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RELEARNING HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI:
THE PEDAGOGY OF ACCOUNTABILITY

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In the past 60 years, American opinions about the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have varied. Some describe it as an act of heroism, or “necessary evil;” others see it as an act of genocide. The complex nature of the subject has made it a difficult and often delicate subject for teachers to address in their United States History classes. In the early postwar period, an average US History classroom depicted the atomic bomb as a heroic technological advancement. Only twenty years later, however, the same event was often framed as unjustifiable annihilation. This thesis will address the pedagogical shift in the treatment of the bombings from heroism in the 1940s to “holocausts” in the 1960s and analyze the political and social influences of the 50s and 60s in the United States to determine why the shift occurred.

Although the United States has been involved in myriad major armed conflicts and wars, US involvement in World War II has proven to be the most internationally influential to date. That involvement, and its result in various forms still shapes world politics today. Most notably, in one strategic decision to end the war, the United States government changed the nature of warfare forever. By dropping two atomic bombs on Japan in 1945, the United States began the continuing race for nuclear armament and demonstrated the capacity of nuclear technology for efficient, mass human destruction. The dropping of atomic bombs “Little Boy” and “Fat Man,” on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, respectively, are still the only nuclear attacks to have ever taken place. Today, as a result, the nuclear powers of the world are locked into a permanent struggle in which nuclear weaponry can never be used in an attack for fear of “mutually assured destruction.”

On July 21, 1945, during his trip to Potsdam for negotiations with Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin, President Truman received the news: the testing of the
second, “Fat Man” plutonium-based bomb had been successful. A message from General Groves, who was overseeing the atomic bomb project in the States, assured Truman that the United States had “the means to ensure [the war’s] speedy conclusion and save thousands of American lives.”¹ Truman shared this news with Churchill and vaguely suggested the significance of the bomb to Stalin at Potsdam. If Japan rejected an American appeal for surrender on July 26, the Americans planned to use the first, “Little Boy,” gun-type Uranium bomb, and continue to drop the new Plutonium bombs on Japanese cities until their unconditional surrender.² By the 25th of July, targets for several atomic bombs had been identified. And by July 30, Japan had officially rejected the Allied surrender ultimatum. On July 31, Truman wrote in response to Groves’ wishes for approval to release: “Suggestions approved. Release when ready but not sooner than August 2.”³

Colonel Paul W. Tibbets was the pilot of the plane that would drop the world’s first-ever atomic bomb on August 6, 1945, the Enola Gay. He flew with a crew mostly unaware of the historical significance of their mission. Several hours into their flight, the crew was still unsure as to which of the designated Japanese cities would be their target. Enola Gay took off at 2:45am Japanese time, but wasn’t until 7:25am that Tibbets informed his crew, “It’s Hiroshima.”⁴ At 8:15am, the Enola Gay unleashed the first atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima below.

43 seconds later, Hiroshima was blasted with a blindingly bright white light. In one moment, fires erupted all across the city. Immediately, thousands of burn victims

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² Wyden, *Day One*.
³ Wyden, *Day One*.
⁴ Wyden, *Day One*. 
were simultaneously scrambling to find safety, help, and water. The firemen and fire
departments, hospitals and staff, and most city buildings and their leaders, were destroyed
as quickly as everything else. Without warning, Hiroshima had been thrust into the
largest crisis the world had ever witnessed in a single moment. The burned and dying
citizens could only rely on themselves and the kind, brave volunteers from Hiroshima and
surrounding areas who stepped into positions of authority during the emergency.
Thousands of Japanese living in Hiroshima were killed instantly when the bomb
detonated, thousands more were burned alive in the moments that followed, and tens of
thousands would continue to suffer and die from severe burns and from excruciating
radiation poisoning.

On August 9, Japan’s leaders received news that a second atomic bomb had just
been dropped over Nagasaki, reproducing the horrors of Hiroshima. Eventually, in an
unprecedented move for a Japanese emperor, Hirohito entered the discussion, decisively
stating that, “the time has come when we must bear the unbearable,” which, for Japan,
meant full surrender.

The implications of these events produced a challenge for educators around the
world. As eyes turned to a new generation of citizens, individuals wondered how the final
act of WWII would be characterized and, thereby, how it would be remembered.

From the late 1940s to the 1960s, the US History curriculum significantly
changed its approach to the atomic bombings of Japan. A typical textbook of the 40s or
50s, for example, reads: “The United States unveiled its newest weapon, the atomic
bomb, demonstrating twice—first at Hiroshima and then at Nagasaki—that a good-sized

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5 Wyden, Day One.
city could almost be erased from the map in one blinding flash.” Yet twenty years later, in 1966, a typical textbook claims “more than 150,000 Japanese died in the resulting holocausts. Thousands of others suffered dreadful after effects.” The initial rendering of the event in textbooks and classrooms, immediately postwar, directly reflected the social and political climate of the 1940s. American sources were usually biased, and influenced heavily by the government, and the US History curriculum would quickly come to reflect this biased viewpoint.

The idea that the atomic bombings of Japan were justified and necessary was extremely popular in mainstream American culture immediately postwar. Polls of representative populations at the time concur with the assessment of historian Michael J. Yavenditti who found early American reactions to Truman’s use of the atomic bomb to feature “little public remorse.” The justification that the bomb saved American lives, and sometimes possibly even Japanese lives, was a persuasive belief that “fundamentally shaped America’s responses to the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.” An August 1945 Gallup poll, for example, found that 85% of Americans approved of the use of the atomic bomb.

