Hiroshima

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN HERSEY

John Hersey was born to a family of missionaries living in China; he grew up speaking Chinese before he spoke English. When he was ten, he moved to New York to attend school, and he later went to the elite Hotchkiss boarding school, followed by Yale. Hersey attended graduate school at Cambridge, and then began writing for *Time* magazine. He was a war correspondent during World War Two, and he wrote for some of America's most popular papers and magazines, including *The New York Times* and *Life*. Shortly after the bombing of Hiroshima, Hersey began writing a lengthy magazine article on the subject; it was later published in *The New Yorker*, and it became Hersey's defining work. Following *Hiroshima*, Hersey penned many other novels and nonfiction books. During the 1960s, he was a residential college master at Yale, where he was noted for his support of radical student movements. Hersey continued writing prolifically in the final three years of his life, and he was almost universally respected—an elder statesman of American journalism.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The overarching historical event of *Hiroshima* is, of course, America's decision to drop an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, followed by another on the city of Nagasaki. The bombings were followed almost immediately by the unconditional surrender of the Japanese state, effectively ending World War Two in the Pacific Theater with a victory for the Allies. In the immediate aftermath of the bombing, President Harry Truman claimed that Hiroshima and Nagasaki were "military bases"—an untrue, or, at the very least, intentionally misleading statement (as one journalist said, "If Hiroshima was a military base, then so is Seattle"). Later, Truman changed course and claimed that the bombing of Hiroshima was a morally justifiable response to the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, the event that sparked America's involvement in World War Two. The bombing of Hiroshima remains highly controversial, with some historians insisting that it was an appropriate way for America to save countless soldiers' lives, and other historians claiming it was an appalling war crime intended to assert America's new supremacy on the world stage.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The bombing of Hiroshima inspired many great works of fiction and nonfiction. Arguably the greatest was the 1959 film *Hiroshima mon amour*, directed by the French New Way auteur Alain Resnais, with a screenplay by the novelist Marguerite Duras. Readers looking for an authoritative account of the history and politics of the Hiroshima bombing should consult Ronald Takaki's *Hiroshima: Why America Dropped the Atomic Bomb*, or, for a more partisan take, the World War Two chapters of Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Hiroshima
- **When Written:** The first chapters were written in the first half of 1946; Hersey later added additional chapters, including one written forty years after the bombing
- **Where Written:** New York City and the Solomon Islands (in the Pacific)
- **When Published:** The first portion of the book first appeared as the entirety of the August 31, 1946 issue of *The New Yorker*, and it later appeared as a full-length book in November 1946. In 1985, *The New Yorker* published another full-length Hersey piece on the aftermath of the bombing, which was later included in editions of *Hiroshima*.
- **Literary Period:** The book has been considered one of the founding texts of New Journalism, the journalistic technique of depicting nonfiction events with a narrative literary style. However, Hersey later said that he despised New Journalism, so he probably wouldn't appreciate being remembered as its godfather!
- **Genre:** nonfiction
- **Setting:** Hiroshima, Japan, and surrounding towns
- **Climax:** None—the book follows characters through many stages in their lives, so that action never really "rises" or "falls"
- **Antagonist:** The United States, nuclear technology, or the indifferent Japanese state could all be considered antagonists
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient (moving back and forth between the six main characters)

EXTRA CREDIT

How to get a job by being a jerk. John Hersey was famous, and notorious, for his blunt, outspoken manner. As a young man, he wrote a long article on how horrible *Time* magazine's journalism had become. *Time*'s editors read the article—and promptly hired Hersey to make the magazine better!

The sincerest form of flattery. John Hersey was a highly-respected journalist, but he had his share of detractors. In 1988, he gained some new enemies after he was found to have

plagiarized large chunks of Laurence Bergreen's biography of the writer James Agee for his own article on Agee in *The New Yorker*. Hersey was reportedly humiliated by the discovery, and he publicly apologized to Bergreen. But later, a reader discovered that Hersey had plagiarized *other* articles, too!

PLOT SUMMARY

The book opens with the sudden dropping of the atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. The narrative then follows six survivors of the blast as they recount their lives before, during, and after the explosion.

The first person, Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto, is a beloved priest. On August 6, he wakes up early to help his friend move some heavy furniture to another house. At 8:15 am, while Tanimoto and his friend are outside the house, a bright light flashes across the sky, and the force of the explosion throws Tanimoto to the ground. However, because he is miles away from the blast center, he survives without any serious injuries. Another woman living in Hiroshima, Hatsuyo Nakamura, wakes up very early on August 6. Nakamura is a widow who sews for a living. When the bomb explodes, Nakamura's house is reduced to rubble. She is able to crawl through the rubble and save her three young children.

