

INTRODUCTION

There are no right words to recount the nuclear holocaust. I feel this after reading thousands of words uttered by survivors of the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and those who have thought much about them. “There is no one who can tell what happened at the hypocenter,” wrote artists Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi.¹ Survivors said they did not know what happened, and that they thought they were dreaming when they saw ghost-like figures staggering in the cities’ flattened landscapes. With their clothes torn and flesh burnt, these women and men were indistinguishable from each other. How do I, a historian born long after 1945, reach out to someone else’s nightmare? For years, most survivors remained silent about their experiences because of pain, fear, anger, or resignation. When they finally began to speak, it seemed impossible to talk about the bomb without altering memories or having them manipulated. What happened was mass, indiscriminate, and senseless death, yet those who listened wanted to distinguish it as worthy. After three quarters of a century, we still grapple with aspects of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that point to a breathtaking disregard for individual lives and human differences. Women and men, children and adults. Civilians and soldiers with varying relationships to the Japanese empire’s mechanisms. All of the Japanese, Koreans, and Americans who perished in these cities.

That the nuclear weapons did not discriminate has raised questions about their morality, generating a large, rich body of work. This book about Japanese American and Korean American survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – US-born US citizens of Japanese ancestry

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who were in Japan in 1945, in addition to Japanese and Korean people who came to America after the war and became US citizens at some point² – belongs to and builds on this genealogy. But my inquiry also diverges from it. This book is not about the morality of the US decision to drop the bomb at the end of World War II, although the subject and its closely related cousins – whether the use of nuclear weapons was legal, politically and militarily necessary, justifiable – continue to fascinate many, including myself. These concerns involve the time leading up to August 1945 and shortly thereafter, and they often revolve around tightly knit circles of politicians, military leaders, and scientists in decision-making positions.³ Although these individuals made the bomb possible in the most immediate sense, they are not paramount to the history of US survivors or in their remembering of the nuclear destruction. For the same reason, this book is not about political constructions or cultural representations of the bomb's meanings, which took shape on both national and international scales in the Pacific region after the war. Though they provide important background for the history I explore and thus will be taken up as such, these political and cultural productions are more often counterpoints against which US survivors' history has formed rather than its encompassing contexts.⁴ Individual remembering always varies and is never a perfect collective memory. For US survivors who have not belonged to the mainstream politics or cultures surrounding the bomb in Korea, Japan, or America, the tension between personal and public memories has been particularly pronounced.

The history of US *hibakusha* is a counter-memory of the bomb – a memory both marginal and resistant to the national remembering in America, Japan, and Korea – and, as such, their stories reveal with a certain clarity the indiscriminate way of nuclear weaponry and its historical consequences.⁵ If, indeed, it is “not the centre that determines the periphery, but the periphery that ... determines the center,”⁶ US survivors' history is a periphery that threatens to disassemble established meanings of the bomb that have not taken notice of it. When told that the bomb was necessary for America to win the war, US *hibakusha* wondered why they, American citizens, had to be attacked. When told that the Japanese government offered free medical treatment of radiation illness among the Japanese, US survivors wondered why their illness did not count. Either way, their experiences refute the assumption that the nuclear weapons were used singularly against enemy nationals. Too,

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their experiences call into question the notion that the bombs used in 1945 were slight in magnitude. As nuclear weaponry specialists tell it, hydrogen bombs developed after the war were many times more destructive than those used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. True as this may be, one troubling consequence of the focus on scientific progress is the endless postponement of a nuclear holocaust into the future.⁷ To be sure, a nuclear destruction may be unique in that it “signifies the simultaneous destruction of . . . whole families, generations, and societies,” hence it “reduc[es] survivors to *barbarism*.”⁸ This may be what separates a nuclear holocaust from other forms of killing; it is a global phenomenon by definition. And yet, because of the belief that its effects in 1945 were relatively contained, the use of nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki has been seen as less indiscriminate than a nuclear catastrophe that may happen in the future. This belief also has allowed us to consider the first and so far only nuclear attacks and their lasting aftermaths mostly in terms of a single nation or in a comparative perspective that assumes relatively clear-cut national boundaries. Frequently, more capacious, cross-national aspects of the bomb have been pushed aside.