Similarly, an autumn 1945 poll by pollster Elmo Roper demonstrated that 53.5% of the population believed that “we should have used the bombs on cities, just as we did” while the next largest proportion, 22.7%, believed “we should have quickly used many more of the bombs before Japan had a chance to surrender.” 13.8% of those polled felt

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7 Kyle Ward, *History in the Making*, 289-292
9 Boyer, *By the Bomb*, 183.
that the United States should have dropped a “warning” bomb somewhere remote to demonstrate its immense destructive power and only proceeded to bomb Japanese cities if the Japanese still refused to surrender. A mere 4.5% of those polled in 1945 felt that the United States should have made no use of the atomic bomb. According to Elmo Roper’s data, the less-harmful alternatives were advocated most by blacks, the well-to-do, and the well-educated. Conversely, 30% of the poor and Southwestern United States wished that “many more” bombs had been dropped.10

Some Americans literally celebrated the dropping of the bombs at a Hollywood gala on October 27, 1945. The event gathered approximately 100,000 people in the Los Angeles Coliseum for a “Tribute to Victory Pageant” where the atomic bombings and subsequent Japanese surrender was literally re-enacted onstage for the entertainment of the party guests.11 Party guests were thrilled by the “explosion” of the atomic bomb, but they apparently missed the eerie significance that their entire party of 100,000 would have been obliterated in an instant had they actually been bombed. Charles Poore’s 1946 review in the New York Times noted, however, that “a small minority believes that we should never have used the bomb at all; this is balanced by the lunatic fringe which has already picked targets on which it would like us to use it again.”12 An uncontroversial statement at the time Poore’s review asserts: “There is very little evidence that many believe we should hesitate to use the bomb if anyone ever made aggressive war on us again.”13

10 Boyer, By the Bomb, 183.
11 Boyer, By the Bomb, 181.
This initial acceptance of the atomic bombings can be heavily attributed to the government’s careful characterization of the decision to drop the bomb, as well as its characterization of the effects of the bomb itself on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The government was quick to point out the persuasive argument that the lives lost at Hiroshima and Nagasaki would have paled in comparison to the loss of life that would have resulted from an American invasion of the Japanese mainland. US citizens attempting to justify the dropping of the atomic bombs often cited this logic, some claiming that if even one American life were spared by the bombings, then it was worth the loss of Japanese lives. The earliest reports on the devastation of Japan came from reporters who were all carefully briefed by the US military, and then escorted by US Occupation officials around the two cities.14

The first two reporters to visit Japan independently of American Military escort were Wilfred Burchett from Australia and George Weller from the Chicago Daily News. Burchett witnessed the effects of radiation poisoning, or what he called “a mysterious malady” and reported this phenomenon to a London newspaper in September of 1945. When US officials encountered Burchett during their briefing of another group of reporters in Tokyo, they claimed that he was a victim of Japanese propaganda, denying that any such “malady” existed. Burchett was then admitted to a hospital for examination and, when released, found that the rolls of film he had taken of Hiroshima and his original dispatch to London had disappeared during his hospital stay. Similarly, George Weller’s reports of his independent observations within Japanese hospitals were

14 Boyer, By the Bomb.
somehow “held up by American Occupation press officials in Tokyo and never published.”

On August 7 and 8 of 1945, Dr. Howard Jacobsen of Columbia University, who was a low-level scientist on the Manhattan Project, published an article about his predictions regarding the consequences of the bomb. Jacobsen described harrowing aftereffects that would haunt the areas until for at least the next seventy years. As a result of this publication, Jacobsen was interrogated for hours by the FBI following his publication and pressured by the War Department until he eventually announced that his article was mere personal opinion and not based on any confidential scientific information. Instead, some of the very first accounts of the atomic bombing to reach the US mentioned only visual observations of the bomb from the air – from the point of view of Enola Gay’s crew. In September of 1945, two major pieces in the New York Times by Manhattan Project correspondent William I. Laurence denied the existence of radiation sickness and dismissed any reports to the contrary as Japanese propaganda. As the only American journalist to have witnessed any detonation of the atomic bomb, William I. Laurence was generally deemed a reliable source on the subject.

In addition to controlling the news reporters writing immediately after the Japanese surrender, the US Government released several films about the bombings. Two of these government-produced films were “The Atom Strikes!” produced by the Army Pictorial Service Signal Corps in 1945, and the US War Department’s “Tale of Two Cities” from 1946. Neither film is without bias, though both do show a significant amount of actual footage from the two demolished cities. Both films use propaganda

15 Boyer, By the Bomb, 187-188.
16 Boyer, By the Bomb, 188.
techniques including exaggerating, blaming the victim and appealing to intellectual and
religious authority.

“The Atom Strikes!” opens with dramatic music, and striking drums introduce a
light-filled sky followed by an explosion and a huge mushroom cloud. The film then
introduces itself in an appeal to authority, saying that the film was captured during an
American mission “organized by the Manhattan Engineer District, includ[ing] engineers
and medical officers and a few scientists.” This US Army film is very careful in its
language, mentioning for example that the first bomb burst over the “enemy target” in
“enemy territory”—the Japanese city of Hiroshima. The film exhibits multiple examples
of the force of the bomb—workers point out where landmarks have been destroyed,
memorials and statues blasted rough, and light posts demonstrating the direction of the
blast through evidence of flash burns.¹⁷

A school a quarter of a mile from ground zero, Hiroshima, is shown to
demonstrate its collapsing ceiling beams and buckling cement floor, yet the fate of its
students goes noticeably unmentioned. In fact, the first mention of deaths caused by the
bomb isn’t until 8 minutes into the film when a “barren point 3/10 of a mile” from ground
zero is shown to be the remains of army barracks. The narrator is sure to mention that this
desolate space is where the “main Japanese military headquarters” once stood —The
narrator also notes that most of the military personnel, about 20,000 individuals, was
“wiped out.” When the film shows a Red Cross hospital, the narrator is careful to note
that though it was damaged in the blast, the hospital never ceased functioning. The shot

¹⁷ Army Pictorial Service Signal Corps, “The Atom Strikes!” (1945) The Internet
Archive.
http://www.archive.org/details/ArmyPictorialServiceSignalCorpsTheAtomStrike
(accessed March 20, 2009).
then zooms to show how the windows were blown in by the blast and shows patterns on the backs of chairs that demonstrate they were flash-burned through the windows.\textsuperscript{18}

As the camera passes over Hiroshima’s destroyed factories and homes alike, the narrator says, “They made no attempt to zone their various types of buildings. Barracks, homes, industrial centers of steel and reinforced concrete, factory buildings of brick construction all were crowded together with no apparent regard for the safety of the civilian population.”\textsuperscript{19} Here the US Army Pictorial Service Signal Corps blame the Japanese for the destruction of their own homes, for being poorly zoned, when zoning is a completely Western invention, and no Far-Eastern cities would have been zoned in 1945.