Another Hiroshiman, Dr. Masakazu Fujii, is sitting on the porch behind his home (which doubles as a single-practice hospital), reading the paper. The force of the explosion rips the porch out from the building and throws it into the river below. Fujii is able to wade out of the river, though he has broken his collarbone in the fall. A German priest living in Hiroshima, Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge, is sitting in his chapel during the blast. The young doctor Terufumi Sasaki is working in the Red Cross Hospital when the explosion rips apart some of the building's walls. Sasaki is uninjured, and he immediately begins tending to the victims of the explosion. The final main character in the book, a young clerk named Toshiko Sasaki, is sitting in her office; in the explosion she is crushed under a heavy **bookcase**, so that "in the first moment of the atomic age, a human being was crushed by books."

In the chaos following the explosion, Tanimoto runs back into the center of the city, desperate to find his wife, child, and church congregants. Almost miraculously, he is able to find his family, even though tens of thousands of people who haven't been killed are running through the streets. However, when he sees his wife, Tanimoto doesn't say much to her; he just nods, explains that he wants to check on his church, and runs off. Around the same time, Father Kleinsorge and the other uninjured priests at his church run through the neighborhood, helping people from under their wrecked houses. Dr. Fujii also risks his own safety to help some of his neighbors. Nakamura gathers her three children, all of whom are uninjured, and leads them toward nearby Asano Park, where Hiroshimans have been instructed to gather in times of emergency. By this time, fires are breaking out across Hiroshima; the heat of the nuclear blast has been so intense that it is now destroying the city's remaining buildings, most of which are made from wood. Dr. Sasaki continues working hard in the hospital, while Toshiko Sasaki remains trapped under the bookshelf for hours. Eventually, two men free her and take her to the courtyard of her building, where she lies next to two other injured people for the next two days, without any food or water.

Many of the surviving people of Hiroshima gather in Asano Park. Father Kleinsorge and Reverend Tanimoto are both there, tending to the injured and dying and fetching buckets of water for them from the nearby river. Tanimoto finds a small boat, which he takes regretfully from its dead owners, and he uses it to transport injured people up the river toward a Novitiate chapel outside the city. There, some of the priests, who've been trained in medicine, are able to give the Hiroshimans medical care. On August 15, Emperor Hirohito officially declares that Japan is surrendering to the United States.

Within a few weeks of the bombing, it becomes painfully clear that many of the Hiroshimans who survived the bombing are suffering from a rare disease: **radiation sickness**. One of Mrs. Nakamura's children feels tired all the time, and Father Kleinsorge has so little energy that he has to go to the hospital. Japanese scientists have had some previous experience dealing with radiation sickness (mostly from people who've been exposed to too many X-rays), though never on this scale. In addition to having a child suffering from radiation sickness, Mrs. Nakamura loses her only source of income, her sewing machine, in the explosion. Dr. Fujii loses his hospital, Kleinsorge and Tanimoto lose their churches, Dr. Sasaki is severely traumatized by the explosion, and Toshiko Sasaki is severely injured. In other words, six of the luckiest people in Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 are still devastated by the events of the day.

In the long final chapter of the book, written forty years after the bombing, Hersey traces the lives of his six main characters. Mrs. Nakamura becomes a typical *hibakusha* (Hiroshima survivor). She struggles to support herself, is shunned and even harassed by others, and, for many years, is utterly ignored by the Japanese government. She works in a chemical factory to support her children, but benefits from a 1957 law providing her with financial and medical compensation. Dr. Terufumi Sasaki goes on to become a highly successful doctor; however, Hersey suggests that he throws himself into his work as a means of forgetting about the past. Father Kleinsorge remains in Japan for the rest of his life. He suffers from weariness and exhaustion brought on by his radiation poisoning, but he devotes himself to teaching the Bible to children and giving comfort to the sick and dying until his own death in 1977.

Toshiko Sasaki experiences an incredible transformation following the Hiroshima bombing. Father Kleinsorge visits her

in the hospital and gradually converts her to Catholicism. After leaving the hospital, Sasaki becomes a nun, and eventually rises to become Mother Superior of her convent. In 1980, she is honored with a dinner celebrating her twenty-five years of faith. Dr. Fujii continues to live a successful, prosperous life; however, it's likely that he suffers from depression brought about by the bombing. In 1964, he is found asleep in his room with the gas heater turned up all the way, suggesting that he was trying to kill himself. Fujii spends the last eleven years of his life vegetative in a hospital.