US survivors are no less survivors of a nuclear holocaust just because they are not survivors of the worst nuclear holocaust we can imagine. They were affected by it regardless of who they are, sharply illuminating nuclear warfare’s uncontainable effects from its inception in 1945. Because of their comparatively small number (compared to Japanese or Korean survivors) and their unexpected belonging to America, US *hibakusha* and their remembering about the bomb have been severely under-recognized in the scholarship and by the public alike. Particularly in America, where survivors of any nationality have not occupied as prominent a place as scientists, political and military leaders, and cultural critics in the research and writing about the bomb, US survivors have gone virtually unrecognized. The ideology of American justice that shaped the aim of the “Good War,” punctuated by the dropping of the bomb and followed by the opening of the nuclear umbrella over America’s Pacific allies during the Cold War, is still persistent in the twenty-first century.⁹ Consequently, US *hibakusha*’s experiences, raising doubts about the justness of both wars, have occupied little place in national remembering of the bomb. This neglect does a disservice to the richness of their history and of what can be learned from it.

There were an estimated 20,000 American citizens of Japanese ancestry in Japan when the war started between the

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United States and Japan in December 1941.¹⁰ Many of them were children of the first generation, or *Issei*, immigrants who, after living in America for years, came to Japan before the outbreak of the war for reasons ranging from education (of their children) and care (of their aging parents), to retirement (their own). Many of these children – second generation, or *Nisei*, Americans – came to Japan for the first time, unaccompanied by their parents. They came to obtain a few years of education in their relatives' care in Japan while their parents continued to work and raise their families in America. On the US West Coast, where most of the Japanese and Japanese Americans resided, restrictive immigration and naturalization policies were made worse by racist, segregationist practices in housing, work, and education. Sending their children to a school in Japan was a necessity for many of those who cared about their offspring's future.

Of the 20,000 Japanese Americans in Japan in 1941, an estimated 3,000–4,000 were in Hiroshima, a prefecture sending the largest number of Japanese immigrants to Hawai'i and the US mainland since the late nineteenth century. The number of Japanese Americans who were in Nagasaki is unknown, although it was likely smaller than its counterpart in Hiroshima. Of the Japanese Americans located in either of these prefectures, an unknown number were affected by the atomic bomb. Soon after the war's end, the majority of those who survived went back to the United States, their home country across the Pacific. Because they did not come together until 1971 as a group called the Committee of Atomic Bomb Survivors in the United States of America (CABS), their number in the earlier decades is difficult to appraise.¹¹ As of 2007, the total number of Japanese American *hibakusha* residing in the United States was slightly less than 1,000.¹² Of these, US-born US citizens likely made up about half. The other half of the 1,000 living in the United States were Japanese citizens who migrated to America in the 1950s and 1960s and became US citizens at some point. In my estimate, one half of these “new” immigrants, about 250–300, had siblings, relatives, or acquaintances who were US citizens and were in America during the war.¹³ In other words, these “new” immigrants were in fact part of the “old” flow of people going back and forth across the Pacific from the late nineteenth century onward. Taking advantage of “old” connections, these “new” immigrants came to America for jobs, education, or marriage.

