

## The Third Hiroshima Peace Studies Tour

Takanori Mita (Doctor of Education)  
Chair of Languages & Cultures  
Professor of Japanese  
Minnesota State University Moorhead

Travel Dates: March 13 – 19, 2010

Participants: 12 students and one teacher

Peace Studies Course Term: Nine lectures between Jan 13 and March 11

Two lectures after the tour

Study Resources: Comic book “Barefoot Gen”

Part of thesis on the A-bombing

Film “Rhapsody in August”

### New Contents Compared to the Previous Tour

1. Primary purpose is to meet with the citizens of Hiroshima.
2. Survey on students' awareness conducted during the second tour was not carried out.
3. Showed “Rhapsody in August” directed by Akira Kurosawa instead of “HIROSHIMA” by Roger Spottiswoode.
4. On February 27, toured a missile site in North Dakota, which had been used until the 1980's.

### Reasons for the Changes

1. It is difficult to understand the feelings of the current citizens of Hiroshima and the A-bomb survivors by only seeing exhibits in the Peace Memorial Museum.
2. It is difficult to raise worldwide sympathy by only speaking on the hatred and sorrow associated with the A-bombing, when it comes to Americans, especially. A new approach to passing on the tragedies of the A-bombing is required.
3. If we were to conduct a survey on awareness, the students would unconsciously defend their country's use of the atomic bomb. Presuming that students with only a superficial knowledge of the atomic bombing would have changed their minds would lead to inconsistent replies.
4. When going through the Cold War era missile site in the Cold War in the neighboring state, the students learned just how seriously the U.S., which dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and understood their danger, took defense preparations for a possible Soviet attack.

5. For this current generation that doesn't know the tragedy of war, I felt that it was better to show a video that expresses the younger generation's effort to understand the feelings of the survivors, rather than one that just explained the history of the atomic bombing.

### **Change in Student Sentiment**

Just as with the past two trips, many students thought that the people of Hiroshima hated Americans. As with the previous trips, the students this time were also surprised at the differences between their assumptions and reality. This time they had opportunities to meet with junior high students, college students, volunteer guides at the Peace Memorial Museum and Hiroshima Castle, passersby on Hondori street and shop staff. After experiencing life in Hiroshima, the students' fears turned into a familiarity with the people, and they began to understand the tragedy of the past.

Students began to think that the driving force behind peace was in a country's national education. In the discussion with Hiroshima college students, one student said that "It will take time to abolish all nuclear weapons. But, we should do what we can. Our government should educate people on threat of nuclear war." One participant wrote the following in a journal:

*Walking from the Peace Park to Aster Plaza: After we visited the Peace Museum, I couldn't walk the streets without feeling haunted. At the hypocenter, I looked up and imagined looking up to see a fireball and then be gone. There had be someone at the hypocenter. What were their last thoughts? Once back at Aster Plaza, it is right next to the river, so to think that anyone not killed was crawling to that river, begging for water, was unimaginable.*

*In the Memorial Hall: Retell a testimony in your own words as if it happened to you. Personally, no matter how I would retell this, it would have no comparison to the pain the survivors felt.*

The night before heading back to the U.S., one participant thought about what that day on August 6 must have been like, while walking from the Peace Park to Aster Plaza.

*If someone managed to survive the thermal radiation within 1km radius, it was only a matter of time before the prompt radiation made them ill. The prompt radiation alone had the capability to kill almost everyone within 1km of the hypocenter. It was difficult for me to imagine the currently beautiful city as something totally different; and that was*

*scary. Humans are capable of almost anything. It is just too bad that we usually end up hurting each other instead of helping.*

*Later that night, around 9:00 P.M., I stood by the river banks with friends. We didn't say much as we all contemplated what we had seen and experienced on this trip. I put my hand to the ground as a symbolic gesture and tears began to flow down my face as I, once again imagined all the suffering that occurred in this city not long ago. The Hiroshima Peace Studies Tour has made me much more sympathetic, as I was essentially ignorant to the pain and devastation before. I changed because I was more aware of what truly occurred here and I am willing to advocate their cause now. I will never forget what happened.*

## **Summary**

When looking over the previous visits, I decided this time to focus on peace activities for Americans and also ways to think about peace by meeting with Hiroshima citizens. I think that the new contents were effective for allowing the participants to better understand the tragedy that took place in Hiroshima.

One of the main causes of war is a lack of understanding between countries. By deliberately using misinformation, the country stokes the flames of bigotry. If they have an affinity toward people in a foreign nation, they won't use nuclear weapons on them. Many Americans don't support "the world without nuclear weapons" advocated by President Obama. Why? Because they don't know the terror of nuclear weapons. The U.S. government has repeatedly validated dropping the atomic bombs for over 60 years. So, for the American people, the problem is not the despicable use of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but rather the number of bombs used. Was one atomic bomb enough to use? Due to lack of national education on the nuclear threat, President Obama's wonderful policy of "a world without nuclear weapons" was not fully supported. I believe the reasons for the delay in nuclear disarmament are that the U.S. has repeatedly validated the A-bombings without telling of the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; and rather than look at the responsibility that America has, other nations have placed the blame on Japan, while security developing nuclear power. Once something has been spread out, it's hard to go back and contain it. Just like gun control. In other words, there are industries that benefit from guns. These businesses make donations to political parties who in turn uphold the right of the people to protect themselves with guns. It's geographically difficult to prevent the influx of guns, and lawmakers fear trying to amend the right to gun ownership which has been in the constitution since the pioneer days.

Those who are opposed to gun control say, “Guns don’t kill people. People kill people.” This theory is also interpreted as, “Nuclear weapons don’t kill people, the people who press the button kill people.” They validate nuclear development as a deterrent and prevent nuclear disarmament in this social theory. That is why the U.S. isn’t proactively advocating “a world without nuclear weapons”. Therefore, we can’t continue with the current way of just showing the destruction by the atomic bomb. Instead, we must think of a new way to talk to Americans about nuclear issues.

The purpose of this “Peace Studies Tour” was to have the students get to know the people of Hiroshima and through those meetings, feel ever more keenly the destruction that was reaped upon the city by the atomic bomb. However, among the participants, there was a student who was unmoved by the Peace Memorial Museum exhibits or the *hibakusha*’s story from the heart. He wrote the following in his journal:

*It was eerie though, and almost took on a redundancy that made the task of listening to testimonial and reading firsthand accounts mundane. After a while the same phenomena that occurred with the written and video testimonials began to happen with the pictures—if you’ve seen one you’ve seen them all. It seems very unfortunate that such earth shattering images can be reduced and boiled down to a very basic essence that one can represent all. I feel it was an unavoidable situation though, for when so much emphasis is put on the outcome of an event more than fifty years in the past, and so little on the importance of solely concentrating on the future.*

I commented that, “The reason why they are repeatedly saying the same thing is because all the destruction was inflicted at once. They were not forced to say so by a dictator. They mention that because the weapon used totally destroyed the whole city in an instant.” The day before the end of this tour, he revisited the monuments in the Peace Memorial Park again to sort out his feelings, but didn’t visit the Museum and the Memorial Hall again. For Americans, more than anyone else, it is tough to face the tragedy in Hiroshima.

The reason I host the “Hiroshima Peace Studies Tour” is to convey to many Americans the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and I hope they will become citizens who strongly oppose the use of nuclear weapons, or lawmakers who will make the choice to not use nuclear weapons in the future if America is in a dangerous situation and on the verge of a war in the future.