The first gives a brief explanation of the creation and use of the bomb, and the latter provides some of Feis's thoughts on the use of the atomic bomb. He explains that he added these two chapters because an "...interest in the decision to use the bomb has become more critical and resounding..." (Feis vi). Feis indeed makes an honest effort to present the difficulty and criticisms regarding dropping the atomic bomb. Feis even goes so far as to point out a somewhat controversial finding in the initial report of the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, namely that "...Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated"(191).

Feis supports the maintenance of future nuclear disarmament and peaceful conflict resolution by arguing for the justification of the use of the atomic bomb. Feis justifies the atomic bomb after presenting information that suggests there could have been made to warn the Japanese about the power of the atomic bomb and to mot



surrender more quickly. Feis writes:

[m]ight not that broadcast knowledge [the information gathered in the first atomic bomb tests] ...[and] the explanation that one of our purposes was to spare the Japanese, have had enough shock effect to cause the Emperor to overrule the resistant Japanese military leaders? (201).

Feis then follows this up by claiming that the Japanese would likely not have been swayed by such information, but, he hastens to add, if the U.S. had warned the Japanese, "...we as a people would be freer of any regret-I will not say remorse-at the necessity of enrolling Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the annals of history" (201). Feis thereby creates an analysis that acknowledges the shortcomings of the U.S. decision to drop the bomb, but for the sake of defending the possibility of using atomic weapons in the future, he rejects the need for remorse at the destruction of human life and proclaims the necessity of nuclear weapons. A conclusion like this one does not ensure a future which emphasizes peaceful conflict resolution; moreover, it implies that the use of nuclear weapons is justifiable if there is a good enough reason.

It should be said that while Feis's ideas are entrenched in supporting a pro-nuclear future, his writing is not a surprising reaction, given the political context of his study: the height of Cold War tensions between the U.S. and Russia, of his study. In other words, considering the historic moment in which a text is written is key when presenting this kind of historical analysis, especially in the history classroom. Students must be alerted to the socio-historical context of arguments and hypotheses in order to avoid developing narrow perspectives that perpetuate mentalities. Such discourse can not support true peace education.

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In contrast to Feis's study and the particular context for his analysis, it would also be effective to include a perspective that does not support the possibility of nuclear conflict. Paul Ham's work, entitled *Hiroshima Nagasaki The Real Story of the Atomic Bombing and Their Aftermath* and published in 2011, provides a much more recent analysis of the reasoning behind the dropping of the bombs. The most significant difference, apart from the different ideological arguments, is Ham's inclusion of an entire chapter discussing the role of *hibakusha* following the bomb. This important human perspective is understandably absent from Feis's justification--not simply because it would no doubt completely undermine his argument by questioning his ability to justify mass destruction. Moody's research shows, too, that in the 1960s the *hibakusha* peace movement was still in its infancy.

With the addition of this perspective, Ham changes the question about justifying the atomic bomb, one that Feis answers in an environment where the bomb was seen as the best method of deterrence vis à vis the Soviet Union. Ham poses an urgent and difficult moral question that Feis no doubt would have struggled to integrate into his argument. In Ham's words, "...the question is whether good intentions alone justify the flouting of war conventions and the massacre of ordinary people" (487). Ham responds to this question by explaining how the goals for dropping the atomic bomb, "...to extract 'unconditional surrender' from a defeated foe, 'manage Russian aggression in Europe and Asia, and avenge Pearl Harbor'" were not achieved, unless, Ham concedes, completely destroying two cities "...is accepted as proportionate punishment for Pearl Harbor..." (487). The fact that Japan surrendered with the condition that the emperor remain and that the Soviets soon went on to threaten U.S. interests in the Cold War undercuts any defense for the use of nuclear weapons and Nagasaki. The objectives of Japan's unconditional surrender and deterrence were not met.



Ham's anti-nuclear sentiments and self-reflective historical analysis are an important part of encouraging human empathy across cultures and time. In the high-school history classroom, discussing the difference between Feis and Ham's arguments may allow students to arrive at a forward-thinking anti-nuclear conclusion more relevant in a growing globalized community than the U.S.-centric pro-nuclear sentiments of Cold War historians. Developing students' ability not only to compare and contrast, but to contextualize historical analysis of major events is an important step toward allowing them to negotiate the multiple historic truths or narratives that surround a moment like the dropping of the atomic bomb.

In a world where meeting an atomic bomb survivor will soon become an impossibility, Ham's work, which provides information and conversations with *hibakusha* that are respectfully presented for future generations, is particularly important. Furthermore, having someone speak to students directly about how meeting a survivor affected their outlook on historical events enforces the significance of the absence of the human element and ensures that this perspective is integrated into the conversation.

### **Personal Experiences, Conclusions, and Future Personal Efforts for Peace Education**

The historical narratives of Ham and Feis are both important perspectives that should be incorporated into discussing the history of the atomic bomb. Yet, including and discussing only these perspectives is still not quite enough when it comes to teaching about the importance of peace education. From my personal experience, already knowing both perspectives going into the Hiroshima Peace Seminar that I attended in August 2016, still did not provide the impact of hearing the testimony of Keiko Ogura, the aforementioned *hibakusha*



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unmediated discussion of her experience added an element of experiential learning in which we, the listeners, were forced to reflect on the “hardships” of our own life and seriously consider them in comparison with the horrors of surviving a nuclear blast. Such an effect, enforced by experiential learning, which includes the opportunity to meet a survivor, is the primary component that can dramatically improve on the results presented in Doppen's study. Direct instruction of past historical events and interpretations to a real-time historical-human experience that creates a physically tangible connection to a moment provides meaningful insights that go well beyond those included in a textbook. Students can move more readily beyond a "narrow focus" that assumes that there are only two sides to every historical event (us and them) (Doppen 165).

However, the likelihood of an educational researcher employing a *hibakusha* in order to teach a unit on multiple perspectives is becoming ever more unlikely. So the idea that a common high school social studies or language arts teacher may try to do this is even less of a probability.

Instead, I might suggest, after also experiencing the lectures of non-survivor peace advocates like Bowling Green State University's Dr. Raymond Craig, who presented a paper entitled “Empathy and Recognition: On the Role of Humanities and Arts Education in the Pursuit of Peace” at Hiroshima Jogakuin University in 2016, that a focus on encouraging human empathy may be the most realistic and effective course of action. Thus, in my high-school history curriculum I plan on contextualizing historic documents as well as analyzing multiple views when teaching about difficult topics that involve unimaginable numbers of lost human lives.

As a Language Arts high-school teacher I may assign small groups of three to read a particular historical perspective related to the atomic bomb, such as a study of the scientists involved in developing the science for the a-bomb, the perspective of the vic

that of the military personnel who dropped the bomb. Students must then attempt to write their own analysis of why the bomb was dropped. After completing this research on perspectives, students could then compare and defend their arguments in small group debates. In this way, students not only get to familiarize themselves with a particular perspective on the war and the dropping of the bombs but also experience the difficulties and challenges of negotiating multiple historic narratives. Ensuing large group discussions could then refocus students' attention on the overwhelming dangers of nuclear weapons to human life and encourage understanding of their responsibilities in an ever growing globalized society.

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