

## **Hiroshima Films: Cultural Contexts Before, During, and After the Cold War**

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### **Abstract**

Remarkably, Hollywood has produced only three Hiroshima films – *The Beginning or the End* (1947), *Above and Beyond* (1952), and *Fat Man & Little Boy* (1989). Considering the number of Hollywood films about World War II, it is clearly significant that so few have been produced about an historical event that significantly changed history. Surprisingly, television has outdone Hollywood producing four Hiroshima films and numerous documentaries. This paper explores the multiple cultural/societal pressures, perspectives, interests, and concerns that influenced the production of Hiroshima films. In addition to the U.S. produced Hiroshima films two non-U.S. films are examined: *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (FR, 1959) and *Black Rain* (JP, 1989). By investigating other cultural/political viewpoints, the American perspective comes more into focus. What emerges is a highly charged atmosphere of thoughts, emotions and reactions that reveals a subject fraught with perplexing moral ambiguities. A spectrum of cultural forces pushes and pulls against each other ranging from ethical concerns, political/military justifications, communism fears, and anti-war, anti-nuclear stances. Several primary sources are referenced in order to highlight the historical distortions and/or accuracies. They include the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation's

Hiroshima Witness oral history program, *Hiroshima Diary* by Dr. Michihiko Hachiya, and videoed statements by the pilot and co-pilot of the *Enola Gay*, the Hiroshima B 29 bomber. To date, American cinema pays lip service to the moral questions surrounding the decision to drop the bomb but is not the core concern as it is in many foreign films. American Hiroshima films emphasize military organization, technological superiority, and scientific ingenuity deemphasizing the impact of the bomb on human relationships, families, and communities.

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## Introduction

The documentary *The Atomic Bomb: The End or the Beginning?* starts with the following statement:

Our nation's use of the atomic bomb remains one of the most controversial and emotional issues of World War II. Americans born before 1940, in general, cannot comprehend how anyone could be critical of President Truman's decision to end the war. Those born after 1945, growing up in the Cold War, wonder if there was not a better alternative (Kaye, 2003).

A film's creation and content often reflects society's current viewpoints, interests, and concerns (Evans, 1998). Hollywood films are produced to make a profit. As a result, economic pressures influence the selection of images, themes, and dialogue. Many of the Hiroshima films take a U.S. military-political point of view. Often script changes were made in order to receive military equipment and Pentagon expertise (Evans, 1998).

Another overt pressure, especially in the 1950s, was the House on Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC).

By examining eight Hiroshima films spanning the years 1947 through 1990, multiple cultural/societal pressures, perspectives, interests, and concerns will be brought to light. Before the Cold War, before 1949 when the Soviet Union successfully exploded their first atomic bomb, there was one Hiroshima film, *The Beginning or the End?* (1947).

During the Cold War, 1947 – 1988, three Hiroshima films were made: *Above and Beyond* (1952), *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), and *Enola Gay: The Men, the Mission, the Atomic Bomb* (1980 TV Movie).

From 1989 to 1990, leading up to the forty-fifth anniversary of the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, four films were produced. Three were American

productions, *Fat Man and Little Boy* (1989), *Day One* (1989 TV Miniseries), and *Hiroshima, Out of the Ashes* (1990 TV Movie). *Black Rain* (1989) was a Japanese production.

*Enola Gay*, *Day One* and *Hiroshima: Out of the Ashes* were made for television movies. *Fat Man and Little Boy* was the last Hollywood film on Hiroshima. The number one grossing film of 1989, the same year that *Fat Man and Little Boy* was released, was *Indian Jones and the Last Crusade* bringing in 200,000,000 million. In stark contrast, *Fat Man and Little Boy* grossed only 3.5 million. It lost money. The set construction alone ran over 2 million. The television productions fared better. *Day One* won a primetime Emmy and *Hiroshima, Out of the Ashes* was nominated for two primetime Emmys.

#### Before the Cold War

By 1946, only a few months after the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, stories of the public's concerns about the dangers of atomic power pervaded the newspapers, magazines, and radio broadcasts. *Life* magazine called the splitting of the atom the "biggest event since the birth of Christ" (1947). Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) began production on *The Beginning or the End?* in 1946. This first Hiroshima film combined docudrama with romance making a fictitious Manhattan Project scientist the hero.

Almost from the beginning, MGM ran into conflicts and controversies that had nothing to do with any moral or ethical concerns by the producers (Evans, 1998). By choosing the docudrama genre, director Norman Taurog was forced by legal requirements that no longer exist "to depict living, well-known public figures" only after

securing their written permission (p. 28). The film's creative control was not completely in the hands of the director and producer. They were forced to haggle final script approval with the Pentagon and Manhattan Project scientists without forfeiting "dramatic license in the depiction of events for maximum box-office draw" (p. 28).

Specifically, MGM chose to exercise dramatic license by showing the United States in a desperate race to build the first atomic bomb against both Japan and Germany. The Atomic Scientist Movement opposed the further development of atomic weapons. When they found out about the blatant inaccuracy, they withdrew their support for the film. Fortunately for MGM, senior Manhattan Project scientists Robert Oppenheimer and Leo Szilard had already received fees for the film's endorsement reportedly for as high as \$10,000 (Evans, 1998).

Still, many senior Manhattan Project officials protested the film's propaganda approach. Eventually, MGM compromised, allowing for the ethical questioning of the creation and use of the bomb by Matt, the main character. MGM received little if any disapproval from the White House and the War Department. The Pentagon determined that the film adequately portrayed military personnel, procedures, interest, and events (Suid, 1978). Since much of the Manhattan Project details remained top secret, MGM cooperated with the military to insure that nothing compromised U.S. security.

