

Department of History
University of Wisconsin-Madison
College of Letters and Science

The Atomic Bomb in American, Japanese & Global History
History 952/ Hist Sci 921

Spring 2025
Friday 1:20-3:15
5257 Humanities Building
<https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/436942>

Professor Louise Young
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OH Mondays 1:30--3:30

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OH Tuesdays 2-4

Course Description

When America dropped two atomic bombs on Japan in August 1945, the world entered the nuclear age. The implications were global, putting every person and nation under what the peace activist Lenore Marshall called “nuclear sword of Damocles”--the constant threat of nuclear annihilation or at risk for the “slow violence” of environmental harm and nuclear contamination. But nuclear weapons hold special meaning for Japan and the United States--nations transformed through their development and use. This course will explore the history of their special relationship with the bomb, as well as the broader significance of the nuclear age on science and society.

The course is divided into three parts, each dealing with a separate dimension of the atomic bomb. Part One (weeks 2-5) examines the development of atomic weapons and decision to drop the bomb, both the real time context that led up to August 6 and 9, 1945; and the debate over the ethics and necessity of this decision that broke out in the immediate aftermath and continues to the present day. Part Two (weeks 6-11) looks at the atomic bomb in culture and memory, comparing the construction of meaning around the bomb in the United States and Japan. We also examine how both countries dealt with the possibility of nuclear energy as well as the medical and environmental impacts of nuclear power. Part Three (weeks 12-14) focuses on the larger legacies of the bomb for international politics, the organization and politics of science, and national security, touching on issues such as nuclear proliferation and brinksmanship, peace movement, the nuclear taboo, nuclear diplomacy and other aspects of our atomic age.

Learning Objectives

- Develop a critical understanding of the history of atomic bomb from both American and Japanese perspectives
- Recognize issues, debates, and gaps in the relevant historiography
- Hone your discussion skills by engaging with the ideas of others; improve your ability to provide critical feedback on peer projects.
- Deepen research skills, assembling an archive of primary source materials and relevant secondary sources for the final project.
- Polish analytic skills and cultivate attention to issues of style in short form essays as well as long form research papers

Course Requirements

1. Complete the weekly reading assignments and come to class prepared to actively participate. (20%)
2. Post a one page reflection on the **weekly** assignment to our class discussion board and read through your classmates' posts. Specific instructions for the posts will be given throughout the semester. Posts will be due the day before class. (20%)
3. The main assignment is an individual research or historiography paper on any topic related to the atomic bomb in history. Students can consult with the instructor or choose from among the course themes. The term paper should be 3,000-4,000 words, including footnotes. Bibliography and appendices do not count towards the word limit. Please use Chicago Manual of Style for footnotes and bibliography. Due on the final day of class. (50%)
4. There will be two peer review sessions in week 8 & 9. Students will circulate an introduction/abstract of their paper, together with an argument outline and annotated bibliography. We will read each other's work and provide critical and constructive feedback. (10%)

Grading Scale

A (92.50+); AB (87.50-92.49); B (82.50-87.49); BC (77.50-82.49); C (69.50-77.49); D (60-69.49); F (Below 60)

Modality/ Level/ Credit Policy Statement:

3 credits / Graduate / In person / Enrollment by permission

The credit standard for this course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the course learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit), which include regularly scheduled seminar meetings, reading, writing and other student work as described in the syllabus.

Students are also expected to meet either Prof. Young or Kennedy at least once to discuss progress in the course and ideas for the final project.

Note on use of AI

While AI tools have uses, they are often sloppy and error-prone, for instance “hallucinating” fake historical events and sources. Moreover, to use them is to skip out on the work that will get you the most benefit from this class. This course will exercise your ability to write and reason about complex ideas and events. Practicing core skills of argumentation, close reading, and writing will enhance your abilities as a student, and in every field that comes after.

We will discuss appropriate and inappropriate uses in class.

