

stated that he was disturbed by the “complacency, the indifference, and the silence with which we greeted the mass bombings in Europe, and, above all, Japan.” He said that he could not feel “exultant” about the bombings of Hamburg, Dresden, and Tokyo. At Potsdam, the secretary of war tried to persuade Truman to pursue a negotiated peace. Stimson refused to be driven by a rage for revenge, and did not want to add unnecessarily to the horror of the war.

Four days after the bombing of Hiroshima, Stimson reflected on the tragedy of the avoidable killing of so many people. In his diary, he recalled how at Potsdam he had advocated the “continuance” of the emperor with certain conditions. But “the President and Byrnes struck that out” of the Potsdam Declaration. Then Stimson noted the terrible influence of stereotypes: “There has been a good deal of uninformed agitation against the Emperor in this country mostly by people who know no more about Japan than has been given them by Gilbert and Sullivan’s ‘Mikado,’ and I found today that curiously enough it had gotten deeply embedded in the minds of influential people in the

State Department.” That day, the United States accepted an offer from Japan to surrender that implicitly allowed the emperor to remain.

Today, in our increasingly multicultural society, Hiroshima continues to intrude upon our consciousness: it is a past that is not even past, to borrow from Faulkner. The bombing of Hiroshima was the culmination of a crossing to a new level of international violence: the rules of warfare had been radically redefined during World War II. Recognizing this horror, Truman and Stimson experienced painful ambivalence: they sensed the tragic meaning of the destruction they were helping to unleash. They possessed a complexity of thought and a broad range of feelings that many of us, like my colleague at the conference, seem to lack. They had a perspective on the moral issue of war—what the acceptable conduct of warfare was *before* Hiroshima. Whether we will be able to recover that memory remains a challenge. Still we must make the effort—to examine as many of the facts as possible and also to make our own moral judgments about Hiroshima. Not to do so is to avoid responsibility.

Michael Walzer

Though I have argued for many years that the American use of atomic bombs against Japanese cities was wrong, I do not find myself much engaged by one of the questions it raises: should U.S. leaders apologize now to the Japanese people for what we did in 1945? Nor by the questions raised recently in Japan about apologies to the Korean and Chinese people. The wrongs that were done need to be admitted and confronted, but official apologies somehow seem an inadequate, perhaps even a perfunctory, way of doing this. Better, I think, that the U.S. government devote itself to creating the conditions for nuclear disarmament or, more immediately, to stopping the slaughter of civilians in places where we have influence or power. Better that the Japanese government act

strongly against anti-Korean prejudice and discrimination in contemporary Japan.

As Ian Buruma reports in his new book *The Wages of Guilt*, a large number of the victims of the Hiroshima bombing were Korean slave laborers at work in the city—who are unmentioned in any of the Japanese memorials. Surely Japan’s leaders should address that piece of their history before carrying diplomatic regrets to Seoul. Our own very belated decision to pay reparations to Japanese families interned during World War II is morally more important than any message that President Clinton might deliver even in Hiroshima itself.

But maybe this question about apology is simply a way of stirring up debate and reflection here

at home. And that is certainly a good thing to do (it is, perhaps, what the original Smithsonian exhibition on the Enola Gay should have been designed to do—instead of arguing, as it apparently did, for a single moral/political position). A public debate, not only about Hiroshima and Nagasaki but also about the fire-bombing of Tokyo and Dresden, about total war and the U.S. role (and other countries' role) in creating it, would be an event of real importance in our political history. Not just liberal breast-beating, which would be no event at all, but a many-sided argument in books, magazines, reviews, exhibits, documentaries, talk shows, and classrooms. We insist often enough that other countries need to come to grips with their past. But the morality of memory applies to us too.

There is one argument in favor of using or, better, since it's a retrospective argument, in justification of having used the bomb that seems to me still worth considering (I have never written about it). The argument is that the reason nuclear weapons have not been used since 1945 is that they were used then. The bombings did not break down a moral limit or set a precedent for the future, as critics at the time argued they would do. Quite the contrary: nuclear terrorism has, so far, had no copycats. The Japanese civilians who lived in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were, on this view, the innocent victims of a (probably unintended) deterrent strategy that worked. Their deaths and injuries were so awful and so frightening that any rational political leader would have to think a long time before doing anything like that again. This may well be true, and if it is, we might describe this outcome as Harry Truman's moral luck: that what he did in 1945, however horrifying at the time, turned out to have long-term benefits. ("Moral luck" is a term philosophers use to suggest that our judgments of political actors are affected by circumstances that don't depend on their good or bad intentions.)

But this argument can't be very comforting to Americans, for what the people who make it are almost certainly thinking is that if we had not used the bomb against Japan, we would have used it in Korea or Vietnam or, though this seems less likely

because so much more dangerous, pre-emptively against the Soviet Union. For those were the next occasions, and we were the great power most ready with advanced weapons and accurate delivery systems. Robert McNamara's Vietnam memoir makes it clear that top American military officers wanted to use the bomb against the North in the late 1960s or, at least, to consider using it; it was the civilian leaders, Truman's heirs, who refused even to think about it.

So the deterrence argument amounts to saying that had we not acted wrongly in the forties, we would probably have acted wrongly in the fifties and sixties—and, again, at least in the Korean and Vietnamese cases, at moments when there was no threat to our own territory or population. We would now have different memories to work through (but memories of the same sort) and other necessary public debates to organize.

I have my own vivid memory of marching with a gang of kids through the streets of the Pennsylvania town where I lived in 1945, beating a drum (or, more likely, banging a pot) and shouting in celebration of the news from Hiroshima. I can't report that my own celebration—I was ten years old—was shadowed by moral anxiety. I can't even claim that what I felt was relief, like American soldiers in the Pacific, who had immediate and personal reasons to rejoice, since it was now virtually certain that the war would end without any further risk to their lives. In Pennsylvania, by contrast, that August day was simply a moment of triumph and exaltation. When they touch people who are not children, such moments are dangerous.

St. Augustine argued somewhere that just wars should always be fought by melancholy soldiers, who would not be tempted by war's excitements and who would understand that even triumphs we are right to welcome can be tainted by the means with which they are won. But that is a hard prescription, and I doubt that many American soldiers, or civilians, paused even for a moment in 1945 to mourn Hiroshima's dead. That, at least, is something we ought to be able to do fifty years later. □