William S. Parsons, assistant chief of naval operations at the Pentagon, reviewed the final script. Parsons was the naval officer who activated the atomic bomb aboard the *Enola Gay*. He disagreed with the ethical concerns expressed by Matt. The tug of war between the military justification for the bomb and the ethical concerns of scientists and others was not resolved by the time MGM wanted to start filming. MGM refused to

make any further changes and the Pentagon did not attempt to force any more script changes.

Another dramatic license in the film was used to “help alleviate American guilt for destroying a target composed mainly of civilians, so that this ‘entertainment film’ would not oppressively burden and alienate the audience it hoped to attract” (Evans, 1998, p. 31-32). Historically inaccurate, the film shows a U.S. plane dropping leaflets warning the Hiroshima civilians of the coming disaster.

For the most part, *The Beginning or the End?* justifies the use of the atomic bomb in the context of World War II propaganda. One line of dialogue expresses the consensus of opinion about the bomb in 1945 as a “necessary evil, less destructive than the prolongation of the war.” Another line confirms the pro-military/government stand when after the first successful test of the bomb a character says, “Now it seems certain we can hurry the end of the war ... a year less of war will save thousands of lives.”

However, what remains clearly unique about this pre-Cold War Hiroshima film is the constant raising of ethical questions about the creation of the bomb and its use. A short exchange between President Franklin Roosevelt and Vannevar Bush who represented the Manhattan Project scientists, illustrates this perspective.

ROOSEVELT: Atomic energy on the loose could open the way for destruction of all civilization.

BUSH: The development of atomic weaponry is inevitable, if not by this country, they by some other.

ROOSEVELT: Do you have any idea how far Hitler’s scientists have progressed?

BUSH: They’re probably ahead of us.

Despite the ongoing tug of war between ethics and government propaganda, MGM’s priority was the film’s commercial success. In order to attract a female

audience, they introduced a romantic subplot. During the war, Hollywood released “a glut of male-dominated combat films” (Doherty, 1993, p. 153). Consequently, the female audience stayed away. MGM would try to avoid that mistake by emphasizing the romance between Matt and his bride.

Making a scientist the main character and the hero of the war was unique to all other Hiroshima films to follow. As a pre-Cold War Hiroshima film, *The Beginning or the End?* did what could not be done in the Cold War Hiroshima films, give the spotlight to the atomic scientists. They are portrayed as the characters most in control while the military characters play a secondary role and often appear buffoon-like in comparison to the responsible and more reasonable scientists (Evans, 1998). General Leslie Groves, the head of the Manhattan Project, has a fictional subordinate who is portrayed as an opportunist and a womanizer. The actual General Groves “would not have tolerated it in the corps of engineers” (Reingold, 1984, p. 161).

In order to counterbalance the audience’s expected negative reaction to the difficult moral issues surrounding the atomic bomb, MGM released the film as a B picture giving it second billing to the Red Skelton comedy *Merton of the Movies* (Evans, 1998). Despite the second billing, the film failed at the box-office. At least seventy-five films grossed more in 1947 (Variety, 1947). In recent years, however, *The Beginning or the End?* has reached a large audience since it is shown regularly on TCM (Turner Classic Movies). It is also available for viewing at the UCLA Film & Television Archive.

### During the Cold War

Three Hiroshima films were produced during the Cold War. Two took a decidedly pro-American, pro-Nuclear bomb, pro-military perspective. The other weighed in on the side of peace, anti-nuclear bomb, and an end to the arms race between the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. The polarizing forces between the soul searching scientists weighing in against the further use of the atomic bomb and the political/military viewpoint advocating the strategic use of the bomb found a reincarnation in separate films rather in a single film.

Just five years after releasing *The Beginning or the End?* MGM produced another Hiroshima film, *Above and Beyond* (1952). The film business and the world had changed drastically in those few years. Besides wanting to make money at the box-office, MGM wanted to reduce the government's scrutiny of Hollywood. The House on Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) suspected Hollywood of Communist sympathizing. MGM attempted to waylay those suspicions by producing a movie that showed the bomb as an "indispensable weapon for national defense" (Evans, 1989, p. 47).

The political, social, and cultural atmosphere in the United States was decidedly different in the early 1950s than in the mid to late 1940s. Besides the Cold War nuclear arms race between the U.S. and the Soviets, the Korean War was in full swing. As a consequence, *Above and Beyond* does not reflect the historic context that *The Beginning or the End?* did. Rather, it has other motivations stemming from the cultural influences of the early 1950s.

The hero spotlight of *Above and Beyond* makes a complete shift away from the ethical scientist as hero to the military hero whose devotion to country goes "above and



beyond the call of duty.” The action centers on Colonel Paul Tibbets, the pilot of the *Enola Gay* and the leader of the B29 squadron responsible for dropping the atomic bombs on Japan. With Hollywood and the Pentagon joining forces to show the military industrial complex as the best deterrent to the Communist menace, the military became directly involved in script development (Evans, 1989).

MGM hired Colonel Tibbets as a script consultant. His stance on dropping the first atomic bomb was made clear in the 2005 BBC documentary *Hiroshima*. “I was not thinking about the people who got killed or hurt. I was thinking about the people who did not get killed or hurt.” Tibbets’s personal point of view is reflected in the film and aligns with the Cold War agenda. During the Cold War the moral justification for the bomb had to do with the survival of the American way of life.

