

Plenty of blame to go around: A review of:
Bridging the Atomic Divide: Debating Japan-US Attitudes on Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Harry Wray and Seishiro Sugihara

Lexington Books, 2019

--by Tadashi Hama

The central goal of *Bridging the Atomic Divide* is to present and defend the US perspective concerning the US atomic bombings of Japan, in that the only alternative to atomic bombing Japan into submission was to launch an amphibious assault, which would have been extremely costly in terms of American lives. As author Harry Wray claims, since die-hard Japanese government militants vowed to fight to the last man, America had no other choice than to use the atomic bombs. With publication of the current book, it is Wray's wish to "have a dialogue about the atomic bombs..." a "balanced dialogue", and a dialogue which "must not be like the Tokyo Trials conducted during the Occupation... a one-sided affair imposed by the victorious nations on the losing side..."

Despite his appeals to a "balanced dialogue to historical perception," and stating his desire to avoid conducting a "Tokyo Trial", Wray starts off by berating the Japanese for their "litany of clear-cut crimes against humanity", and mentions, among other things, forcing Korean women to be "prostitutes", or so-called "comfort women", and for the "rape of Nanking". His barrage of war guilt sets up the tone of the rest of the book. What is one to make of the author, who, on one hand, calls the Japanese "war criminals" but on the other hand pleads for "balanced dialogue"? The so-called "comfort women" and "rape of Nanking" do lend themselves to further historical scrutiny, and have been addressed in a number of Japanese language books. However, having a "balanced dialogue" with English speakers, particularly Americans, on these historical issues is really pointless, as there is almost nothing in the English language that thoroughly scrutinizes the so-called "comfort women" and the "rape of Nanking" at the level that books in the Japanese language do.¹ Unfortunately, rather than fully confront the English speaking world with facts, the Japanese appear to be generally reluctant to do this, perhaps out of a long history of quite diplomacy and a cultural desire for harmonious relationships, thus refraining from stating hard truths that may upset "feelings". From the beginning, one sees that the current book does not even pretend to take "balance" seriously.

While Wray states that the perspectives in the book, including that Japan committed a "litany of crimes", are his alone, one could suppose that his views reflect that of most Americans. (Indeed, it is highly doubtful that the current book will change the thinking of most Americans—that Japan "deserved" the atomic bombings. At the same time, Japanese who lay blame on the atomic bombs and the entire Pacific War squarely on

¹ A recently published English language book that thoroughly explores, for example, the comfort women issue is *Comfort Women and Sex in the Battle Zone*, by Professor Ikuhiko Hata (2018, Hamilton Books).

Japan's shoulders will not change their minds either.²) Attitudes die hard. Indeed, even before the “sneak attack” on Pearl Harbor, Americans viewed the Japanese as sub-humans.³ Thus, on one hand, Americans spent much time and effort “cleansing” the “heathens” by westernizing and Christianizing Asia and, on the other hand, prohibiting them from immigrating to America. After what President Franklin Roosevelt called the “unprovoked and dastardly attack” on Pearl Harbor, it was pretty easy for Americans, including a teenaged Wray at the time, to view the attackers as “dirty, sneaky and yellow monkey Japs”. Americans were dragged into war with Japan and what they sought was revenge for being humiliated—by non-whites no less! The US military in the Pacific more than obliged the American people as the US media stoked the fires of hate back home.

Wray's statements, that “Americans sometimes did not take prisoners”, “US servicemen sometimes acted inhumanly,” “sometimes GIs and marines ignored orders from officers not to kill surrendering Japanese,” and “US officers sometimes discouraged taking prisoners,” blatantly ignore reality.

Wray does note that at the highest military levels, soldiers were ordered to “kill Japs” and “kill more Japs”—Admiral William Halsey, US commander of operations in the South Pacific, made this exhortation. However, Halsey further stated that so many Japanese will be killed that “the Japanese language will be spoken only in hell.” A marine colonel ordered his men not to take prisoners, “You will kill every yellow-son-of-a-bitch, and that's it.” Does this kind of language from US officers discourage “inhumanity”?

