The Atomic Bomb and the Nuclear Age

Sociology 480J/History 486K

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The following paperback books have been ordered at the campus bookstore.

Books


Laura Hein and Mark Selden, eds., Living With the Bomb: American and Japanese Cultural Conflicts in the Nuclear Age. M.E. Sharpe.


Michael Hogan, ed., Hiroshima in History and Memory. Cambridge.

Kenzaburo Oe, Hiroshima Notes. Marion Boyers.


Supplementary Books


Films:

About this course

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

Students are asked to prepare a term paper on a question related to one of the central themes of the course. A four page précis and preliminary bibliography of your paper is due in class on October 6 following e-mail proposal and office hour discussion of the subject. Term papers are due at my office at noon on December 18. I would like to begin discussing your ideas about research papers beginning from the first weeks of the semester through a combination of office hour conferences and e-mail discussion. You should not hesitate to float one or more preliminary ideas in these discussions, preferably after briefly consulting the list of relevant readings provided in the syllabus. Students with common research interests will be encouraged to collaborate where feasible. We plan to use e-mail communication to plan presentations and papers, to discuss pertinent issues among students and/or with the instructor, and to make student papers available to members of the seminar. If there is interest, we will consider making a web page for archiving the term papers.

There is no prescribed length for the term paper, but twenty pages is a length that may be appropriate for working through a significant problem.

Students are expected to report on assigned readings and films and to participate in class discussion. Unless otherwise noted, films and videos will be available in the reserve library for your viewing prior to class. Please come to class prepared to discuss them.

Grades are based on evaluation of the quality of contributions to class discussion, oral presentations, précis, and term paper.

**Syllabus**

1. Before the Bomb: Power, and the Clash of Empires in World War II. 9.8

Supplement:

2. **Film and Discussion**: Grave of the Fireflies (90 minutes). 9.15.
In class screening and discussion on Japanese perspectives on World War II bombing.

**Note:** The instructor will be away at this time. A student will introduce and lead a discussion on the film. The weeks of September 15 and 22 provide ideal opportunities to move ahead in defining a research topic and discussing it with the instructor.

3. Medical and Environmental Aspects of Nuclear Bombs and Power Generation. 9.29

**Guest presentation by Alan Haber,** Binghamton radiation biologist and former research scientist at Oak Ridge Laboratory. 9.29

**This week only the seminar will meet in Science III, Room 214.**


**Film:** Godzilla. King of the Monsters (2 hours)

Supplement:

4. The Atomic Decision: Why? 10.6


Supplement:
- a. Essays by Sayle, Blackett, Bernstein, Sherwin in *Hiroshima's Shadow*.

**Film:** Fat Man and Little Boy. Starring Paul Newman. (2 hrs)

**Note:** Term paper précis is due in class on October 6.

5. The Atomic Bomb, Japan's Decision to Surrender and the Dawn of The Nuclear Age. 10.13

**Film: Testament (90 mins)**


**Supplement:**

**Film: Imamura Shohei, Black Rain. Based on the novel by Ibuse Masuji. (2 hrs)**

7. Human Consequences of the Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (2): Japanese and American Literary Representations. 10.27

**Film: Them (90 mins).**


**Supplement:**

10. The Indian and Pakistani Bombs and the Control and Abolition of Nuclear Weapons After the Cold War. November 17.
    **Readings to be assigned.**

11. The Bomb in Japanese and American Memory (1) 11.24
   b. Oe Kenzaburo, *Hiroshima Notes*, 11-71, 123-71 (and as much more as time permits).

Supplement:

**Film:** Atomic Cafe (90 mins).

12. The Bomb in Japanese and American Memory (2). 12.1
Supplement:


**Film:** *Dr. Strangelove. Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb.* (90 mins.)

13. Student Presentations of Papers and final discussion. 12.8
Reserve Book List

(Note: Supplementary readings have not been placed on reserve.)

Jorn Gjelstad and Olav Njolstad, eds., *Nuclear Rivalry and International Order.*
Laura Hein and Mark Selden, eds., *Living With the Bomb: American and Japanese Cultural Conflicts in the Nuclear Age.*
Michael Hogan, ed., *Hiroshima in History and Memory.*
Edward Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, eds., *History Wars. The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past.*
Keiji Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen* (two volumes).
Kenzaburo Oe, *Hiroshima Notes.*
Kyoko Selden and Mark Selden, eds., *The Atomic Bomb. Voices From Hiroshima and Nagasaki.*
Yuki Tanaka, *Hidden Horrors. Japanese War Crimes in World War II.*
E.P. Thompson and Dan Smith, eds., *Protest and Survive.*
Lawrence Wittner, *One World or None. The Struggle Against the Bomb.*
Possible Research Topics (these are designed to stimulate ideas, not to restrict choices)

1. How many people died/were injured, as a result of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: who (e.g. nationality), when (immediately, within six months etc.), where (distance from the hypocenter), why (blast, radiation, psychological trauma)?

2. What is known about the medical, genetic, and psychological effects of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima/Nagasaki? What scientific and technological issues remain unresolved and why?

3. Why did the Truman administration use the bomb at Hiroshima? Nagasaki? How did it subsequently justify its decision to use the bomb (twice).

4. Was the bomb critical to ending the war? To saving American/Japanese lives? Discuss the issues in the context of the positions of Japan, the USSR, and the US.

5. Assess the dominant positions in the debate over the decision to drop the atomic bombs.

6. Why are the issues surrounding the dropping of the atomic bomb still so intense five decades later? Do the issues appear different when viewed from the US and from Japan?

7. What is to be learned from a review of Japanese and American literatures (or visual and other arts) on the atomic bombing?

8. Assess the impact of anti-nuclear movements (or official arms control efforts) on the development of nuclear weapons and nuclear power during and after the Cold War.

9. Make the case for (or against) the abolition of nuclear weapons (and/or nuclear power).

10. How can and should nuclear weapons be limited, reduced and eliminated? Assess the major proposals currently under debate concerning nuclear arms control and elimination.

11. How has historical memory of the bomb in the United States and Japan differed? Assess the master narratives and critical narratives in both countries and explain the differences.

12. Explain Japan's decision to surrender.

13. What has been the impact of the decision to use the bomb on subsequent international conflict? Did the bomb help preserve peace or exacerbate military conflict since World War II?


15. In what sense can the era from the final years of World War II be called the nuclear age?

16. In what ways, if any, do themes of racism illuminate atomic issues?
17. What is the significance of the fact that the U.S. is the only nation that has used the bomb?

18. Develop a "least worse case" strategy to deal with the problem of nuclear waste.

19. Evaluate some of the leading proposals for reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons.

20. Assess the nuclear winter hypothesis.