This Cold War justification is reflected in *Above and Beyond* when Lucy, Colonel Tibbets’s wife, says: “Somewhere at this very moment bombs are being dropped and children are being killed” (1hr. 11). Tibbets’s response is swift and intense:

Lucy, don’t ever say that again. Look, let’s clear one little piece of morality right now. It’s not bombs alone that are horrible, but war. War is what is wrong, not weapons. Sure innocent people are being killed, but to lose this war to the gang we’re fighting would be one of the most immoral things we could do to those kids in there [their two boys are asleep in their bedroom].

This time MGM incorporates the love story subplot from the beginning. In fact, *Above and Beyond* is told from Lucy’s viewpoint. She is portrayed as the loyal, devoted, endlessly suffering wife who stands behind her man despite the forced separation from her husband. She cannot compete with his duty to country. She comments in voice over, “In five years of marriage we were only together seven weeks” (17:00).

Tibbets is portrayed as a man who places military commitments before his own life, wife, and children. He is unwavering and stoic from start to finish as evidenced by the following exchange (29 min. 30):

GENERAL: No one's ever dropped an atomic bomb before. I can't give you any guarantee you'll come back.

TIBBETS: A guarantee didn't come with the uniform.

In polar contrast to the strong, unwavering military hero, the film's atomic scientists are portrayed as weak and unable to make important and critical decisions. Matt, the wise, responsible, and ethical scientist hero from *The Beginning or the End?* has been reduced to indecisiveness and incompetence.

An example of this is shown when a group of Manhattan Project scientists are asked when the bomb will be ready (1 hr. 21):

SCIENTIST: Hard to say, maybe months ...

TIBBETS: A lot of men can die in a month.

SCIENTIST: Then the responsibility for its use must be completely and solely yours.

“From 1945 through 1947, the prevailing attitude toward members of the scientists' movement (against the bomb proliferation) had been approval and admiration, but by the end of 1947 such admiration had faded” (Boyer, 1985, p. 30). By 1949, opinion polls found growing public sentiment against atomic scientists. This decline in public favor is attributed to the conflict between what the scientists had to say about the hazards of A-bomb development and the Atomic Energy Commission's positive portrayal of atomic energy (Boyer, 1985).

The next Cold War Hiroshima film was released in 1959, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. Directed by Alain Resnais, it was originally commissioned by the French government to

be a documentary about the horrors of Hiroshima. But after traveling to Hiroshima to do some research and scout out some locations, Resnais decided to do a narrative film.

Apparently, he changed his mind about doing a documentary after seeing several Japanese documentaries that he felt were “interesting and substantial”(Kolbowski, 2007, p. 81).

Ironically, while the film was being written and produced, France was preparing to detonate their first nuclear bomb in the Sahara desert. On June 17, 1958, French President Charles de Gaulle authorized the nuclear test (France’s Nuclear Weapons, 2001). The bomb was detonated on February 13, 1960. An even deeper irony was that during this time B 52 bombers loaded with atomic bombs were in the air 24/7.

*Hiroshima Mon Amour* takes a dramatically different perspective from both *The Beginning or the End?* and *Above and Beyond*. There are no scientists or military heroes. Instead, there is a Japanese man and a French woman who are lovers for 24 hours in Hiroshima. Both remain nameless throughout the film.

The woman is an actress who is in Hiroshima portraying a nurse in an anti-nuclear bomb film. The Japanese man appears Westernized. After the war (he was a soldier during the war), he went to the university and became an architect. He asks, “Why are you in Hiroshima?” She replies, “To make a film” (16:30). During this conversation she tells him it is a film about peace and that it is an international production and not solely a French film. She concludes their exchange by making a sarcastic remark: “If they make films to sell soap, why not films to sell peace.” The man responds, “In Hiroshima we don’t joke about peace” (30:00).

The anti-nuclear bomb, pro-peace perspective resonates with the Atomic Scientist Movement. It was formed by a group of antimilitary Manhattan Project alumni who hoped to educate the public about the dangers of atomic weapons. Matt, the scientist main character in *The Beginning or the End?*, expresses similar moral reservations as the scientists against nuclear proliferation (Evans, 1998).

It is important to point out that Resnais was a director involved in the French New Wave movement of the 1950s and 60s. It was made up of “a loosely knit group of French filmmakers who brought new and often subversive styles, visions ... and politics to commercial cinema” (Brown, 2003, p. 75). *Hiroshima Mon Amour* does not focus on the development, creation, and dropping of the bomb. For the first time a Hiroshima film places the focus on the bomb’s aftermath and the bomb survivors or what the Japanese call hibakusha.

The French woman tells about her visit to the hospital where bomb victims are suffering from radiation sickness more than a decade after the initial blast. She goes into some detail describing her visit to Hiroshima Museum. The visuals reflect the horrific experiences of the Japanese civilians. There are images of twisted and burned iron, petrified bottle caps, photos of bomb victim’s burns and scars, and “human skin hanging free and still writhing” (4:30).

When the peace film is being shot, the film within the film, there are images of Japanese children walking in a parade each carrying a photograph of a civilian who died in the atomic blast. Others in the parade carry placards with large photos of hibakusha who expose their gruesome burns (34:00).

*Hiroshima Mon Amour* was nominated for an Academy Award in 1961 for Best Writing, Story, and Screenplay written directly for the screen. Although it did not win, it was the only Hiroshima film to be nominated for an Academy Award. The Cannes Film Festival and the Directors Guild of America nominated Alain Resnais for Best Director in 1959 and 1961 respectively. The French Syndicate of Cinema Critics awarded *Hiroshima Mon Amour* Best Film in 1960 (IMDb Pro). The recognition and awards points to the fact that the American military's Cold War support of Hiroshima films featuring strong military heroes was not the only voice being heard.