A significant portion of the film is dedicated to an interview with a German Jesuit priest and professor outside of Hiroshima (the only human being featured in the film aside from American scientists pointing out different pieces of rubble). The priest quotes a local estimate of approximately 100,000 dead, and recalls that the damage he witnessed just out the door of his classroom (four miles away from “zero point”) was so severe that he was, at first, convinced that a bomb had been dropped directly outside. The interviewee recalls that there was no one to take charge after the explosion because most important city officials and the city’s regiment were killed. When asked his opinion of “the rumor that the ruins of the city emit a deadly ray,” the priest replies that he and his colleagues have worked in the ruins since the bombing and have experienced no adverse side effects.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{18} “The Atom Strikes!”
\textsuperscript{19} “The Atom Strikes!”
\textsuperscript{20} “The Atom Strikes!”
Finally, the priest is asked how he and his colleagues felt about the use of the bomb. Here the survivor clearly reads from a prepared statement, saying that some felt that the bomb’s use was akin to using poisonous gas against civilians and disapproved of its use. Others, he continues, feel that “in total war, as carried on in Japan, there was no difference between civilians and soldiers and that the bomb itself was an effective force in ending the bloodshed and warning Japan to surrender and thus to avoid total destruction.” The priest then says that he believes anyone who supports total war, in principle, cannot complain about war against civilians, but that he himself takes issue with the morality of total war.21

Once the film moves to Nagasaki, the narrator asserts that nearly 100% of Nagasaki’s 230,000 residents were involved in “the manufacture of arms, munition, and other war products” as a montage of Japanese industrial workers is displayed. The target at Nagasaki is said in the film to have been chosen to do the most harm to the “isolated” industrial sector, which contained one of the world’s largest torpedo factories and an arms manufacturing plant. Again, in Nagasaki, the narration justifies the damage done to homes in the industrial sector. This time, however, rather than blame irresponsible zoning practices, rather, most homes were “lightly constructed” and “on machinery in many of these homes, piecework was carried on to help the Japanese war effort.” Here the narration implies that even ordinary Japanese citizens are productive and militant.22

This section of the film is also careful to mention that rescue workers entering the city after the bombing had suffered no “ill effects or injury.” A death toll at Nagasaki is completely left out of the film, and in fact in its characterization of Nagasaki, one might

21 “The Atom Strikes!”
22 “The Atom Strikes!”
not even realize there were any casualties until the word “survivors” is mentioned. The film ends with a triumphant score, as it began, and after another impressive display of an atomic bomb exploding, the narration ends with an attempt at neutrality: “This is the record…2 B-29s…2 bombs…2 cities…the record speaks for itself.”

1946’s “Tale of Two Cities” is very similar in style to “The Atom Strikes!” and indeed they share a significant amount of film and narration with each other. One new addition, however, is the depiction in 1946 of American occupation of Japan. While a shot of American trucks driving through a landscape of rubble fills the screen, the narrator informs the viewer “Today these highways through the ruins are again in use. Beside our military traffic trudge the survivors of vanished Hiroshima, the first city in history to be atom bombed into oblivion.” In “Tale of Two Cities,” a member of the “mission” draws the viewer’s attention to the outline of a person’s shadow blasted into the concrete of a bridge. No comment is made about the fate of the person who once stood there, however. Instead, the narrator says that this “everyman” points to “a path which leads to unparalleled progress or unparalleled destruction.” The film’s narrator claims of the bomb dropped over Nagasaki that “in the towering mushroom, Japan could read its doom. This was more than a routine bombing. It was the funeral pyre of an aggressive nation.” In 1946, with this film’s was release, the United States War Department effectively told the American public that, in August of 1945, Japan could only be brought to justice through mass killings by atomic bombing.

Some news sources in the late 1940s led US citizens to believe that the Japanese had been given explicit advanced warning that the bomb would be used upon Japan’s

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23 “The Atom Strikes!”
refusal to surrender. These sources can only have been referring, however, to the generic statement in the Potsdam Declaration that if Japan did not surrender they would face “prompt and utter destruction.”\textsuperscript{18} Other prominent Americans used their intellectual power to convince citizens that the bomb was necessary, such as President of MIT Karl Compton’s 1946 essay “If the Atomic Bomb Had Not Been Used,” which emphasized the number of lives saved by the atomic bomb and asserted Japan’s unwillingness to surrender otherwise. Compton wrote this publication in order to answer the “wishful thinking” of “after-the-event strategists” and those who in hindsight deemed the bomb “inhumane or unnecessary.”\textsuperscript{25}

Apparently Compton felt the need to contradict the “after-the-event strategists” who charged that the July 1, 1946 United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS) proved that the atomic bombs were unnecessary. Certainly, the USSBS acknowledged that the atomic bombs would have been unnecessary to procure an unconditional Japanese surrender by the following November or December if Japanese casualties continued at a steady rate. However, the USSBS did not downplay the role of the atomic bombs in Japan’s decision to surrender in August of 1945.

This also may have influenced Secretary of War from 1940-1945 Henry L. Stimson to publish his 1947 article in \textit{Harper’s Magazine}. Stimson’s article was titled “The Decision to Use to Bomb” and he framed the article as an honest account of the complicated decision-making process leading to the bombings. In a private letter to President Truman, however, Stimson said that in publishing such an article, he wished to “satisfy the doubts of that rather difficult class of the community which will have the charge of the education of the next generation, namely educators and historians.”\textsuperscript{19} It is

\textsuperscript{25} Boyer, \textit{By the Bomb}, 189.
no wonder, then, with some of the most trusted and influential intellectual figures praising the use of the atomic bomb, that teachers brought this rationale into the classroom in the early postwar years. It is striking, however, that excerpts of Stimson’s account would make its way into textbooks in later years, though in one case preceded by the disclaimer: “Secretary Stimson in 1947 set forth some of the factors that went into the decision (which some experts have severely criticized).”²⁶