Class Schedule

PART ONE: THE A BOMB IN REAL TIME

Week 1: Introduction - 1/24

Required:

National Committee on Atomic Information “One world or None”

<https://www.loc.gov/item/2018601242/>

MIT [Visualizing Cultures: Ground Zero 1945](#)

Week 2: Atomic weapons programs and the transformations of science and state - 1/31

Required:

Daniel Kevles *The Physicists: The History of A Scientific Community in America* (MIT, 1995), Chapters 19-21 (61 pgs.)

Jessica Wang *American Science in an Age of Anxiety: Scientists, Anticommunism, and the Cold War* (UNC Press, 1999), Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2 “Fear, Suspicion and the Surveillance State” (84 pgs.)

Audra Wolfe *Competing with the Soviets* (Johns Hopkins, 2013) Chapters 1 and 2 (39 pgs)

Recommended:

David Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb* (Yale, 1994)

Campbell Craig and Sergey Radchenko *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War* (Yale, 2008)

Discussion Themes:

- Scientists, morality, and political movements
- The military-industrial-academic complex
- Big science
- Science, anti-communist politics national security

Week 3: The 'decision' to drop the bomb: the ongoing debate - 2/7

Required:

- J Samuel Walker, "Decision to use the bomb : a historiographical update", in *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (Cambridge U Press, 1996), 11-37
- J Samuel Walker, "Recent Literature on the Atomic Bomb: the Search for a Middle Ground", *Diplomatic History* 29, 2 (2005): 311-34
- Alex Wellerstein, "The Kyoto Misconception: What Truman Knew and Didn't Know about Hiroshima" in *The Age of Hiroshima* (2020); 34-55
- "Can the Atomic Bombs Be Justified?" Tsuyoshi Hasegawa interview
- Sean Malloy, "When You have to Deal with a Beast: Race, Ideology and the Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb" in *The Age of Hiroshima* (2020); 56-70
- Asada Sadao, "The Mushroom Cloud and National Psyches: Japanese and American Perceptions of the A-bomb Decision, 1945-1995", in *Living With the Bomb: American and Japanese Cultural Conflicts in the Nuclear Age*, eds Laura Hein and Mark Selden (ME Sharpe, 1997), 173-201
- Barton Bernstein, "Understanding the atomic bomb and the Japanese surrender: missed opportunities, little-known disasters, and modern memory", *Diplomatic History* 19.2 (Sp 1995): 227-273

Recommended:

- The Choices Program, "Ending the War Against Japan Science, Morality, and the Atomic Bomb" (2005)
- Barton Bernstein, "Reconsidering Truman's Claim of 'Half a Million American Lives Saved' by the Atomic Bomb: The Construction and Deconstruction of a Myth," *Journal Of Strategic Studies* 22, no.1 (1995): 54-95.

Discussion Themes:

- The meaning of "decision"
- Considering the decision to drop the bomb before and after August 1945
- Did the bomb end the war or begin the cold war?
- Views from outside the US

Week 4: Atomic weapons, Air Power and Total War Doctrine- 2/14

Required:

Ronald Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment: American Bombing in World War 2* (Oxford U Press, 1988), 1-34, 107-176, 190-218. (Chapters: introduction, 1-2, 6-8, 10 and notes)

Barton Bernstein, "Eclipsed by Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Early Thinking about Tactical Nuclear Weapons," *International Security* 15, 4 (Spring 1991): 149-173

Peter Galison "War Against the Center" June 2001; **Grey Room** 1(4):6-33.