Another thing that *Hiroshima Mon Amour* does that previous Hiroshima films did not do is open up emotional channels to the horrors and consequences of dropping the first atomic bomb. The previous black and white docudramas with their matter of fact approach did not deal with the deeper emotional and psychological impacts. Andrew Sarris concluded in his review for *The Village Voice* with:

Even if it is too early to tell where *Hiroshima Mon Amour* will stand in the artistic evolution of the cinema, and let us hope this is the beginning rather than the culmination, no other film of our time so graphically reflects the alienation of individual sensibility from the brutal processes of history (Sarris, 1960).

More than twenty years elapsed between Cold War Hiroshima films. *Enola Gay* (1980) was a made-for-television movie based on the book by Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan Witts. It tells the story of Colonel Paul Tibbets (played by Patrick Duffy of *Dallas* television show fame) and the training of the 509<sup>th</sup> bomber squadron. *Enola Gay* takes a patriotic and militaristic tone from start to finish that is similar to the other Tibbets semi-biographical film *Above and Beyond*. One big difference between them is

the *Enola Gay* does not give as much attention to the relationship between Tibbets and his wife Lucy as does *Above and Beyond*.

The film's opening dedication superimposed over the U.S. Air Force Seal is a throwback to World War II combat films. In 1980, Ronald Reagan runs for President and wins. The Cold War is in full swing. In 1982, Reagan gives his "Evil Empire" speech about the Soviet Union and the Communists. The military man is the hero of World War II and by association the Cold War.

Accompanied by the hackneyed military snare drum and trumpet, the film's opening dedication rolls:

On December 7, 1941  
 The United States was attacked,  
 And so entered a war against  
 The Empire of Japan and  
 The Third Reich of Nazi Germany.  
 It was a war of liberation  
 Fought under the Banner of Freedom.  
 Young men, mostly civilians  
 Willingly left their families  
 And the way of peace,  
 Put on uniforms  
 And went to far off battlefields  
 To fight and sometimes die  
 For their good cause.  
 This is the true story  
 Of a group of those young men  
 Who went to war,  
 Bravely did their duty  
 And, in their innocence,  
 Changed all of human history.

Here the film's perspective and theme are summarized in the opening dedication. Terms like "Banner of Freedom," "good cause," "duty," and "innocence" tends to eliminate any doubt about the morality of dropping the bom. From beginning to end, any questioning of the use of the bomb is quickly opposed. For example, in the film's first

scene General Groves says, “You boys have pulled off a miracle.” When J. Robert Oppenheimer, lead scientist on the Manhattan Project, expresses doubt about where the miracle will lead, Groves responds with a tone of obviousness, “Why, to the end of the war” (3:0).

The film crosscuts between two primary locations, the Wendover Air Force base in Utah where the 509<sup>th</sup> trained for the Hiroshima mission and a Hiroshima, Japan military base. The film gives a cursory Japanese perspective that other U.S. Hiroshima films had not explored. By 1980, Japan was central to the United States Cold War effort hosting Air Force bases for nuclear bombers. In addition, Japan was an economic power rivaling the United States for capitalistic prowess. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that by emphasizing that Hiroshima was mainly a military center the fact that Hiroshima was a major city with several hundred thousand civilians is deemphasized.

A third perspective gives the film an air of authenticity that could be seen as highly manipulative and propagandistic. Several Paramount World War II newsreels are strategically placed throughout the film. The first comes at the 14:30 mark. The newsreels provide a simplistic good versus evil viewpoint emphasizing the heavy American casualties and making it easy to justify the dropping of the atomic bomb.

*Enola Gay* claims to be a true story. Obviously, Hollywood and made-for-television production companies take dramatic license. However, there is a scene with FDR where the moral question of using the bomb or not takes place at the White House. FDR asks Colonel Tibbets, “What are your moral convictions?” Tibbets responds, “I believe we are morally bound to end this war as soon as possible with every weapon at

our disposal” (1 hr. 5). Roosevelt reacts by saying, “I’m inclined to agree with this position.”

The film insinuates that FDR, not Truman, made the decision to drop the bomb. Again, any moral debate or doubt about using the bomb is squelched. The Roosevelt popularity and prestige trumps Truman’s. Some historians question whether Roosevelt would have succumbed to the pressure to use the bomb (Perrine, 1998).

Even after the film is over a credit sequence tells the audience what happened to each of the main characters in the ensuing years. Again, this hammers the film’s pro-American, pro-bomb, and pro-military theme that a “brave and patriotic crew carried out a necessary mission to end the war” (p. 55). The end credits give further credence that *Enola Gay* is a “true story.”

#### After the Cold War

On October 11 and 12, 1986 President Ronald Reagan and Secretary-General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev met in Reykjavik, Iceland. Although the talks collapsed, the progress made eventually led to the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Berlin Wall, the symbol of the Cold War, fell on November 9, 1989. By December of 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, breaking up into fifteen separate states. The Cold War came to an abrupt end after more than forty years.

In the two years 1989 and 1990 four Hiroshima films were produced, as many as all the previous Hiroshima films produced before and during the Cold War. With the threat of nuclear war between the two super powers waning, film producers seemed to see a renewed interest in what terrified the world for decades.



*Fat Man and Little Boy* (1989), produced by Paramount, is a “conventional Hollywood movie in that relationships between the characters are more important than the historical events” (Perrine, 1998, p. 30). This Hiroshima film is less pseudo-documentary than *The Beginning or the End?*, *Above and Beyond*, and *Enola Gay*, and more narrative driven.

Jerome F. Shapiro in his book *Atomic Bomb Cinema* writes that *Fat Man and Little Boy* is a remake of *The Beginning or the End?* (Shapiro, 2002). A critical viewing of both films reveals similarities, but not because *Fat Man and Little Boy* is a remake. Rather, it is because both cover the same historical material.

