

Lowe, David, Cassandra Atherton, and Alyson Miller (eds.), *The Unfinished Atomic Bomb: Shadows and Reflections* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2018), 230pp, ISBN: 978-1-4985-5020-8

Remembrance of particularly emotive and world-shaping historical moments invariably invokes strong contestation and bitter dispute which travels down the decades of human history. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki fundamentally altered perceptions, politics, and – most importantly – lives. As with all contentious historical moments, key to the controversy has been the ways in which the bombings have been remembered, contested, and memorialised. Famously, the proposed *Enola Gay* exhibit at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in the mid-1990s provoked a storm of claim and counter claim. Those who sought to place the atomic bombings within a more nuanced historical context were challenged by those who felt that such an exhibition denigrated the legitimacy of U.S. efforts in the Second World War and the sacrifices made by the thousands of Americans who died in the Pacific War.¹ Myths about the atomic bombings, primarily the claim that they saved up to one million American lives, still retain immense historical resonance. For many observers in the United States and beyond, it is these myths about the bombings that sit at the heart of the problematic cultural memory and memorialisation of the events of August 1945.

David Lowe, Cassandra Atherton, and Alyson Miller's edited collection *The Unfinished Atomic Bomb: Shadows and Reflections* looks beyond such endless and unsatisfactory debates to examine the many ways in which memories and memorialisation of the atomic bombings have been shaped, contextualised, received, contested, and remade throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is a genuinely diverse, eclectic collection of writing

¹ Martin Sherwin, 'Hiroshima as Politics and History', *The Journal of American History*, 82:3 (Dec., 1995), 1085-1093

emerging from a wide variety of disciplinary perspectives. It is this very diversity that makes the book both a welcome addition to the scholarship on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and at times a puzzling conundrum.

The volume opens with Peter J. Kuznick's lengthy assessment of the lives and memories of the crews who dropped the bombs, and concludes (appropriately enough) with Robert Jacobs's thoughtful assessment of the politics and memory of seeing in the Hiroshima Peace Park. Kuznick assesses in persuasive detail the ways in which the crews of the *Enola Gay* and *Bockscar* grappled with the contested legacies of their actions in August of 1945. Centring around the frequently controversial figure of Hiroshima mission leader Colonel Paul Tibbets, this lengthy piece parallels and mirrors important recent work on the British Bomber Command personnel's conflicted post-war status in cultural, diplomatic, political, and memory.² On both sides of the Atlantic, public and private memories were critically shaped by the historical context, be it the Cold War, Vietnam, periods of anti-war sentiment, and so forth. Coupled to this was the perennial surrounding discourse of the Second World War as the 'good war', something that saturated (and still saturates) U.S. and UK society, putting figures such as the *Enola Gay* crew in the position of either war criminal or passive victim of a larger military or political system. This extended chapter therefore fits well into an important literature that addresses the troubled identities and memories of wartime aircrew.

Beyond this considered opening, the volume addresses the multifaceted nature of memorialisation through a series of chapters offering distinct perspectives on key issues focusing on the afterlives of the bombings. For example, Carolyn S. Steven's piece on the Japanese Constitution's Article 9 (which outlaws offensive war) illustrates the manner in

² See for example Frances Houghton, *The Veterans' Tale: British Military Memoirs of the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019)

which modern Japanese citizens – politicians and the ‘person in the street’ alike – have shaped, manipulated, and at times softened the memories of wartime Japanese militarism and expansionism. From a different perspective, Alyson Miller offers a succinct, considered assessment of post-war Japanese illustrated children’s books. These, Miller argues, functioned as both a vector of memory and as a stark warning of the horrors of nuclear war to generations increasingly distanced from the events of August 1945.

The conundrum aspect of this volume emerges in chapters such as Adam Broinowski’s, a chapter that seeks to examine the influence of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the contemporary U.S.-North Korea nuclear situation. It is an intriguing case to make, and well worth exploring, although one does wonder if President Donald Trump is even cognisant of what took place on August 6 and 9, 1945? Broinowski makes a bold attempt to connect the atomic bombings, the 1950-53 Korean War, and the current state of international affairs, but the piece is sadly afflicted with a significant number of chronological errors and a lack of substantive evidence to support the core assertions. It is, however, a topic that is eminently worthy of consideration and inclusion in a volume such as this.

Quibbles aside, this is a valuable addition to the scholarship on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It intertwines the post-war struggles of the *Hibakusha*, the anguish and denial of U.S. bomber crews, cultural representation, national and international politics, and concrete commemorative sites in Japan and the United States. It does so in a way that is sensitive to those whose memories are so central to the debates, while interrogating and analysing those memories in a rigorous fashion. As we move towards the 80th anniversaries of the Second World War, works such as *The Unfinished Atomic Bomb* continue to make important

contributions to challenging and assessing the memories and legacies of the twentieth century's most tragic years.