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The remaining 250 or so individuals came to America after the war without any prewar family connection to the country. Most of these survivors were Japanese or Koreans who had married Americans in Japan and followed them to the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. Japan was under the Allied Powers' occupation until 1952. Together with the Korean War (1950–1953), the occupation became a major ground for the formation of the anti-communist Cold War alliance on the East Asian front, increasing opportunities for Americans in US institutions, military or otherwise, to meet and, in some cases, marry Japanese or Korean nationals in Japan. An unknown, yet likely very small, number in this group of about 250 survivors were Koreans who came from the Republic of Korea (South Korea)¹⁴ to America when the peninsula country was under the massive influence of the US military. By the early 1950s, about 23,000 of an estimated 30,000 Korean survivors had returned from Japan to South Korea, leaving about 7,000 of their cohort in Japan.¹⁵ Then, some of these returnees decided to cross the sea again, this time the Pacific Ocean toward the United States. As is well known, American military bases remained a fixture in South Korea after the end of the Korean War. International liaisons occurred here, too, with some resulting in Korean nationals who were survivors following their American spouses to the United States. Because of the international, racial, and gender dynamism of the era, the majority of *hibakusha* who came to America either from Japan or South Korea were women, often referred to as “military brides.”¹⁶

To understand the experiences of “military brides,” it is crucial to note that in the racially integrated US army of the Cold War era, Japanese American and Korean American soldiers for the first time served side-by-side with other Americans stationed in a range of locations in Japan and Korea throughout the 1950s and 1960s. For some of the men, military service offered an opportunity to find a future wife, a rare chance to do so for Asian Americans in the pre-*Loving v. Virginia* (1967) era when interracial marriages between white and nonwhite persons were prohibited in many US states. Marriages between Asian and non-Asian minorities were not illegal but deemed socially undesirable. Before the passage of the Hart–Celler Act (1965), the number of Asian immigrants permitted into the United States remained low, hovering at around 100 per country per year. Marrying Japanese or Korean nationals while in service, and bringing them back to America, became one of the more legally feasible and socially acceptable options for Asian

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Americans to build a family.¹⁷ In particular, Japanese American soldiers' quest for spouses was often facilitated by their extended families and friends living in Japan. Again, because Hiroshima had long-standing ties to America through immigration, the courtship often resulted in a marriage between an American man and a Japanese woman who was a survivor. In not a few cases, both a soldier-husband born in America and a civilian-wife born in Japan were survivors, which seems a historical impossibility at first, but was a rather common occurrence made possible by family connections to Hiroshima as a city of immigrants. Simply put, people crossed national borders more frequently than we ordinarily imagine when we think about the bomb. In Nagasaki, too, international liaisons through marriages occurred, though in a number smaller than Hiroshima. Many of the US survivors joined CABS at some point after it was established in the early 1970s. A handful of Korean *hibakusha* who had migrated to America either from Japan or South Korea also came to the organization. Thus, since the beginning, CABS has been open to all US survivors regardless of their national origins.

The history of Asian American survivors traces wars and conflicts that significantly marked the twentieth-century history of the Pacific region. Indeed, as these survivors tell, their experiences of the bomb were intertwined with Japan's colonial rule of Korea, the Asia-Pacific War, and the Korean War. After they returned or came to the United States, their lives in changing Asian American communities continued to be shaped by the Cold War, particularly its heated manifestation in Vietnam. These survivors' history, then, compels us to consider the history of the bomb – and by extension, the morality of the nuclear holocaust – in a longer stretch of time than is usually assumed. Their history tells us that the legitimacy of nuclear weaponry may be considered not only through the immediate circumstances of their use in 1945 but also through lived experiences of those who were affected by the bomb throughout the twentieth century. Moreover, what we learn from their history is not simply the bomb's longer context dotted by wars; in fact, I write against a scholarly convention that makes it easy to collapse a history of minorities into a series of militarily significant incidents. Instead, the counter-memory of the bomb stays at the forefront of my analysis. Despite their small number, US *hibakusha*'s remembering broadly brings to light the twentieth-century history of trans-Pacific immigration through the lens of destruction, loss,