The military hero once again takes the central role as in both *Above and Beyond* and *Enola Gay*. However, instead of focusing on Colonel Paul Tibbets, it centers on General Leslie Groves, the head of the Manhattan Project. The theme of the all-sacrificing military man who gives up everything for his country persists. Groves has no personal life. His wife and family are never introduced. He refers to his wife as a “good wife.” This implies that she is obedient, does not ask any questions, and keeps her mouth shut.

Academy Award winning actor Paul Newman portrays General Groves. It is interesting to note that Newman was a “long-time arms-control activist” (Perrine, 1998, p. 60). He plays Groves as an infantile, single-minded, egomaniac who dominates, cajoles, and manipulates Dr. Oppenheimer throughout the film.

Oppenheimer appears to be the mad scientist driven to create the first atomic bomb without struggling with the moral issues implicit in its creation. The image of the mad scientist is visually stamped on the audience’s psyche when the first test bomb is

successfully detonated in the New Mexico desert. As Oppenheimer witnesses the apocalyptic explosion, his goggles reflect the light of the sun and his face ripples from the 1,000 miles per hour winds generated by the blast.

On the moral issue, whenever Oppenheimer has doubts about finishing the Manhattan Project, Groves steps in barking and biting like a stereotypical dictatorial general. For example, after Germany surrenders, Oppenheimer questions, “If we don’t need it, why make it?” (1 hr.12). Originally, the Manhattan Project was started to develop a bomb before the Germans did. Groves responds by pushing Oppenheimer, “Just the threat and they’re ours.”

When the Chicago scientists write a petition arguing against the dropping of the bomb, Oppenheimer tells Groves, “It’s a crisis of conscience.” Groves responds, “You have one job doctor. Give me the bomb.” Oppenheimer does superficially question the morality of the bomb. But Groves angrily responds, “Moral? Was Pearl Harbor Moral? Poland, Munich, the Death March to Bataan? Was that moral? (1 hr. 26). Oppenheimer finally washes his hands of the whole thing when he says, “We’re not responsible for its use.”

The voice of reason and conscience in this film comes out in Dr. Richard Schoenfield, a fictional Los Alamos medical doctor. He has just lost his best friend, nuclear scientist Michael Merriman, to radiation poisoning. Schoenfield confronts Oppenheimer about the secrecy and security surrounding Los Alamos and the Manhattan Project. “I think it’s to keep it (the bomb) from American Jacks and Jills (1 hr. 45).

This triggers a rapid exchange between them.

OPPENHEIMER: The American people don’t want to know what’s going on. They

want to know that their sons are alive. I'm doing everything in my power to see that they do.

SCHOENFIELD: They are injecting the mentally ill with huge doses of plutonium at Oakridge. I've seen it.

OPPENHEIMER: I don't know about that. But will it be big enough to stop all wars forever? If you want to ask a question, ask that.

SCHOENFIELD: Oakridge isn't building two or three bombs it is set up to build thousands. Hey, Oppenheimer, Oppenheimer you ought to stop playing God.

*Fat Man and Little Boy* does not end with the bombing of Hiroshima. Instead, the individual losses of the central characters are emphasized especially the scientist who developed the bomb. The devastating effects of the bomb on the civilians of Hiroshima are not shown or even mentioned.

*Day One* based on the book of the same title by Peter Wyden was also released in 1989. Aaron Spelling (famed *Charlie's Angels* producer) produced it as a made-for-television movie. It takes a wider, more comprehensive look at the Manhattan Project with a significantly more ethical element than *Fat Man and Little Boy*. General Leslie Groves once again is the central military character. Brian Dennehy plays Groves as dominating, single-minded, and cowboyish, much like Newman's Groves.

Groves takes the status quo position that "if we succeed, we'll win the war and save countless American lives" (38:00). Throughout the film, Groves justifies the development and dropping of the bomb. For example, at a meeting in Washington, D.C where government and military leaders gather to discuss the issues around using the bomb, Groves argues that the Japanese will never surrender. He reminds them how 22,000 Japanese civilians in Saipan committed suicide rather than be captured.

After the bomb was successfully tested in New Mexico he says, “We developed a weapon that can end this war and save thousands and thousand of American lives. Isn’t that something? His aide responds, “It’s amazing General.” Groves replies like a cowboy gunslinger. “It sure as shootin is” (2 hrs. 8).

The Chicago scientists led by Leo Szilard, the film’s man of conscience, submit a petition against the use of the bomb. Groves suppresses it and comments as if he thinks he is the Commander in Chief not President Truman. “I’ve got all the authority I need to drop the bomb” (2 hr 8).

The film begins with Szilard leaving Berlin in order to escape the Nazis. “I take Hitler seriously” (5:33). He continues his chain reaction research in America. He wants to make sure the Nazis do not develop and use an atomic bomb first. Several times throughout the film Szilard expresses his concerns about the bomb’s creation. After an initial experiment he reflects, “The world is headed for trouble; the world is headed for grief” (8:45). Later, he comments after the successful test of the first nuclear reactor, “This day will go down in history as a black mark against mankind” (32:00). When Germany surrenders he reacts, “This changes everything. As men of conscience we must now prevent America from dropping the bomb on someone else” (1 hr 15).

“*Day One* expresses concerns for the possibility of an arms race that the historical figures mostly lacked” (Perrine, 1998, p. 58). In the context of 1989, the threat of nuclear war had been a menacing reality for decades and the film takes dramatic license by playing on that fear. Szilard goes to Albert Einstein expressing his concern that, “If we drop the bomb we’ll start an arms race” (1 hr 18). After Roosevelt dies, Szilard requests a meeting with Truman. “We know Russia will become an atomic power soon. Russia

will build bombs in an arms race that will end in both Russia and America being destroyed” (1 hr 27).