Reverend Tanimoto spends the second half of his life campaigning for a variety of pacifist causes. He raises money in the United States for his church and for the establishment of a World Peace Center in Hiroshima. However, Tanimoto lacks any real influence in the Japanese government; he is a talented fundraiser, but he can't influence any concrete policies in his own country. Tanimoto also finds it difficult to assimilate with the anti-nuclear movement in his country, which is dominated by far-left radicals and secularists. Year after year, the powerful countries of the world continue to experiment with nuclear weapons and expand their nuclear arsenals. In the 1980s, a poll finds that most hibakusha believe that nuclear weapons would one day be used again in war. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union and the United States stockpile nuclear missiles—suggesting that another nuclear conflict is likely, and that the world's memory of the horrors of Hiroshima "is getting short."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Dr. Masakazu Fujii – A successful doctor with his own private practice hospital, and one of the six central characters of *Hiroshima*, Dr. Fujii is arguably the least overtly "moral" character in the book. Unlike the five other main characters, he isn't shown to be devoted to his patients, to have powerful religious convictions, or to have a strong bond with his wife or children. Fujii is, in other words, the kind of person who lives strictly for himself. After the explosion, Fujii suffers a broken collarbone, but little other harm. He goes on to lead a financially successful life, spending his money on houses, cars, and liquor. However, Hersey gives readers good reason to believe that Fujii continues to suffer from the trauma of Hiroshima: he appears to attempt suicide in the early 1960s, and spends the rest of his life vegetative in a hospital.

Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge – A German priest living in Japan, and one of the six central characters of *Hiroshima*. Like Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto, Father Kleinsorge is uninjured in the explosion, and he devotes himself single-mindedly to helping the injured and dying. With the help of his fellow priests, Kleinsorge tends to the wounded, gives comfort to the dying, and arranges for the seriously injured to be ferried out of Hiroshima to receive the medical attention they desperately need. Although Kleinsorge endures a great amount of xenophobia during his time in Japan, he's deeply invested in bringing Christianity to Japan. After the bombing he lives the rest of his life in the country, even assuming a Japanese name. Kleinsorge suffers from **radiation sickness**, meaning that he has very little energy; however, he's regarded as an energetic, devoted priest. He dies in the late 1970s, one of the most beloved figures in his community.

Hatsuyo Nakamura – A widowed tailor, a mother of three, and one of the six central characters of *Hiroshima*. Mrs. Nakamura instinctively runs to take care of her three small children in the instant after the atomic blast, eventually guiding them to Asano Park, Hiroshima's designated emergency area during the war. After the bombing, Nakamura struggles to support herself and her children—like so many hibakusha (survivors of the explosion), she's discriminated against and generally viewed as an outcast. Nevertheless, Nakamura manages to find work in a chemical factory, and she succeeds in raising three happy, successful children.

Dr. Terufumi Sasaki – A young doctor in the Red Cross Hospital, and one of the six central characters of *Hiroshima*. Dr. Sasaki is one of the only uninjured doctors left in Hiroshima after the bombing, and, as a result, he gets to work tending to the wounded almost immediately. In the Red Cross Hospital, he works for more than twenty-four hours straight. Years later, Sasaki becomes a highly successful private practitioner; however, it's implied that the memory of Hiroshima haunts him, and that his vigorous work ethic is in many ways an attempt to forget about the horrors of the bombing.

Toshiko Sasaki – A clerk in the East Asia Tin Works corporation, and one of the six central characters of *Hiroshima*, Toshiko Sasaki is the character whose life is arguably most overtly changed by the Hiroshima bombing. Sasaki endures a horrific injury to her leg after the explosion throws a heavy **bookcase** on top of her. She is engaged to be married, but (largely because of her injury, it's implied), her fiancé abandons her. In the hospital, Dr. Terufumi Sasaki (no relation to her) operates on her leg, and later on, she regains the ability to walk normally. Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge visits her in the hospital and inspires her to embrace Catholicism, with the result that she becomes a nun. In the aftermath of an unspeakable tragedy, in other words, Sasaki copes with misery and pain by turning to religion. She ultimately finds the spiritual strength to live a long, rewarding life spent helping other people.

Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto – A Methodist minister, and one of the six central characters of *Hiroshima*, Reverend Tanimoto is uninjured in the bombing on August 6, 1945. In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, he tends to the wounded, ferries victims across the river toward a Christian Novitiate where they can obtain medical care, and generally prioritizes the happiness and safety of other people. For the rest of his life,

Hersey explains in the long final chapter of the book, Tanimoto devotes himself to raising money for his church (which was destroyed in the explosion) and campaigning for the design of a global peace center in Hiroshima. Tanimoto succeeds in raising funds for his church, and for burn victims from the bombing; however, he has difficulty enacting any of his more ambitious plans, partly because he acquires a reputation for being self-absorbed and publicity-starved.