Recommended:

Michael Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (Yale, 1987)

Discussion Themes:

- The rise of air power, military doctrine
- Aerial bombing in World War Two
- Atomic bomb as a weapon of war in World War Two and afterwards

Week 5: Japan's struggle to end the war - 2/21

Required:

Herbert Bix, "Japan's Delayed Surrender: a reinterpretation", *Diplomatic History* 19.2 (spring 1995): 197-225

Edward Drea, *Japan's Imperial Army*, chapters 11 and epilogue, pp. 222-262

Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *The End of the Pacific War : Reappraisals* (Stanford U Press 2007), 1-8, 39-62, 65-94, 243-263

Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan*, chapter 1: "Triangular Relations and the Pacific War", 7-44

Recommended:

Documentary [*Wings of Defeat*](#) (90 minutes)

Sadao Asada, "The Shock of the Atom Bomb and Japan's Decision to Surrender", *Pacific Historical Review* 67, no.4 (November 1988): 477-512

Discussion Themes:

- Japanese military decision-making after the turning point in summer 1942
- The role of the emperor
- Diplomacy of peace: Russia, US, Japan
- Atomic bomb(s) and the decision to surrender

PART TWO: A BOMB IN CULTURE AND MEMORY

Week 6: American scientific and atomic nationalisms - 2/28

Required:

Yui Daizaburo, "Between Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima/Nagasaki: Nationalism and Memory in Japan and the United States," in *Living with the Bomb*, 52-72.

Michael J. Hogan, "Enola Gay controversy : history, memory, and the politics of presentation" in Michael J. Hogan, ed., *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (25 pgs.)

Traci Voyles, "Anatomic Bombs: The Sexual Life of Nuclearism, 1945-1957" *American Quarterly* 72 No 3. (September, 2020) 651-673.

Peter Galison, "The Ontology of the Enemy: Norbert Wiener and the Cybernetic Vision" *Critical Inquiry* 21 (Autumn, 1994) 228-266 (38 pages)

Matthew Levin *Cold War University: Madison and the New Left in the Sixties* Chapter 1: "Cold War University: Higher Education after World War II" (27 pgs.)

David Kaiser, “Cold War Requisitions, scientific manpower, and the production of American physicists after World War II” *Historical Studies in the Physical and Biological Sciences* 33 No. 1 (2002), 131-159.

Audra Wolfe, *Freedom’s Laboratory: The Cold War Struggle for the Soul of Science*, Chapter 1: “Western Science vs. Marxist Science.” 19 pages

Recommended:

Kenji Ito “Values of “pure science”: Nishina Yoshio’s wartime discourse between nationalism and physics, 1940-1945” *Historical Studies in the Physical and Biological Sciences* 33 No. 1 (2002), 61-86.

Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb’s Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (UNC Press, 1994).

Atomic Heritage Foundation, “Atomic Culture”, 1-16.

Documentary *Atomic Café*

Doctor Strangelove, 1964

Podcast with AB Stoddard and Charlie Sykes, [“The Night My Father Scared America”](#), December 22, 2023 (On the television screening of *The Day After* in 1983)

Discussion Themes

- Science and visions of the enemy
- Bomb science’s effect on universities and scientific priorities
- The bomb and the good war: memory politics
- Atomic monsters as panic and power

Week 7: Japanese a-bomb culture: atomic victimhood & “peace nationalism” - 3/7

Required:

John Dower, “The Bombed: Hiroshimas and Nagasakis in Japanese Memory”, *Diplomatic History* 19.2 (spring 1995): 275-295

James Orr, *The Victim as Hero* (Hawaii U Press, 2001), 1-13, 36-70, 106-136.

Takuya Sasaki, “The Evolution of Japanese Politics and Diplomacy under the Long Shadow of Hiroshima and Nagasaki”; Wakana Mukai, “The Unnecessary Option to Go Nuclear: Japan’s Nonnuclear Policy in an Era of Uncertainty, 1950s-1960s”; and Kiichi Fujiwara, “Hiroshima, Nanjing, and Yasukuni: Contending discourses on the Second World War in Japan, in Michael D. Gordin and G. John Ikenberry, eds., *The Age of Hiroshima* (Princeton University Press, 2020) (60 pgs.)