One major difference in *Day One* from other Hiroshima films with powerful military protagonists is that some military leaders disagree with using the bomb. This more than likely would have been impossible in an American made Hiroshima film before the end of the Cold War. General Marshall warns, “The implications of the bomb go far beyond the implications of the present war”(1 hr 32). General Eisenhower expresses his concern. “Japan is already defeated. Dropping the atomic bomb is completely unnecessary. We don’t need to do it to save American lives” (2 hr 9). Admiral Leahy insists that “the Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender” and that by using the bomb America has “adopted ethical standards common to the barbarians of the dark ages” (2 hr 16).

Unlike *Fat Man and Little Boy*, *Day One* does end by recognizing the horrendous consequences and devastation caused by the atomic blast. The Los Alamos scientists watch slides showing the physical devastation and human casualties caused by the bomb. Many of the photos had not been readily available to the general public before (Mitchell, 2010). As the scientists watch, the camera captures their anguished looks and remorse. One scientist is sickened by the sight and leaves the room to throw up. Robert Oppenheimer, the leader of the Los Alamos scientists, observes, “the reaction has begun” (2 hr 15).

The Japanese film *Black Rain* (1989) takes an even more sobering perspective on the horrific effects on the Japanese A-bomb victims and survivors. The film was shot in black and white during a time when most were shot in color. The central characters are

Shige, his wife Shigeko, and their niece Yasuko. They experience the flash, the blast, and the radioactive black rain.

For the first time on film, the agonies of the bomb victims are reenacted in visceral detail. Two sequences, one from 4 minutes to 12 minutes and another from 33 minutes to 46 minutes, graphically portray what happened to Japanese civilians after the flash. There are images of people in the throes of death, hands and arms held away from the body with dripping flesh, carbonized bodies, children crying for their mothers, and dead bodies floating in the Ota River.

These images accurately reflect the oral history created and preserved by the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation. Starting in 1986, they have recorded the testimonies of the bomb victims, the hibakusha. Every year the testimony of 50 hibakusha have been recorded and edited into 20-minute segments per person. This collection is titled “Hiroshima Witness – Hibakusha Testimony and can be found on the following website:

[http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/virtual/VirtualMuseum\\_e/visit\\_e/est\\_e/panel/A6/6204.htm](http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/virtual/VirtualMuseum_e/visit_e/est_e/panel/A6/6204.htm).

The transcripts can be read by visiting: <http://www.inicom.com/hibakusha/>.

American films, except for *Hiroshima*, *Out of the Ashes*, emphasize military organization, technological superiority, and scientific ingenuity in order to end the war as quickly as possible. The moral issues and ethical questions are not the core concern of American Hiroshima films.

*Black Rain* and other Japanese atomic bomb films like *Rhapsody in August* “focus on the impact of the bomb on human relationships, families, and communities” (Perrine,

1998, p. 74). The drastically different dramatic and artistic representation of Hiroshima by the American and Japanese filmmakers provides some “evidence for the potent and fluid relationship between films and their social context” (p. 74).

Most of the film takes place in 1950 in a small agricultural town, Fukuyama. Yasuko’s aunt and uncle want to find a marriage partner for their niece. Unhappily, no one wants to marry her because she is an “untouchable,” a bomb victim. The Korean War and the threat of more nuclear devastation terrify the family.

They listen to a radio broadcast (1 hr. 56):

American President Truman has declared that he would consider using the atomic bomb against the Communist Chinese army in Korea. He stated that he hoped that the atomic bomb would never be used, but the final decision about using the atomic weapons would be made by the commanding officer in the field. This statement was in a 14 article declaration ...

Uncle Shige turns off the radio, reacting to the announcement: “Humans are obstinate creatures. We are strangling are throats. An unjust peace is better than a just war. Why can’t they understand that?”

Throughout the film bomb victims die of radiation sickness. A neighbor, Shokichi, says, “The flash has overcome me at last.” He is nearly blind. An exchange between Shokichi and Shige speaks to the exasperation and mindlessness of nuclear warfare (1 hr. 26).

SHOKICHI: Why did the Americans drop the bomb? Even if they hadn’t done it

Japan’s defeat was already certain.

SHIGE: They said it was to end the war quicker.

SHOKICHI: Then why didn’t they do it to Tokyo?

SHIGE: I don’t really understand it.

SHOKICHI: I won’t be at peace if I die without understanding why. I can’t take it that

I'm going to die like this.

Shokichi dies a few days later followed in the next months by Shigeo and Shige.

*Hiroshima, Out of the Ashes* (1990) is the only American Hiroshima film that shows the dropping of the first atomic bomb from the Japanese perspective, from ground zero and the surrounding area. Still, a military centered justification for the bomb is established early in the film. An A-bomb flight crew watches a training film that establishes Hiroshima as a center for munitions factories and military installations. In addition, it is identified as the “home of Japanese Steel” and the headquarters of a Japanese division (4:00).

After this is established, the film introduces multiple protagonists on August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1945. There is Yoshi the Japanese schoolboy, a Japanese doctor, the German priest, the pregnant Japanese-American woman, and even American B 29 airmen who are held prisoners in Hiroshima Castle. About thirty minutes into the film the bomb drops, followed by the flash of light and the blast of wind. For the rest of the film, the audience witnesses the devastation of the bomb on the personal lives of each protagonist.