The current book cites *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970) which offers accounts of Americans committing atrocities against the Japanese—and not just “sometimes”. During his tour of the Pacific in 1944 as a civilian advisor, Lindbergh would hear from officers that the Japanese “are really lower than beasts. Every one of 'em ought to be exterminated.” At a different time, an Army Air Force officer asserted, in reference to the “small percentage of Japanese soldiers taken prisoner,” “Oh, we could take more if we wanted to, but our boys don't like to take prisoners.” There would be “an accident” if too many prisoners were taken. At Biak, a “handful” of Japanese soldiers holed up in a cliff were frustrating US artillery efforts to dislodge them for the past several weeks. Lindbergh stated, “If our positions were

² The current book also gives insight into the Japanese perspective on the American use of the atomic bombs. An essay by author Seishiro Sugihara suggests that President Barack Obama's visit to Hiroshima Peace Park in 2016 “released the American people from the spell of the atomic bomb.” This suggests a level of forgiveness, but Americans do not see this way at all. Also, while Obama called for a world without nuclear weapons, these words ring hollow, as earlier in the year, Obama requested one trillion dollars for the modernization of the US nuclear arsenal. Surely this irony was not lost on the Japanese people—that a Nobel Peace Prize winner demanded a continuation of the nuclear arms race which began in Hiroshima.

³ Dr. Ales Hrdlicka of the Smithsonian Institute advised President Franklin D. Roosevelt that the Japanese “nefarious and warlike” character was attributed to their skulls being “2,000 years less developed than ours.” FDR did not believe that crossbreeding Japanese with Europeans would bring any benefit, much less reduce their “inherently savage” nature. FDR mentioned a Chinese fable to his aides, that the Japanese race was a product of a mating between a Chinese princess and Japanese baboons. Robinson, G. (2001). *By Order of the President*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

reversed and our troops held out so courageously and well, their defense would be recorded as one of the most glorious examples of tenacity, bravery, and sacrifice... But sitting in the security and relative luxury of our quarters, I listen to American Army officers refer to these Japanese soldiers as ‘yellow sons of bitches.’ Their desire is to exterminate the Jap ruthlessly, even cruelly. I have not heard a word of respect or compassion spoken of our enemy since I came here.”⁴ Later, the infantry captured the Japanese stronghold and at first one prisoner was taken, which was later corrected by an army colonel: “No prisoners were taken at all.”⁵ In later conversations with officers at other locations in the Pacific, Lindbergh heard that marines and soldiers “seldom accepted surrender of ... Japanese troops...”⁶ While not content with “killing Japs” and “killing more Japs,” Lindbergh heard from an officer that American troops mutilated the dead for souvenirs. Tellingly, the officer said nothing about stopping his men from doing this.⁷

Author Thomas Goodrich pointed out that it was US troops’ belief in what they were told about Japanese atrocities, rather than anything they actually witnessed, that motivated their hatred of the Japanese and their shooting of surrendering Japanese. Said one GI, “I’ll never let one surrender. Nor will any of us.”⁸ Goodrich noted that “breathless [Japanese] comrades watched, waited, then witnessed the massacre of their unarmed friends” who were attempting to surrender. Also, given that Japanese corpses would be mutilated after death for trophies, “fewer and fewer Japanese soldiers entertained even the slightest notion of giving up.”⁹ The Pacific War, as Goodrich pointed out, was not a war but a hunt, a hunt for “dirty animals” and to murder as many of them as possible.¹⁰

Lindbergh glumly noted the hypocrisy of it all: “We hold his examples of atrocity screamingly to the heavens while we cover up our own and condone them as just retribution for his acts.”¹¹ Thus, according to Lindbergh, not just “some” US military personnel committed atrocities and not just “some” US officers condoned these acts.

The current book tells us that the use of the atomic bombs was justified since the Japanese would never have surrendered. Readers are told that Japanese militants would have sacrificed the entire nation before surrendering. However, such Japanese fanaticism in the summer 1945, especially by the military, was generally lacking. Japanese soldiers indeed fought bravely during the war. Towards the end of the war, however, as Goodrich pointed out, “relatively few young men embraced such an end [death] if there was any

⁴ Lindbergh, p. 879-880.

⁵ Lindbergh, p. 880, 881.

⁶ Lindbergh, p. 915.