Recommended:

documentary [Hellfire](#)

The first film of the franchise [Gojira](#) (96 minutes), William Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind*, 13-42

MIT [Visualizing Cultures: Ground Zero 1945](#)

Maruki Gallery [site](#)

Nakazawa Keiji, [Barefoot Gen, Vol. 1](#) (comic novel)

Akira, 1988

Laura Hein & Mark Selden, eds., *Living With the Bomb: American and Japanese Cultural Conflicts in the Nuclear Age*

Discussion Themes:

- What is “a bomb culture”?
- Narratives of expansionism and defeat: Nanjing & Hiroshima
- The relationship to the US: Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima
- Lucky Dragon & the anti-nuclear movement
- Three non-nuclear principles: nuclear politics in Japan
- The atomic taboo today

Week 8: Research Paper Workshop 1 of 2 3/14

Students will circulate paper abstracts, argument outlines, and annotated bibliographies for peer review and discussion.

Week 9: research paper workshop 2 of 2 - 3/21

Students will circulate paper abstracts, argument outlines, and annotated bibliographies for peer review and discussion.

(SPRING BREAK 3/22-3/25)

Week 10: Embracing Atomic Possibilities - 4/4

Required:

Shinosuke Tomotsugu, “The Bandung Conference and the Origins of Japan’s Atoms for Peace Aid Program for Asian Countries” and Sonja Schmid, “Data, Discourse and Disruption” in Michael D. Gordin and G. John Ikenberry, eds., *The Age of Hiroshima* (Princeton University Press, 2020) (40 pgs.)

Martin Dusenberre and David P. Aldrich, “Hatoko Comes Home: Civil Society and Nuclear Power in Japan,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 70, no. 3 (2011): 683-705

Scott V. Valentine and Benjamin K Sovacool, “The Socio-Political Economy of Nuclear Power Development in Japan and South Korea”, *Energy Policy* 38, no.12 (2010): 7971-79

John Krige, “Atoms for Peace, Scientific Internationalism, and Scientific Intelligence,” *Osiris* 21 (2006), 161-181

Elisabeth Roehrlich, “The Cold War, the Developing World and the Creation of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) 1953-1957”, *Cold War History* 16, no 2 (2016), 195-221

Stephen L. Del Sesto, “Wasn’t the Future of Nuclear Energy Wonderful?” in *Imagining Tomorrow: History, Technology, and the American Future* (MIT Press 1986), (25 pgs.)

Recommended:

Jeff Kingston, “Nuclear Politics in Japan, 2011-2013” *Asian Perspective* (2013)

Matthew Penny, “Nuclear Nationalism and Fukushima”, *Japan Focus* (2012)
Documentary *Nuclear Nation*, 2013
Astro Boy

Discussion Themes:

- Atoms for peace
- Nuclear power as possibility and peril, shifting viewpoints
- Dealing with accidents: 3 mile island, Chernobyl, Fukushima
- Connecting & disconnecting nuclear weapons and nuclear energy

Week 11: Nuclear Fallout - 4/11

Required:

Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (OUP 2013), selections (53 pages)

Susan Lindee, *Suffering Made Real: American Science and the Survivors of Hiroshima* (U Chicago Press, 1994), selections (60 pages)

Sean Malloy, “A Very Pleasant Way to Die: Radiation Effects and the Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb against Japan”, *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 3 (June 2012): 515-545

Traci Brynne Voyles, *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country* (U Minnesota Press, 2015), 1-26

Recommended:

William Moss and Roger Eckhardt, “The Human Plutonium Injection Experiments”, *Los Alamos Science* 23 (1995): 177-233

Shampa Biswas, “Nuclear Harms and Global Disarmament,” in *The Age of Hiroshima*, 259-275

Jane I. Dawson, *Eco-nationalism, Anti-nuclear Activism, and National Identity in Russia, Lithuania and Ukraine* (Duke, 1996)

Joseph Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico* (Princeton, 2006)

Ruth Oldenziel, “Islands: The United States as a Networked Empire”, in *Entangled Geographies: Empire and Technopolitics in the Global Cold War* (MIT Press, 2011), (30 pgs.)