Writers, rather than journalists and scientists, struggled to find an appropriate tone with which to address the bomb, immediately postwar. They may have struggled to address it because, like for almost all Americans at the time, it symbolized the end of a war against evil.²⁷ Therefore, in most major novels written in postwar America, the bomb goes unmentioned, just as it does in the poetry of well-established poets of the 1940s.²⁸ The first American-published eye-witness account of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima was published on May 11, 1946, in the Saturday Review of Literature and was written by J.A. Siemes—a German Jesuit priest who was 2 kilometers away when the bomb hit.²⁹

However, in August of 1946, John Hersey published his research on the accounts of six atomic bomb survivors in his piece, Hiroshima. The New Yorker printed the first publication of Hiroshima on August 31. The magazine devoted all of its pages to publishing Hersey’s text in its entirety. From September 8-12, 1946, ABC ran a dramatic reading of Hiroshima, and several newspapers then re-printed it, uncut. The New Yorker reported that they received letters 90% in favor of Hersey’s piece and ABC reported that 95% of its letters approved—the remaining 5% staunchly maintaining that the Japanese

²⁶ Freidel and Drewry, America, 706.
²⁷ Boyer, By the Bomb, 250-251.
²⁸ Boyer, By the Bomb, 257.
deserved the bomb. The national Book-of-the-Month Club distributed a free copy to all of its subscribers (hundreds of thousands of Americans), and the hardbound edition remained on the bestseller list for a month. It may, as one review noted, have become the most widely read text of its generation.30

In contrast to the propaganda the American people had been receiving from the US government with regard to the Japanese people, Hiroshima presented the Japanese people as humans rather than barbarians. It also arguably had the short and long-term effect of instilling in Americans a sense of guilt over the bombings.31 By fall of 1947, the percentage of Americans who felt that the development of the atomic bomb was “a good thing” decreased to 55% from its high of 69% in 1945, and those who felt it a “bad thing” increased to 38% from its low of 17% in 1945.32

In the period immediately following the atomic bombings and consequent end of World War II, Michael J. Yavenditti argues, “Americans not only approved the atomic bombings, they also became increasingly apathetic about the controversy regarding the bomb’s use.” Yavenditti attributes this apathy in part to American’s conflicting information surrounding radiation poisoning. Japanese sources were reporting 30,000 to 60,000 additional deaths in Hiroshima due to radiation poisoning, yet American sources refuted these numbers. Finally General Groves tried to reassure the skeptical, saying that doctors had assured him “it is a very pleasant way to die.”33

30 Johnson, The Japanese, 42-44.
31 Johnson, The Japanese, 43.
32 Boyer, By the Bomb, 184.
Fueling this American apathy was Alexander P. de Seversky’s “study” and subsequent Reader’s Digest article. De Seversky was a well-known aviator, airplane designer and propagandist for strategic air power as well as a special consultant to the Secretary of War. His article blamed flimsy Japanese construction and fires for lives lost at Hiroshima (presenting a story similar to the “blame the victim” mentality from “The Atom Strikes!”). De Seversky further claimed that a modern steel and concrete city, presumably like those we have in the United States, would be no more damaged than if hit by a 10-ton TNT blockbuster. Somehow in de Seversky’s study, the force of an extra 19,990 tons of TNT (that it would take to duplicate the power of an atomic bomb) would do no more harm than the first 10 tons.34

Their government and news sources appeased Americans of the World War II generation. According to most American sources, Americans should have had no reason to feel guilty about Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but plenty of reasons to be grateful. Yes, they were encouraged to believe, it was a development that changed warfare forever, but it also changed the world for the better, by effectively ending the struggle against fascism and tyranny, proving to the world that democracy and liberty would prevail.

Accordingly, textbooks of the 1940s and early 1950s typically focused on the “revolutionary” nature of the atomic bomb itself. The sections treating the atomic bomb were usually written in passive voice, and rarely mentioned an actual death toll for the two cities. Typical of a textbook from this postwar period is the following account:

…the first atomic bomb was exploded on Hiroshima in Japan on August 6. The atomic bomb, revolutionizing warfare, has more power than 20,000 tons of T.N.T. According to reports, sixty per cent of Hiroshima was wiped out by this single bomb. On August 9 a second atomic bomb was exploded on Nagasaki, another

important Japanese city. More than a third of the city’s industrial area was destroyed.\textsuperscript{35} These passages contain many features common to textbooks of this period including passive voice, a focus on the “power” of the bomb, and its statistical characterization of the devastation of the two cities.

Firstly, the author has deliberately chosen to use the passive voice. In most early postwar US History textbooks, the atomic bomb “was dropped” on Japan. The agent of this action—the dropping of the most destructive bomb in history to that date—is missing from the sentence. In fact, in some versions of the events of August 6 and 9, 1945, the agent of this action (namely, the United States) is unclear even from the context of the description. One 1946 textbook, for example, relates:

\begin{quote}
The Japanese were urged by the Allied powers to end the war at once, but the military clique in control of the Nippon Government hesitated. They came to a quick decision, however, when the atomic bomb—a new and terrible weapon of modern warfare—was dropped on two of their cities—Hiroshima and Nagasaki.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

The author of this textbook not only used passive voice to describe the United States dropping the bomb, but he also lead into the section by mentioning the Allied powers, thus forcing students to refer to their personal knowledge of the event to recall the nation responsible for the bombings. The use of the passive voice to describe the actions of the US Government is a deliberate decision made by textbook authors, and its vagueness denies the United States responsibility for the bombings. Similarly, early postwar textbook authors relied upon statistics to convey the destructive power of the bomb, thus alleviating any American guilt over the loss of life.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Wirth, \textit{Development}, 804.}
\footnote{James T. Adams, \textit{The Record of America} (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1946), 594h.}
\end{footnotes}
In the first example, Fremont P. Wirth cites a statistic used in most immediately postwar textbooks: a single atomic bomb contained as much power as 20,000 tons of TNT. This sounds powerful, indeed, but since most students would have no reference point for the destructive power of just one ton of TNT, it shifts the reader’s focus off of the destruction of the two Japanese cities and onto the scientific achievement of creating such a powerful bomb. Few postwar textbooks cite numbers of actual Japanese killed or injured in the blasts. Instead, like Wirth’s example above, authors chose to include statistics on how much of the city was damaged. Several cite that 60 per cent of the city of Hiroshima was destroyed. In one 1946 textbook, the bomb “wiped out 60 per cent of [Hiroshima]” and three days later, “most of the city of Nagasaki was pulverized.”37 By citing these statistics, authors were able to frame the bombings as military successes. Rather than note how many lives were taken by the bomb, these authors chose to relate the destruction in terms of percent of target destroyed. In reality, the Japanese loss of life in these two attacks alone totaled nearly half of the total US loss of life throughout the entirety of World War II.