⁷ Not just the dead but wounded as well. See: Sledge, E.B. (2007). *With the Old Breed at Peleliu and Okinawa*. NY, NY: Presidio Press. A directive from the US Joint Chiefs of Staff in January 1944 banning such mutilation went, obviously, unheeded. The Army’s Judge Advocate General pointed out that such mutilations were violations of the laws of war (i.e. war crimes) (Weingartner, J.J. (1992). *Trophies of war. The Pacific Historical Review* 61: 53-67).

⁸ Goodrich, T. (2018). *Summer, 1945*. Siesta Key, FL: The Palm Press. p. 18.

⁹ Goodrich, p. 19.

¹⁰ Goodrich, p. 25.

¹¹ Lindbergh, p. 880.

hope of living.”¹² One Japanese veteran stated, “If men had been allowed to surrender honorably, everybody would be doing it.”¹³ Towards the end of the war, lacking food and air support, Japanese soldiers did not appear to be especially fanatical. Said one soldier, “Who cares about the enemy? How can they be so foolish so as to expect us to fight when we are not fed right...What do we care about the war? ...”¹⁴

Wray states that another justification for the use of the atomic bombs was to save American lives. Ostensibly, President Truman hoped that use of the atomic bombs would lead to Japanese capitulation, thereby obviating the need for a planned November American amphibious assault and sparing many American lives. Wray claims a varying range of casualties¹⁵—an “invasion of Kyushu would possibly entail the loss of approximately 250,000 to 300,000 American lives” (p. 22 and p. 26), “250,000 to 300,000 US *casualties*” [emphasis added] (p. 29 and p. 38), “an estimated death of 250,000 to 300,000 US military casualties” (p. 76) or “potential loss of 175,000 to 200,000 Naval, Marine and Army lives” (p. 177). Wray also points out that former President Herbert Hoover estimated 500,000 to one million American “casualties”. Truman has stated that the bombs saved “half million lives.”¹⁶ The numbers Wray cites, however, are what authors Robert Lifton and Greg Mitchell called “postwar creations”. The number of American lives saved rose when Truman left office—the “more lives saved the greater the virtue.”¹⁷ Lifton and Mitchell further noted that “at a certain point the figure 500,000 became the constant, rounded figure that could take its place in Truman’s inner mythology about what he had done and why he had done it.”¹⁸

Former Truman Administration officials propagated the inflated, projected casualty figures. After the war, Secretary of State Henry Stimson wrote: “...I was informed that such operations [the invasion of Japan] might be expected to cost over a million casualties, in American forces alone.”¹⁹ As Lifton and Mitchell, point out, Stimson “did not disclose who ‘informed’ him of this projected number of casualties.”²⁰ Much later, the number of American lives “saved” by the atomic bombings would go up into the millions.²¹

How many lives did the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, at the time, predict would be lost during an “all-out invasion” of Japan? According to historian Barton Bernstein, a report written in June 1945 estimated losses between 25,000 and 46,000.²² Oddly, while Army Chief of

¹² Goodrich, p. 18.

¹³ Goodrich, p. 20.

¹⁴ Goodrich, p. 19.

¹⁵ In the quotation of casualties, it is not entirely clear if “casualties” refers to total number of deaths *and* wounded or just deaths. Early in the book, Wray appears to be implying deaths, such as “losses” of 250,000 to 300,000 (p. 22), but later on, the distinction is not entirely clear.

¹⁶ Lifton, R.J. & Mitchell, G. (1995). *Hiroshima in America*. NY, NY: Avon Books. p. 179.

¹⁷ Lifton & Mitchell, p. 180.

¹⁸ Lifton & Mitchell, p. 180.

¹⁹ Lifton & Mitchell, p. 109.

²⁰ Lifton & Mitchell, p. 109.

²¹ Lifton & Mitchell, p. 181.

²² Lifton & Mitchell, p. 274. Barton also noted that Chief-of-Staff Admiral William Leahy’s diary stated that “casualties” would not exceed 63,000 (Lifton & Mitchell, p. 293).

Staff General George Marshall informed Stimson of the report's findings, Stimson nonetheless stated after the war that "over a million" casualties were expected.²³

Some may state that whether estimates were one thousand or a million, the atomic bombs saved American lives. Indeed, military personnel in the Pacific at the time expressed relief, if not jubilation, for the atomic bombing of Hiroshima: "Thank God for the atomic bomb."²⁴ In a morose sense, Americans celebrated life by sowing death.²⁵ The current book and others have claimed that the atomic bombings actually saved Japanese lives as well by negating the need for a "final battle" that Japanese militarists craved—a punishing blow that would lead the US to "yield concessions".