Three volumes by International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War:

Radioactive Heaven and Earth (1991)

Plutonium: Deadly Gold of the Nuclear Age (1992)

Nuclear Wastelands: A global Guide to Nuclear Weapons Production and its Health and Environmental Effects (1995)

Discussion Themes:

- Shifting knowledge of radiation sickness
- Medical testing: Japanese bomb victims, US military tests
- American nuclear imperialism & testing in Micronesia and Arizona

- Revelations of the 1990s in the United States
- Environmentalism and anti-nuke movement

PART THREE: THE NUCLEAR AGE

Week 12: An Atomic Way of Thinking: Cold War Rationality - 4/18

Required:

Carol Cohn “Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals” *Signs* Vol. 12, No. 4, Within and Without: Women, Gender, and Theory (Summer, 1987), pp. 687-718 (32 pages)

Paul Erickson et. al. *How Reason Almost Lost its Mind: The Strange Career of Cold War Rationality*. (University of Chicago Press, 2013), selections (103 pgs)

Paul Edwards *The Closed World: Computers and the Politics of Discourse in the Cold War* (MIT Press, 1996), selections (74 pgs)

Recommended:

S.M Amadae *Rationalizing Capitalist Democracy: The Cold War Origins of Rational Choice Liberalism*. (University of Chicago Press 2003)

Paul Erickson, *The World the Game Theorists Made* (UChicago Press, 2015)

Missile, 1987

The Day After, 1983, & [podcast](#) on the controversy over making/screening the film.

Discussion themes:

- Reason vs. Rationality
- Human sciences and nuclear strategy
- Game Theory and Escalation
- The theory of containment and its scientific and technological supports
- Procedural rationality and missile launch officers

Week 13: The Nuclear Revolution and Price of “Peace” - 4/25

Required:

Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution* (Cornell U Press, 1990), selections
 “Book Review Roundtable: The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution 30 Years Later”, *Texas National Security Review*, April 30, 2020

David Holloway, “Racing Towards Armageddon” in *The Age of Hiroshima* (Princeton, 2020), 71-88

Michael D. Gordin, “Nuclear Mythology and Nuclear Uselessness,” *Nonproliferation Review*, 20, no.2 (2013): 375-80

Nina Tannenwald, “The Legacy of the Nuclear Taboo in the Twenty-first Century”, in *The Age of Hiroshima*, 276-293

Recommended:

Michael Mandelbaum, *The Nuclear Revolution: International Politics before and after Hiroshima* (Cambridge U Press, 1981)

Nina Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons* (Cambridge U Press, 2007)

Matthew Jones, *After Hiroshima: The United States, Race and Nuclear Weapons in Asia, 1945-1965* (Cambridge U Press, 2010)

Paul Bracken, *The Second Nuclear Age* (Times Books, 2012)

Robert Jervis, "A Horrifying and Believable Path to Nuclear War with North Korea," *War on the Rocks*, September 4, 2018

Discussion Themes:

- The global Cold War
- Deterrence and international security structures
- Nuclear proliferation
- Nuclear weapons regimes
- The nuclear taboo

Week 14: Case studies: the fragmented reality of the nuclear age - 4/25 [this session can be used for Michael Gordin during week 8 when he visits]

Required:

Gabrielle Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade* (MIT Press, 2012), selections (98 pages)

Dick Van Lente, ed., *The Nuclear Age in Popular Media: A Transnational History 1945-65* (Palgrave, 2012), selections

Gabrielle Hecht, *The Radiance of France: Nuclear Power and National Identity after World War II* (MIT Press, 1998)

Nuclear Proliferation International History Project,

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/program/nuclear-proliferation-international-history-project>

Discussion Themes:

- Perspectives of nuclear and non-nuclear states
- "Using" atomic weapons: programs, tests, diplomacy
- The varieties of a bomb nationalism/ a bomb cultures