Early postwar textbooks also fixate on the idea that Japan was “warned” about the power of the atomic bomb. These textbooks refer to the generic statement in the Potsdam declaration that if the Japanese refused to surrender unconditionally then they would face “prompt and utter destruction.”38 In most descriptions, this “threat” or “warning” was either ignored or refused by the Japanese. This outlook implies that the United States amply warned the Japanese before attacking on August 6 and 9, 1945. However, since the power to use an atomic bomb was exclusive to the United States in 1945, there is no

38 Boyer, *By the Bomb*, 189.
evidence to support the notion that the Japanese government could have foreseen atomic bombings as the meaning of “prompt and utter destruction.” The characterization of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the post-war classroom directly reflected the limited and biased information available in the wider post-war society. Textbooks encouraged the societal consensus that Americans had no need to feel guilty, and plenty of reasons to feel grateful that their government had dropped the bomb.

However, the post-war period rapidly gave way to the cold war era when, in 1949, the Russians exploded their own atomic bomb and the United States lost its unique position as the sole possessor of nuclear power. The 1950s would be characterized by cold war tensions and a new age of American affluence, factors that not only precipitated into the teachings of the atomic bombings, but that would also raise a unique generation of political activists.

These children of the WWII generation, the baby boomer generation, were born into a new, wealthy version of the United States. The United States was the richest, most powerful country in the world. The US had contributed to the war effort on a massive scale, joining the Allied nations and helping them triumph, but witnessed virtually no fighting or bombing on its home soil. The economic stimulation of the Second World War was like nothing the United States had ever experienced, and suddenly a generation who struggled to survive the Great Depression could now buy their own homes and send their children to college. The baby boomers were the first generation to grow up in an American age of affluence and the first generation to grow up with the atomic bomb as a reality. Both factors caused a significant rift between this generation and that of their parents.
While parents of the baby boomers could view the bomb as a relief—the end of a cruel war—the baby boomer generation viewed it as a constant threat. Subjected to school drills and air raid sirens, children raised during the Cold War understood the bomb first in relation to themselves and their lives. Todd Gitlin identifies a significant turning point in generational views about the atomic bomb when he says, “The bomb, which felt like a shield in 1945, turned into a menace again in 1949, when the Russians exploded their own.” With this development, the American public was subjected to a constant stream of government propaganda telling them what to do and what not to do in case of an atomic attack.

Films such as “Atomic Alert (Elementary Version)” and “Duck and Cover” were shown in elementary schools around the United States to educate students as to the proper behavior in an atomic attack. “Atomic Alert” advises children to find cover in the event of an atomic attack and briefly describes the three “dangers” of an atomic bomb—the blast, the heat wave, and the radiation waves. “Duck and Cover” likewise advises children to find shelter if at all possible during an atomic bombing, and uses the friendly graphic of “Bert the Turtle” to illustrate the proper response to “danger.” When Bert is blithely walking along and is surprised to find a monkey in a tree holding a lit stick of dynamite toward Bert’s face, he immediately “ducks and covers” by zipping into his

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shell. But, as the campaign advises, Bert has his shelter on his back, whereas children must “learn to find shelter.”

Films like these were also made for general audiences, including 1951’s “Survival Under Atomic Attack” produced by the US Office of Civil Defense. This film also recommends protecting oneself and one’s family from the 3 main dangers of the bomb: blast, heat, and radioactivity. This one goes further, however, to reassure Americans that most Japanese who suffered radiation poisoning now lead happy healthy lives and bear healthy children. The reassurance is completed by a gratuitous shot of a “happy, healthy” Japanese family. Recommendations for shelter at home include refuge in the cellar, preferably underneath a steady workbench and against the wall nearest your town’s most likely target. When an air raid siren sounds, citizens are advised to close windows and blinds, turn off appliances and heaters and congregate in the safest part of the home/building. During a “surprise attack,” individuals are encouraged to duck into a doorway or fall to the ground. If indoors, one should slide beneath a table or fall to the ground facing away from any windows. During a ground attack, individuals are advised to get and stay inside until the all-clear is given, cover broken windows, and wash anything if exposure to radioactive dust is suspected.

In the 1950s, Hiroshima was rekindled as a symbol of the ban-the-bomb movement. In March of 1954, the Bikini H-bomb test ignited American furies when researchers covered a Japanese fishing boat with radioactive fallout from the test. Thus images of Hiroshima were recalled to help the movement gain popularity and

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momentum. On the 10 and 20-year anniversaries of the Hiroshima bombing, the US saw myriad magazines and newspapers publishing eyewitness accounts and other articles on Hiroshima’s devastation. Throughout this period, research on the effects of nuclear fallout on the affected population gained strength and lent credibility to the theory of radiation sickness, this research eventually reaching the United States.\textsuperscript{43}

As early as 1947, several journalists had heralded guesses that the atomic bombings may have been more anti-Soviet strategy than anti-Japanese.\textsuperscript{24} In P.M.S. Blackett’s 1948 book \textit{Fear, War, and the Bomb}, he highlighted the Soviet Union’s planned invasion of the Japanese mainland while the US forces remained on smaller islands. Blackett identified the possibility that the Soviets may have obtained occupation of Japan if they had succeeded in overtaking the mainland before the US bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These theories would be widely dismissed, however, until the 1960s.\textsuperscript{44}

Textbooks of the 1950s demonstrate influences of the ban-the-bomb movement, cold war ideology, conspiracy theories and increased criticism of US foreign policy. Textbooks increasingly treated the atomic bomb as a dangerous development, and encouraged more questioning of US decisions during World War II. In Wirth’s 1950 and 1955 editions of textbook \textit{United States History}, his description of the bombings themselves are very similar to those found in 1946 and 1947 texts. In addition, however, both books include a cartoon from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch entitled “Challenge of the Atom” which depicts an iron giant on a leash. The leash is held by one of two tiny figures on the surface of the earth, and the giant, labeled “ATOMIC POWER,” has shoulders

\textsuperscript{43} Boyer, \textit{By the Bomb}, 189-192.
\textsuperscript{44} Boyer, \textit{By the Bomb}, 192.
twice as broad as Earth’s diameter.\textsuperscript{45} This implies that human beings are trying futilely to control something so powerful that it could easily destroy all of us—an implication completely lacking from earlier texts on the same subject.