Yet, given the state of Japanese troops and the state of Japan's industrial potential before August 6, it is highly questionable that Japan would have been able to inflict serious damage on the US war machine. Reported Japanese manpower in Kyushu, between late July and early August rose from 500,000 to 900,000, with an additional 10 million civilians as reserves. We read in the current book that the people in the reserves sent to engage battle-hardened Americans included un-conscripted males between 13 and 60 years of age and females between 17 and 40 years of age (p. 75). In addition, readers are told of hoards of naval *kamikaze* attack units and 10,000 airplanes—"almost all of Japan's airpower"—that were assigned to defend Kyushu (p. 78). Mentioned earlier was the degraded state of the Japanese military towards war's end. The current book (p. 82), gives a clear picture of the real fighting potential of homeland defense—Wray states that the overall situation was in fact "bleak". The civilian force was to defend the homeland with farm implements, "bamboo spears, bows and arrows and old-fashioned rifles" (p. 75). The Japanese government reported that the lack of raw materials was disrupting aircraft and munitions production.²⁶ Malnutrition and starvation had become "very serious". Due to repeated air raids on cities, transportation networks and communication lines were "choked". There were shortages of food, a devastated naval fleet, poorly equipped soldiers and, ominously, "surfacing antiwar sentiment." While the current book noted earlier that "10,000 airplanes" were ready to be used to strike against the American invasion force, it is also stated that by early June, the Japanese Navy had "exhausted its oil supply and had suspended training of aviator recruits in March for lack of aviation fuel." One should ask, if such was the state of Japan in the spring and early summer, how were Japanese planes and ships without fuel supposed to hurl themselves into American military units? While *kamikaze* aircraft in late 1944 and early 1945 certainly struck fear into the American military, significant investments in other *kamikaze* units, such as a torpedo-carrying two-man submarine (*Kairyu*) and human torpedo (*Kaiten*) failed to even scratch the US war machine.²⁷

²³ Even more odd, though, is that Wray states that in a June 18 meeting with the US JCS and Truman, Marshall calculated that there would be well over 200,000 "losses" in the invasion of Kyushu (p. 77).

²⁴ Lifton & Mitchell, p. 237.

²⁵ Following Japan's capitulation, about 23% of Americans wished that more atomic bombs were dropped on Japan (Goodrich, p. 183).

²⁶ Toland, J. (2003). *The Decline and Fall of the Rising Sun*. NY, NY: Modern Library. p. 746.

²⁷ Toland, p. 700.

One of Wray's historical perspectives is interesting, in that he states that Soviet entry into the war had no significant effect on Japan's willingness to surrender. Thus, the argument goes, both atomic bombs were necessary. However, others have stated the exact opposite—that the Soviet declaration of war was a deciding factor for Japan's surrender. It would probably be difficult for Americans to understand this without a review of wartime Japanese-Soviet relations and Roosevelt's and Stalin's secret agreement at the Yalta Conference in February 1945, which are lacking in the current book. Readers will need to go elsewhere.²⁸

One other historical issue, perhaps indirectly related to America's justification for the use of the atomic bombs, is that Japan's "rude, irresponsible failure" to accept the Potsdam Declaration was a rejection of what Wray calls "positive democratic guarantees" that were stated in the Declaration. The Declaration made promises of "democratic tendencies" and "fundamental human rights". Wray goes on to state that "implementation of its promises during the occupation of Japan would make it the most benevolent and democratic military occupation in world history." Refusing the Declaration led to the atomic bombings and Wray lays the blame squarely on the Japanese militarist and the Emperor. What is interesting here is Wray's casting of the Potsdam Declaration, surrender and the American occupation as "positive", as the "most benevolent and democratic military occupation in world history". Reality is far removed from this pious characterization. When American forces arrived in Japan, inevitably there was rape, just as with "Okinawa and Saipan".²⁹ In the Tokyo-Yokohama area, over a 10 day period, there were 1,000 "reported" rapes. Given the shame associated with rape and women's modesty, it is estimated that the actual number of rapes was ten times this.³⁰ Indeed, a number of rape victims committed suicide. In Nagoya, GIs went to the trouble of cutting communication lines before engaging in rapes.³¹ Japanese who tried to do anything to halt the rapes were arrested—anyone speaking about American rapes were arrested and sentenced to hard labor "for spreading rumors derogatory to occupation forces."³² Newspapers attempting to report the problem were shut down. As an example of the extent of "free speech" allowed by the Occupational authorities, even newspapers reporting on the "mere censorship of other newspapers" were censored and eventually