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and illness unique to the nuclear attacks. It is not only that US survivors' history allows us to critically examine the bomb's history without privileging a majority's experiences, as do histories of other minority populations affected by irradiation such as the Marshallese or the Navajo.¹⁸ US survivors' history also urges us to consider the historical and moral meanings of nuclear destruction in the modern world where people move, connect, and become attached across national boundaries. It is in this sense that US *hibakusha*'s history conveys their hope of transcending the nearly unspeakable horrors as well as capturing their remembered desolation. To be sure, the coming and going of immigrants led to family separations and, ultimately, to the devastation of the bomb. US survivors' status as immigrants and racial minorities made it difficult for them to talk about the suffering caused by their own government's actions. As the mainstream view of Asians in America shifted from "aliens ineligible for citizenship" to the "model minority" through the Cold War, they nonetheless remained "perpetual foreigners" who did not belong.¹⁹ In this climate, US *hibakusha* found it necessary to not only heal, but also hide, their radiation illness. This explains, in large part, why it took US survivors until the early 1970s to come together as a self-support group.

And yet, their continuing movement across the ocean has also allowed them to use their trans-Pacific ties to define important aspects of who they are. As they grappled with radiation illness, for example, US survivors sought official recognition, medical care, and financial assistance from both the American and the Japanese governments. As they collaborated with other Asian Americans who supported their appeals to the US government, American survivors formed alliances with Korean, Japanese, and Brazilian survivors to make pleas to the Japanese government. In so doing, US *hibakusha* also joined hands with Japanese supporters of non-Japanese survivors overseas. US survivors certainly defined the lack of recognition as a failure of a nation state, an occurrence unique to a national polity. Simultaneously, however, they also insisted that the problem was cross-national, a failure on the part of all nations to see the universality of survivorhood. Their rights, US survivors claimed, were civil and human rights at once. Their cross-nationality that pieced together the uniqueness and universality of their experiences, I argue, shows the "strengths of weak ties" in the history of immigration in the Pacific region, to use a classic sociological term.²⁰ US *hibakusha*'s trans-Pacific ties are "weak" in that they have relied on small-scale, grassroots

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relations that have not been practiced on a daily basis. For some, their experiences of the bomb have not been central to their identity. And yet, when needs and concerns commonly shared by US survivors arose, they have used their cross-national affinity and affiliation – which are “strong” because of their multiplicity and their ability to relate more interconnectedly – more than did nonimmigrant survivors. These resources unique to immigrants rose to meet the disquieting universality of the nuclear holocaust, even when their prospects were uncertain, their results less than complete. Their history as immigrants pushed them to seek an understanding of nuclear weaponry through not only divisions but also unity.

US *hibakusha*'s history takes shape where the histories of the bomb and of Asian immigration to America intersect, thus they serve as this study's two pillars. As I weave together these histories, a few important focal points emerge. The history of Japanese Americans called *Kibei*, those who were born in the United States, received education in Japan, and returned to America, is one of my study's foci. Many US survivors fell into this group, so my exploration of their social and cultural histories in the early chapters illuminates an understudied aspect of the Asian American experience. Particularly, my focus on their layered national belonging throughout the critical years of the Asia–Pacific, Korean, and Vietnam wars adds to the literature that has largely revolved around autobiographical and biographical accounts of *Kibei*.²¹ Too, the Asian American civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s and, by extension, the memory of wartime Japanese American incarceration that served as one of the movement's driving forces, will become this book's foci in select chapters. These well-known events in Asian American history spurred by racism had a close relationship to US survivors' efforts to obtain access to medical treatment for radiation illness in the United States, something not discussed in either Asian American history or the history of the bomb. Likewise, the rise and fall of antinuclear activism in both Japan and America from the 1950s to the 1980s will be discussed in contrast to US survivors' history that has been colored by silence, invisibility, and neglect. US *hibakusha*'s participation in public rallies for antinuclear causes was almost nonexistent before 1970. When some began to participate in the antinuclear movement in the 1970s, their participation was propelled by the Third World awareness that, indeed, a nuclear holocaust might happen again at the expense of people of color. Even so, US survivors' Asian American background was rarely mentioned in

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mainstream political and cultural discourses throughout these decades, further pushing aside the relevance of the histories of race, immigration, and cross-nationality as a way to understand the bomb.