A typical textbook of the 1950s differs significantly from earlier versions in its characterization of the atomic bombings. Ralph Harlow and Ruth Miller’s 1957 text, for example, gives a much more balanced view of the atomic bomb than most textbooks of the 1940s, saying: “The atomic bomb brought the Japanese to their knees, but it cast a fearful shadow over the world. Many Americans could not rest easy over what we had done to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They argued that other means of defeating the Japanese might have been used. Our government claimed officially, however, that the use of the atomic bomb had been a military necessity…Terrible as it was, the bomb ended the war quickly and saved countless lives, both American and Japanese.”\textsuperscript{46} This text includes the idea that the bomb is dangerous for the entire world population and acknowledges dissent on the subject within the United States, yet it concludes with an appeal to authority. The authors cite both the “official” government stance and the argument that American and Japanese lives were actually spared when President Truman ordered the use of the atomic bomb against Japan.

Textbooks of the 1950s were also increasingly likely to include death tolls and suggestions for discussing the ethical implications of the atomic bomb. Harlow and Miller’s text includes the following in its description of the effects of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima: “In a matter of minutes the bomb wiped out the entire city, and took


\textsuperscript{46} Ralph V. Harlow and Ruth E. Miller, ed., \textit{Story of America} (Henry Holt and Company, 1957), 508.
the lives of some 70,000 human beings.” 47 This contrasts sharply with the earlier
depictions describing merely the percentage of the city destroyed by the bomb. Harlow
and Miller chose not to shy away from the harsh reality and instead invite students to
fully realize that it was not simply a military target, but that tens of thousands of
individuals lost their lives instantly when the United States dropped the first atomic
bomb. In its end-of-chapter activities, a 1958 text by Samuel Steinberg actively provokes
students and teachers to discuss the ethical implications of the atomic bombing of Japan.
One of a long list of “questions on the text,” reads, “Do you think we should have used
the atomic bomb against Japan? Why?” 48 Thus, students are invited for the first time in
1958 to take a critical look at their nation’s foreign policy and identify their own reasons
why the bomb should or should not have been used.

Another new feature in the textbooks of the 1950s is the mention of American
internment camps for Japanese-Americans. Wirth’s 1950 text notes that during World
War II “…intolerance in most instances was avoided except toward Japanese Americans
in some sections of the country.” 49 Although Wirth’s assessment is a gross
understatement, it is notable that he brings up “intolerances” against Japanese-Americans.
Just seven years later, however, Harlow and Miller bring questions of race and racism
into the high school classroom saying that “confining men and women—not for what
they had done, but because their whole ‘race’ was under suspicion—looked like the kind
of totalitarian practice we were fighting against.” 50 Literally comparing practices of the
United States the practices of the Axis powers during World War II was an

47 Harlow and Miller, Story of America, 508.
48 Samuel Steinberg, The United States: Story of a Free People (Boston: Allyn and
49 Wirth, United States History, 1950, 550.
50 Harlow and Miller, Story of America, 511.
unprecedented move in the high school American History curriculum. In the chapter’s additional information and activities section, the same textbook suggests as a potential debate or panel discussion “Resolved: That our government should not have put Japanese-Americans in internment camps.”⁵¹ Again, the authors of this 1957 text invite student discussion of racism against Japanese-Americans.

Despite the more accurate portrayals of Japanese-American internment and the acknowledgement of the global significance of atomic bomb, textbooks of the 1950s portrayed the bombing itself as a relief. It may have been described as a “terrible” modern weapon, but it was still discussed as the savior of American soldiers and sometimes even Japanese soldiers who would have otherwise been killed had the United States invaded the main Japanese islands.

The political climate of the 1960s provided a unique opportunity for Americans to reexamine their attitudes toward American foreign policy. In 1974, Barton Bernstein wrote that William Appleman William’s position on atomic diplomacy as written in The Tragedy of American Diplomacy (1959) was not revived and appreciated fully until the Vietnam War set the stage for criticisms of American foreign policy.⁵² Along with the US Government’s willingness to terror-bomb another Asian country came a willingness of many Americans to question the policies that lead to Hiroshima and Nagasaki.⁵³ Todd Gitlin asserts that many baby boomers even felt that they needed to speak out against the killings of innocents in Vietnam as their parents had failed to speak out for European

⁵¹ Harlow and Miller, Story of America, 517.
⁵³ Newman, Truman.
Jews.\textsuperscript{54} Indeed, many young Americans who began to distrust their government due to Vietnam came to distrust the decision to use atomic weapons against Japan.

This questioning coincided with psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton’s 1968 publication \textit{Death in Life}, wherein Lifton claimed that all Americans feel collective guilt about the bomb.\textsuperscript{55} Suddenly, Blackett’s 1948 position on the atomic bombings gained popularity, and Americans increasingly viewed the atomic bombings as an unjustified demonstration of US technology to intimidate the Soviet Union.

After the Greensboro, North Carolina, sit-ins inspired imitations and non-violent activist groups against racial discrimination across the country, “racial injustice, along with the threat of nuclear annihilation and the prevalence of bureaucratic insensitivity to injustice (and later…imperialism and sexism, too) became the perceived by-products of a debased American liberalism.”\textsuperscript{56} Baby boomers disillusioned and bored with the affluent fifties looked around for role models to join in order to spur social change, but found them lacking. Tom Hayden, of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) would be the man to propose a plan for a new form of “American liberalism,” a “New Left” for a new generation.