²⁸ Wilson, W. (2013). The bomb didn't beat Japan... Stalin did: Have 70 years of nuclear policy been based on a lie? <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/05/30/the-bomb-didnt-beat-japan-stalin-did/>

Hasegawa, T. (2011). Soviet policy toward Japan during World War II. *Cahiers du monde russe* 52: 245-271. <http://journals.openedition.org/monderusse/9333>. While Japanese Imperial General Headquarters was apparently aware of a build-up of Soviet arms in the Soviet Far East, they and the local Kwantung Army were caught completely by surprise when the Soviets invaded. Surprise may have been due in part to the Japanese-Soviet Neutrality Pact that, although renounced by Stalin in April 1945, was set to expire in 1946.

Drea, E.J. (1984). Missing intentions: Japanese intelligence and the Soviet invasion of Manchuria, 1945.

Military Affairs. 48: 66-73. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1987650?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

A US official stated, "If at any time the USSR should enter the war, all Japanese will realize that absolute defeat is inevitable." (Goodrich, p. 180); Truman knew that Soviet entry into the war against Japan would "provoke a surrender": "He'll [Stalin] be in the Jap War on August 15...Fini Japs when that comes about." (Goodrich, p. 184; Lifton & Mitchell, p. 273); Toland, p. 633-638.

²⁹ Goodrich, p. 227.

³⁰ Goodrich, p. 227.

³¹ Goodrich, p. 229.

³² Goodrich, p. 230.

shut down as well.³³ All forms of communication were “strictly controlled and censored”³⁴. In the new democratic Japan, merely flying the Japanese national flag was a criminal offense.

In addition to American crimes and Japanese dissent, news concerning the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were banned from the Japanese public. The Occupation barred reporters from entering Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Reporters violating the ban were expelled from Japan. Mail and photographs concerning these cities were seized and destroyed. Films were confiscated and locked away as “Top Secret”. Witnesses were barred from speaking out and even mourning for the victims was banned.³⁵ The US military labeled any news that leaked out depicting the slow, gruesome deaths of the victims of the atomic bombings as “propaganda”.

The current book, as stated previously, will not likely sway American attitudes concerning the atomic bombings of Japan. Equally troubling, though, is that American attitudes that prevailed during World War II and following the atomic bombings will not likely change—in that the US is the vanguard of liberal internationalism, in which the US serves as the world’s guardian of democracy and brings democracy to countries at the point of a bayonet. The lesson of World War II that Americans seem to have internalized, based on views stated in the current book, is not that mankind needs to refrain from using military force to solve long-standing political problems, but that force in the name of spreading “freedom” and “democracy” is justified. The numerous US military adventures worldwide following World War II suggest that Americans have taken this lesson to heart.

An American veteran and journalist, who served in North Africa and the Pacific had this to say about the war that just ended and American’s need to be the world’s policeman:

We Americans have the dangerous tendency in our international thinking to take a holier-than-thou attitude toward other nations. We consider ourselves to be more noble and decent than other peoples, and consequently in a better position to decide what is right and wrong in the world. What kind of war do civilians suppose we fought, anyway? We shot prisoners in cold blood, wiped out hospitals, strafed lifeboats, killed or mistreated enemy civilians, finished off the enemy wounded, tossed the dying into a hole with the dead, and in the Pacific boiled the flesh off enemy skulls to make table ornaments for sweethearts, or carved their bones into letter openers. We topped off our saturation bombing and burning of enemy civilians by dropping atomic bombs on two nearly defenseless cities, thereby setting an alltime record for instantaneous mass slaughter.³⁶

³³ Goodrich, p. 230.

³⁴ Goodrich, p. 234; Lifton & Mitchell, p. 56, 58, 59.

³⁵ Goodrich, p. 239.

³⁶ Jones, E.L. (1946.) One war is enough. *The Atlantic Monthly* 177: 48-53.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/unbound/bookauth/battle/jones.htm>