Korean *hibakusha* in South Korea and Japan, too, will be discussed insofar as their histories have interacted meaningfully with their American counterparts. Until the end of the 1970s, the Japanese government did not begin to recognize Korean survivors living in Korea, severely limiting their access to the medical care and monetary allowances that had been made available to Japanese survivors by the Japanese government. After the decolonization of Korea in 1945, Koreans were not Japanese anymore, allowing the Japanese government to use their Korean nationality as a cover for a tenacious belief about their racial inferiority. As will be shown, both Japan and America had a long history of linking nationalism and racism to enhance state power, continuing discriminatory practices before, during, and after the Asia–Pacific War. Korean *hibakusha*'s demand to finally end these discriminations has inspired US survivors, who also have sought recognition of non-Japanese survivors by the Japanese government. By defining the bomb as a consequence of the “crimes against humanity” committed by the Japanese government during the Asia–Pacific War, Korean survivors brought a fresh force to US *hibakusha*'s activism which, if implicitly, had challenged the perception that the bomb was a “necessary military action” conducted by the US government. In my exploration of these issues, it becomes evident that US survivors' history cannot be told without considering racism and nationalism across the Pacific. Scholars have argued that the US decision to drop the bomb was not principally driven but certainly facilitated by racism, a consensus I value.²² American nationalism and its legacy of colonialism that shaped the nuclear policy in the Pacific region throughout the Cold War, too, has been a frequent subject of scholarly inquiry.²³ But if we consider the bomb's history by including what has been pushed into the periphery, and over a long span of time as I do here, both racism and nationalism reemerge with fresh import. Who has been speaking on US survivors' behalf? Specifically, what were the racial and national compositions of the groups that came to support Asian American survivors? Who has been the chief source of the support – a governmental entity or grassroots organizations? Questions multiply: Who has had the authority to define radiation illness, and to determine what scientific research is to be conducted or what medical treatment is to be offered? Which

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country has taken a responsibility for recognizing, treating, and paying for Asian American survivors? How has this apportionment of responsibility revealed racial and national orders in the Pacific region, and how have they enabled the nuclear proliferation after the war? Answers to these questions are unequivocally shaped by racism and nationalism in Japan, America, and Korea.

The moment when the bomb exploded over Hiroshima or Nagasaki, it affected everyone regardless of age, race, gender, nationality, culture, and individual reasons for being there. Radiation illness and its lasting effects, too, have been indiscriminate. This dual discrimination – not only at the moment of detonation but also in the decades that followed – has separated survivors of the nuclear holocaust from survivors of other mass destructions sociopolitically and medically, most notably in Japan. Simultaneously, this paired indiscriminate has brought *hibakusha* together across many boundaries. Survivors from Japan, Korea, and America have shown a remarkable ability to collaborate, despite their small number, meager resources, and often hostile sociopolitical environment. Equally important as this history of indiscriminate, all sorts of discriminations and distinctions shaped survivors' experiences during the time leading up to the explosion and continuing from that moment on. In the hours and days following the detonation, Japanese Americans used their cultural resources as Americans to find, help, and heal each other. The clothes they wore, the food they ate, and the medicine they used distinctively marked their remembering of the bomb. Korean and Korean American *hibakusha* recalled how they were not given emergency food or care because of their Korean background. The human ability to discriminate in the face of indiscriminate destruction became part of their experiences of illness and injury for many years to come. In this light, it is not surprising that perceived national, cultural, and racial differences among the people of Korea, Japan, and America have exercised influence throughout the bomb's history extending to this day.

Gender, too, has played critical roles, frequently determining ones, in how survivors have formed their identity as sufferers of an indiscriminate destruction and claimed their responses to it as a crucial part of the bomb's history. US *hibakusha* expressed their gender variously – sometimes by attuning to common notions of femininity and masculinity, other times by blurring the line defining the