“We are the people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit.”\textsuperscript{57} Thus begins the 1962 Port Huron Statement delivered by Tom Hayden to a group of college-student supporters. Hayden immediately distances his own generation from that of his parents.

\textsuperscript{54} Gitlin, \textit{The Sixties}, 26.
\textsuperscript{55} Johnson, \textit{The Japanese}, 40-45.
\textsuperscript{56} Geoff Andrews, ed. \textit{New Left, New Right and Beyond: Taking the Sixties Seriously} (Basingstoke: Palgrave Publishers, 1999), 53.
The Statement “voiced two common views of an entire political generation” when it identified the collective uneasiness of the college generation—uneasy because of racial bigotry which “compelled most of [the New Left generation] from silence to activism” and because of the “‘common peril’ of nuclear annihilation.” Hayden’s 1962 speech notes that his generation grew up when the US was on top: the least war-torn, the leader in atomic power, the wealthiest and strongest. He also notes the significance that they are the first generation to grow up during the Cold War—with the presence of the bomb a very real threat. Hayden says “with nuclear energy whole cities can easily be powered, yet the dominant nation-states seem more likely to unleash destruction greater than incurred in all wars of human history,” a problem which he refers to as one of the greatest paradoxes faced by his generation.

Hayden rejects the apathy toward the bomb and toward politics generally that pervaded the postwar era. He states that “our work is guided by the sense that we may be the last generation in the experiment with living” and denounces quiet complacency in such an atmosphere. He tells his generation that they will be relied upon in order to form a New Left. “A new left must consist of younger people who matured in the postwar world and partially be directed to the recruitment of younger people.” This generation must be able to “transform modern complexities into issues that can be understood and felt close up by every human being. [A new left] must give form to the feelings of helplessness and indifference, so that people may see the political, social, and economic sources of their private troubles, and organize to change society.” Hayden ends his speech with an attitude common to his activist generation: “If we appear to seek the

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59 Hayden, *Port Huron*. 
unattainable, as it has been said, then let it be known that we do so to avoid the unimaginable.”

Reflecting the controversial additions to the Utah social studies curriculum the 1961 Utah Social Studies guide contains a “Policy on Controversial Issues” guaranteeing their students the right to disagree with teachers and the right to a fair presentation of all sides of any issue. Several of these controversial issues must have been raised in newly added Unit 7 of the Grade 11 US History and Government curriculum. Unit 7, “Our Country and the World” includes study of US foreign policy decisions. Its listed “outcome” for students is an “understanding that problems relating to American foreign policy are hazardous and complex and they require continuous reassessment and concerted effort toward their resolution.” Textbooks of the 1960s certainly did reassess American foreign policy decisions, particularly those made during World War II.

Textbooks of the 1960s still mention the Potsdam declaration, but not all of them portray this call for surrender as a “warning” for the destruction of an atomic bomb. These descriptions are much more historically accurate than those of the 1940s and 50s. One 1963 characterization, for example, states that the Japanese chose to “ignore” the Potsdam ultimatum, but continues, “Actually, Japan, still at peace with the Soviet Union, was trying to obtain Soviet help in making a more favorable settlement than unconditional surrender.” This relation ignores the fact that the Soviets had already agreed to a land invasion of Japan at Potsdam. However, this portrayal of the event gives the Japanese government much more credit than previous descriptions in texts of the

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60 Hayden, *Port Huron.*
63 Steinberg, *The United States*, 632.
1940s and 50s, all of which leave the incident with the Japanese “ignoring” the summons to surrender. A description that claims “from Potsdam came a message to Japan: surrender or be destroyed” and that Japan then refused to comply, leaves the reader to assume the Japanese should have known what to expect after refusing the ultimatum.\textsuperscript{64} Here, in the 1963 version of the story, Japan has an understandable reason to refuse the terms of unconditional surrender.

Textbook authors of the 1960s also portrayed Truman’s deliberation and decision to drop the bomb more accurately and with more careful attention than previously. Multiple authors used excerpts from Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson’s 1947 article “The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb” published in Harper’s Magazine. By 1970, Frank Freidel and Henry Drewry printed a lengthy excerpt from Stimson’s article in their text \textit{America: A Modern History of the United States}.\textsuperscript{65} Though Stimson’s 1947 article was an attempt to defend his decision to recommend Truman drop the bomb, it’s inclusion in the 1970 Friedel text and several other texts of the 1960s is important because Stimson’s article admits more than most textbooks in 1947. Stimson, for example, notes that their goal target would be “dual,” containing military power, but “surrounded by or adjacent to houses and other buildings most susceptible to damage.”\textsuperscript{66} The admission by the Secretary of War himself that he and his advising team planned on hitting both a military and civilian target is glossed over in earlier versions of the event. Stimson also admits that several scientists on the project disagreed with his analysis of

\textsuperscript{66} Freidel and Drewry, \textit{America}, 706.
the situation and called for a warning demonstration at the very least, another omission by early postwar textbook writers.

Textbooks from the 1960s were more likely to include a diverse set of documents on the atomic bombings than ever before. Like the Stimson article mentioned above, other texts include excerpts from Albert Einstein’s letter to President Roosevelt urging him to support nuclear research. Quotes from President Truman, from atomic physicists who worked on the atomic bomb, and excerpts from the Baruch plan are all accounted for in several textbooks of the time. Significantly, several of these documents openly condemn the use of the bomb including accounts from physicists who opposed its use, and the Baruch plan, which was suggested to the UN in 1946 to curb nuclear proliferation. Photos were also included but branched out somewhat from the standard mushroom-cloud shot. Additionally, photos of mangled buildings or one of the cities reduced to absolute rubble were included with meaningful captions suggesting that the world would never be the same, now that the atomic bomb proved humans could easily destroy their own civilization.