The horrendous immediate aftermath of the bomb shows burned and charred bodies, children being burned alive in the rubble, a burned baby on a mother's back, flesh dripping from hands, and the black radioactive rain. The film's end credits read that the “research for the film was provided in part” by *Hiroshima Diary: The Journal of a Japanese Physician, August 6 – September 30, 1945* by Dr. Michihiko Hachiya. The University of North Carolina Press first published the diary in the United States on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hiroshima bomb.

Reading Dr. Hachiya's eyewitness account is spellbinding. It is clear his descriptions influenced the film's horrific images. For example he writes:



I paused to rest. Gradually things around me came into focus. There were shadowy forms of people, some of whom looked like walking ghosts. Others moved as though in pain, like scarecrows, their arms held out from their bodies with forearms and hands dangling. These people puzzled me until I realized that they had been burned and were holding their arms out to prevent the painful friction of raw surfaces rubbing together (p. 3).

Overall, *Hiroshima, Out of the Ashes* does not argue for the morality of one side over the other. Instead, it is decidedly antiwar. The characters evolve toward the pacifistic *war is wrong* perspective. One character, for example, Mr. Togawa says, “Nobody fault – must blame everything on stupid war” (50:00).

Having American military men bomb victims in the film adds a powerful perspective and perhaps provides more empathy for the devastating story of Hiroshima. According to *Hiroshima in America: Fifty Years of Denial*, there were twelve American prisoners of war who perished in the blast (Lifton & Mitchell, 1995).

After the blast, three American soldiers escape and hide in a cesspool in order to survive the heat and flames. One dies the first night while the other two, after leaving the cesspool, are stoned by an angry Japanese civilian mob. A Japanese officer rescues them.

The antiwar theme continues when the older American, Pete, says to the younger one, Tom, “It sure looks different from the air.” Tom responds, “Yeah, well, they started it.” Pete reacts, “So what, it makes no sense” (1hr. 12). Again, at the end of the film after Japan surrenders, the antiwar theme is expressed when Tom thinks a Japanese guard is going to kill him. The guard says, “I want you to live. I want you to see what one bomb did to my city so you can go back and tell your people this must not happen again. You are not my enemy. War is our enemy” (1 hr. 26). The camera pans from Tom’s

point of view to a lifeless wasteland that was once the thriving city of Hiroshima with a population of 350,000 civilians.

While all the other Hiroshima films are politically charged and controversial, *Hiroshima, Out of the Ashes*, a made-for-television movie originally broadcast to coincide with the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima, avoids the controversy by blaming war itself for the bomb. There is almost a “philosophical resignation” that is not present in the other American produced Hiroshima films and is articulated by a character that recites a Japanese Haiku, “Now that my house has burned down, I have a better view of the moon” (Perrine, 1998, p. 65).

#### After the Cold War: Since 1990

English journalist, Ronald Bergan, wrote an article titled *Why Hollywood Ignores Hiroshima* for the Sunday Guardian on August 15, 2010. He ponders the question: why are American films so reluctant to depict the Hiroshima bombing? When you consider the number of Hollywood films about World War II, the fact that Hollywood has made only three films about an event that ended the war in the Pacific is more than remarkable and clearly not without significance. Bergan points out that “nowhere in American cinema do we see one victim of the bomb, one burning corpse, one person dying of radiation, one deformed child” (Bergan, 2010, p. 1). Only the made-for-television movie *Hiroshima, Out of the Ashes* (1990) shows the bomb’s victims.

Now, more than 65 years after the horrific event, “the omission seems even more astounding” (p. 1). Bergan speculates that the United States suffers a collective guilt around the fact that it is the only country to have used a nuclear weapon on a civilian population. He argues that it cannot be because the “subject is too appalling” (p. 1).

Endless Hollywood films have graphically portrayed horrendous events. Toni Perrine suggests in her book *Film and the Nuclear Age: Representing Cultural Anxiety* that “it is not surprising that few commercial narratives have engaged a subject fraught with perplexing moral ambiguities” (p. 40).

In the twenty plus years since the last Hiroshima film, a dozen or more documentaries about Hiroshima have been produced. The most ambitious of these was three-hour television miniseries *Hiroshima* shown on the fiftieth anniversary of the first atomic bomb. Still, it was not produced by Americans, but co-produced by Canadian and Japanese companies.

Strictly speaking it is not a narrative film. It is a kind of hybrid documentary and docudrama that stages elaborate reenactments interspersed with actual film footage from the World War II film archives of several countries. A unique aspect of this ambitious production is the first hand accounts by eyewitnesses to history. They include observations and statements by government and military officials from the United States and Japan, Hiroshima bomb victims, and crewmembers of the *Enola Gay*.

Another reason that American Hiroshima films have not been produced in the last twenty years can be attributed to the controversy that exploded over the Smithsonian exhibit of the *Enola Gay*. It was scheduled to open on the fiftieth anniversary of the Hiroshima A-bomb. Veteran groups, one led by Paul Tibbets, and conservative media fought the proposed exhibit that included the various historical controversies and the bomb’s devastation to bomb victims both physically and psychologically (Buruma, 1995).

Outraged critics of the proposed exhibit were successful in having it changed to preserve the traditional American view concerning World War II and how it ended. The current Smithsonian exhibit consists only of a section of the *Enola Gay* with a recording by Paul Tibbets describing the plane's restoration. "Only the Hiroshima bomber is displayed now, without context or explanation, as just another great American plane, like the *Spirit of St. Louis* or the *Kitty Hawk Flyer*" (p. 29).

