

Hiroshima's Shadow: Writings on the Denial of History and the Smithsonian Controversy

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One of the main battles of the cultural wars is the controversy that engulfed the proposed exhibition at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museums in 1995 commemorating the fuselages that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, the Enola Gay. The script for the exhibit turned out to be a tangled bitter display that attempted to celebrate the deaths of millions of Japanese civilians. The impressive volume of *Hiroshima's Shadow* by Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifschultz is an anthology and it originated in the most terrifying as well as the central event of the twentieth century, the use of atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Bird and Lifschultz retrace the historical evolution of the steps and the decisions that led to use of the atomic bomb. There are significant voices that are taken into account. On one hand, there are the voices of the advisors of Truman that expressed doubts about the military necessity and, on the other hand, those of the moral legitimacy that led to the deployment of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. *Hiroshima's Shadow* moves along two directions. The first is a meticulous analysis of why and how the bomb came to be used and the second is how the US lives in the "pathology of denial" and believe that they acted correctly and the bomb was 'necessary' to end the Second World War. In order to demonstrate their arguments the authors rely on both primary and secondary sources. *Hiroshima's Shadow* reproduces ample documentations from that

period such as memoranda and excerpts from diaries and criticism of prominent scholars on key aspects of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki story.

The fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the historical exhibit of the Enola Gay produce a turning point in the public debate. On the one hand, for the Americans, the bomb is 'necessary' and 'justified action to end the Second World War and thus saves both casualties and millions of American lives. Also, Hiroshima and Nagasaki cities are legitimate military targets. Furthermore, they claim that the citizens of both cities were warned of the attack. The assault of the Japanese on Pearl Harbor is "a date which will live in infamy", President Franklin D. Roosevelt said. On the other hand, for the Japanese, the bombs represent the "cruellest days in human history" and nostalgia and the survivors suffer "keloids of the heart" and "leukemia" of the spirit." (pp.341) They cannot escape from their shadow, which is in this case, the past. Therefore, one can notice two different types of narratives, triumphal and 'victimization'. Hence, memory is contested.

The Americans and the Japanese continue to live in the Hiroshimas' shadow. For the Americans, the collective memory of the war and the atomic bomb remain a crucial part of the current debate of the history of the Second World War. For the Japanese, the collective memory of the Hiroshima days will always accompany them in their shadows.

Therefore, both are ethically obliged to remember the past events that turned into the present and the future.

There is a clash between memory, the living voice of the past, and history, the reconstruction of the past. The memory of the past is contested and subjective, while history, is both critical as well as universal. However, one may argue that memory can construct history, but history does not essentially contribute and validate memory. Both sides, the Japanese and the Americans are obliged to remember the past events in the way each them experienced. There is no side to blame or to point fingers. It is important to look at our past carefully and learn something elusive, wisdom.