Significant, too, is how mainstream questioning the moral, ethical, and racial implications of America’s use of the bomb had become by the 1960s. Even the most conservative texts ask students “Should the United States have used the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?” One even ventures to ask, “Would the United States have used [the atomic bombs] on Berlin and Nuremberg?” This hearkens back to the racial question brought up by the introduction of Japanese internment camps as a topic for school discussion. In fact, a 1970 text asks students “Why were American citizens of

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Japanese descent treated differently from American citizens of German descent, even though Germany was considered the more dangerous enemy?" Students are being asked for the first time not only to try an open criticism of their government’s behavior in a controversial area, but also to identify potential racism harbored by their parents’ generation.

By the 1960s, textbook characterization of the actual bombings changed drastically from the postwar view. All but the most conservative descriptions include a death toll, and that number ranges from 70,000 dead in Hiroshima to over 150,000 dead between both Hiroshima and Nagasaki. *Rise of the American Nation*, 1961, provides the most striking accounts of the bombings and their effects. The authors solemnly relate, “…more than 150,000 Japanese died in the resulting holocausts. Thousands of others suffered dreadful after effects.” Suddenly, the bomb is no longer a “revolution” in modern warfare but a weapon for mass murder, for holocausts. And several pages later, the same authors give a striking new view of the bombing—the view from the ground: “On August 6, 1945, at eight-fifteen in the morning, a solitary plane crossed over the Japanese city of Hiroshima. It flew very high. A few people looked up. No alarm was sounded. Then, suddenly, the city disintegrated in a single searing atomic blast. Nearly 100,000 of the 245,000 men, women, and children in Hiroshima were killed instantly or died soon after.” For the first time since the bomb was dropped, over fifteen years prior, American high school students are invited by their textbook to imagine what it must have been like to have one’s life, family, home, and entire city completely destroyed, without warning, in a single instant. Between 1946 and 1961 an enormous transformation must

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have occurred for the US History curriculum and textbooks (usually notoriously conservative) to acknowledge the devastation caused by the American atomic bombings of Japan and even encourage questioning of US foreign policy generally.

Friedel and Drewry’s 1970 text highlights the very rapid and drastic change in public attitude from World War II to 1970 by including the article “Observer: V-E Day Plus 7,305” by satirist Russell Baker. Baker’s article, written twenty years after V-E Day, gives students a sharp image of the shifts in cultural and political attitudes throughout the twenty years after World War II. Baker also highlights the generational differences between the World War II generation and their children, the baby boomers. Baker presents a fictional situation in which a mop-topped adolescent from the 1960s travels back in time to visit a barracks full of soldiers just after V-E Day. The boy asks what the soldiers were fighting for and then systematically responds to their answers telling them how insignificant these problems remain in the “future.”

When the soldiers claim they fought to defeat Japanese imperialism, the boy says “Within 20 years you will rebuild Japan. It will be your warmest friend in the Pacific. When your children are born, you will teach them not to say ‘Japs.’ You will teach them to say ‘our Japanese friends.’” And when another soldier pipes in that “the Jap bombing of Pearl Harbor will live in infamy. We’ve fought to guarantee that,” the young man responds “Then you have lost…Within 20 years you will have large, unhappy children who will not remember Pearl Harbor. They will say, however, that your own bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were acts of infamy.” Eventually the young man is pulled back into the “future” just in time to avoid being seriously brutalized by the soldiers. Baker’s

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71 Freidel and Drewry, *America*, 714.
72 Freidel and Drewry, *America*, 714.
characterization of these two completely different generations facing off as young men highlights several key features of the two. The older generation (the soldiers) was able to define, specifically, what they were fighting for and who they were fighting against, and they took pride in it. Yet the boy manages to complicate each of their assertions and further frustrates the men when he has the audacity to repeat “…then you have lost.”

The material affluence of the 1950s had promised a smooth transition to “the new Utopia”—which was to be a new “egalitarian culture to complement the democratic politics which, following fascism’s defeat, had become a norm for the nation’s world states.” For the postwar baby boomer generation, however, the culture proved to be more complicated than promised. According to Gitlin, “…to many in my generation, especially the incipient New Left, the grimmest and least acknowledged underside of affluence was the Bomb. Everything might be possible? So might annihilation.” The New Left arose from a generation disillusioned by the old liberalism of their parents generation—now torn by East-West complications and opinions—and banded together to succeed where they felt their parents’ generation had failed—to be held accountable for their new role in history.

Certainly, one outlet for this new accountability was the US History classroom. In this cultural and political context, questioning foreign policy decisions—even those that lead to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—was one way to demonstrate newfound willingness to be held accountable for present and future actions. This shift in public attitude, thereby, filtered through to the United States History classroom. As more radical views on the decision to drop the bomb became more socially acceptable, so did

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73 Freidel and Drewry, *America*, 714.
75 Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 22.
teaching students to question their government in general. Thus, through the complex change in political scenery, and a decrease in apathy toward US foreign policy decisions, the American History classroom began to emphasize questioning the atomic bombings.

The pedagogical shift in the teaching of the atomic bombings from the 1940s to the 1960s represents a turning point in the teaching of American history. Through the Second World War, the purpose of social studies courses was to produce patriots. The school system as a whole endeavored to produce generation after generation of nationalist industrial workers. By 1961, however, the Utah State Social Studies Guide includes a telling and accurate forward that reflects the changing curriculum of high school social studies.

The forward begins, “Modern technological advances are resulting in rapid social, political, and economic changes to which the individual citizen in a democracy must learn to react creatively and effectively.” It goes on to express the importance of students’ ability to interpret the past as it affects the present and how those in turn affect the future. Patriotism, nationalism, and civic duty all go unmentioned in this new analysis of the importance of social studies. Just as members of the New Left yearned to be held accountable for their actions, the new trend in social studies curricula became to hold our predecessors accountable. No longer should the US History textbooks have to present a rosy view of the actions of the United States government. Rather than accepting the decisions of an obviously flawed body of governance, teachers and textbook authors finally preferred to let their students grapple with the massacres at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and with atrocities committed by their own government.

76 Wilburn N. Bell, Superintendent, “Social Studies for Utah Schools” (Salt Lake City: Utah State Department of Public Instruction, 1961), iii.
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