In recent years, two documentaries *White Light, Black Rain* (2007) and *24 Hours After Hiroshima* (2010) separate themselves from the orthodox propagandistic docudramas and documentary films of the past by showing living witnesses to the horrors of the bombing, the stories of the hibakusha survivors. *White Light, Black Rain*, produced by Japanese-American Steven Okazaki, was shown on HBO and is currently available through Netflix. *24 Hours After Hiroshima* is a National Geographic production in their popular series *National Geographic Explorers* and is rebroadcast from time to time on the National Geographic cable channel.

Chapter 9 of *White Light, Black Rain* is particularly remarkable. A segment of the 1950s popular television show *This Is Your Life* documents the life of a hibakusha, Reverend Kiyhoshi Tanimoto, a leader of the Hiroshima Maiden Project that arranged for free plastic surgery in America for many deformed by the bomb.

Captain Bob Lewis, co-pilot of the *Enola Gay* spoke, "and looking down from thousands of feet over Hiroshima all that I could think of was: my God, what have we done?" Captain Lewis, who was visibly anxious and genuinely sorry about the bomb, shakes Reverend Tanimoto's hand and gives him a check contributing to the Hiroshima

Maiden Project while saying, “On behalf of the entire crew that participated in that mission ... I’d like to make the first contribution.”

With the World War II generation passing away and documentaries showing the world multiple perspectives, will Hollywood tackle the subject more directly? It remains to be seen. James Cameron, director of the two highest grossing Hollywood films, *Avatar* and *Titanic*, plans on producing a film about the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He optioned the book *The Last Train From Hiroshima* by Charles Pellegrino, “a non-fiction account of the World War II mission to drop an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and of the bombing’s victims” (Itzkoff, 2010, p. 1).

Controversy and polarization has already plague the pre-production and scriptwriting phase of the proposed Cameron Hiroshima film. Publisher, Henry Holt & Company has stopped printing and shipping the book amidst allegations of glaring inaccuracies by some scientists, historians, and veterans. Cameron defended the author when he wrote, “So there must be a reason for the misunderstanding.” He added that the film does not “have a shooting script and no decision has been made to proceed in the short term” (p. 1).

### Conclusion

This paper began with the quote:

Our nation’s use of the atomic bomb remains one of the most controversial and emotional issues of World War II. Americans born before 1940, in general, cannot comprehend how anyone could be critical of President Truman’s decision to end the war. Those born after 1945, growing up in the Cold War, wonder if there was not a better alternative (Kaye, 2003).

This polarity of viewpoint continues to be an incendiary one. The World War II generation has continued to vehemently attack those “revisionists” who question the use

of the bomb. Now that those born before 1940 are passing away, Paul Tibbets, pilot of the Enola Gay, died at 92 on November 1, 2007, maybe Hollywood and American cinema will do what they have not done so far, create Hiroshima films that tell stories that grapple with the morality, guilt, and the short and long term influences on human lives.

To date, American cinema pays lip service to the moral questions surrounding the decision to drop the bomb but is not the core issue as it is in many foreign films like *Hiroshima Mon Amor*, (FR, 1959), *Black Rain* (JP, 1989) and the Canadian/Japanese docudrama *Hiroshima* (1995). Furthermore, the impact of the bomb on human relationships, families, and communities has received minor attention as compared to Japanese films like *Black Rain*, *Rhapsody in August* (1991) and *Hiroshima No Pika* (2005).

With the recent nuclear plant disaster in Japan resulting from the April 7, 2011 Great East Japan 9.0 earthquake, the Japanese collective memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has resurfaced. On the one hand, the U.S. responded with humanitarian aid and Red Cross donations. On the other hand, there was an irrational fear of nuclear fallout and the panic buying of potassium iodine. It may just be that as long as there is the possibility of nuclear accidents and the threat of deliberate nuclear bomb detonations polarizing reactions will surface and find expression in a range of human emotions.

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### **Filmography:**

#### *Feature Films*

ABOVE AND BEYOND (US/ 1952)  
Screenplay by Melvin Frank

THE BEGINNING OR THE END? (US/1947)  
Screenplay by Frank Wead



BLACK RAIN (JP/1989)

Screenplay by Shohei Imamura. Based on the novel by Masuji Ibuse

DAY ONE (US/ 1989)

Teleplay by David W. Rintels. Based on the book by Peter Wyden.

ENOLA GAY: THE MEN, THE MISSION, THE ATOMIC BOMB (US/1980)

Teleplay by Millard Kaufman and James Poe. Based on the book by Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan Witts.

FAT MAN & LITTLE BOY (US/1989)

Screenplay by Bruce Robinson

HIROSHIMA MAIDEN (US/1988)

Teleplay by Jean O'Neill, Tom Shima, Steven Hensley and J. Miyoko Hensley.

HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR (FR/1959)

Screenplay by Marguerite Duras

HIROSHIMA NO PIKA (JP/2005)

Written by Toshio Maruki. Based on the children's book *Hiroshima No Pika*.

HIROSHIMA: OUT OF THE ASHES (US/1990)

Teleplay by John McGreevey

RHAPSODY IN AUGUST (JP/1991)

Screenplay by Akira Kurosawa. Based on the novel by Kiyoko Murata.

### *Documentaries*

24 HOURS AFTER HIROSHIMA (US/2010)

National Geographic Channel

HIROSHIMA (CAN/JP/1995)

Teleplay by John Hopkins and Toshirô Ishidô

HIROSHIMA: BBC HISTORY OF WORLD WAR II (GB/2005)

WHITE LIGHT, BLACK RAIN: THE DESTRUCTION OF HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI (US/2007)

Written by Steven Okazaki

THE WORLD WAR II ATOMIC BOMB: THE END OR THE BEGINNING?  
(US/2003)

Written by Linda Kaye