Emperor Hirohito – The emperor of Japan during World War Two, Emperor Hirohito played a relatively minor role in running his country, but nevertheless wielded a huge amount of symbolic power over his country. When the Allies dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, it was the emperor who formally surrendered—an event that an entire generation of Japanese citizens remembered in vivid detail for the rest of their lives.

President Harry Truman – 33rd president of the United States, who presided over the final days of World War Two in the Pacific Theater and made the executive decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Truman remains a controversial figure among historians; some argue that he saved millions of lives by ensuring a speedy Japanese surrender, while others claim that he was a war criminal who murdered hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians without grounds.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Father Cieslik – A priest who works alongside Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge.

Norman Cousins – The editor of the *Saturday Review*, who later joins forces with Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto and campaigns for the victims of the Hiroshima bombing.

Mr. Fukai – The secretary of Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge's mission, who later commits suicide by running into a burning building.

Dr. Tatsutaro Hattori – Director of the Red Cross Hospital in Yokohama.

Mr. Hoshijima – The catechist at Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge's mission.

Mrs. Kamai – A young woman who is Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto's neighbor.

Father LaSalle – A priest in Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge's mission.

Captain Robert Lewis – The co-pilot of the *Enola Gay*, the airplane that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

Dr. Machii – A colleague of Dr. Masazaku Fujii.

Shizue Masugi – A journalist who works with Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto to raise funds for the female burn victims of Hiroshima.

Mr. Matsuo – A friend whose possessions Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto helps move to another house on the day of the bombing.

Lieutenant John D. Montgomery – The Military Government adviser of Japan immediately following Japan's surrender in World War Two.

Mrs. Murata – Housekeeper for Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge's mission.

Mr. Nakamoto – A neighbor of Mrs. Hatsuyo Nakamura, and head of the Neighborhood Association.

Mrs. Nakamoto – A neighbor of Mrs. Hatsuyo Nakamura and the wife of Mr. Nakamoto.

Yaeko Nakamura – One of Mrs. Hatsuyo Nakamura's three children.

Myeko Nakamura – One of Mrs. Hatsuyo Nakamura's three children.

Toshio Nakamura – One of Mrs. Hatsuyo Nakamura's three children.

Mr. Okuma – A friend of Dr. Masazaku Fujii, whose home is destroyed in a flood shortly after the Hiroshima bombing.

Father Schiffer – A priest who works alongside Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge.

Miss Tanaka – A neighbor of Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto.

Koko Tanimoto – The infant daughter of Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto.

Yoshida – Head of the Neighborhood Association in the neighborhood near Father Kleinsorge's church.

Satsue Yoshiki – The cook for the church to which Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge transfers in his later years.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THE ATOMIC AGE, POLITICS, AND MORALITY

In the very first sentence of *Hiroshima*, John Hersey conveys the shock and disorientation of the Hiroshima bombing on August 6, 1945. Early in the morning, Hiroshimans were going about their business, utterly unaware that the American military, fighting in World War Two against Japan, was about to drop an atomic bomb on their city. The next day, American forces dropped a second bomb on the city of Nagasaki—altogether, these bombs claimed more than 200,000 lives.

Since 1945, nuclear missiles haven't been used in a war, making the United States the only country in history to use atomic bombs on an enemy population. This is a controversial designation. Some believe that the United States was justified in killing hundreds of thousands of civilians, including children, for the "greater good" of pressuring the Japanese government to surrender right away. Had President Harry Truman not decided to drop an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, they argue, World War Two would have continued for months or even years, leading to the deaths of many more people. On the other hand, some have argued that bombing Hiroshima was a human rights atrocity; furthermore, historians have suggested that the Truman administration chose to bomb Hiroshima not simply to end the war, but to assert its new superpower status. Since 1945, the world's most powerful countries have stockpiled nuclear weapons, while other countries have pursued nuclear programs. Since understanding the legacy and the historical background of the bombing of Hiroshima is very important, one of the most surprising things about John Hersey's book is that it doesn't spend that much time exploring the political or ethical implications of Harry Truman's decision to bomb Japan. Instead, *Hiroshima* revolves around the lives of six people who survived the explosion, while making very few references to politics or ethics.

Readers continue to debate what *Hiroshima* ultimately suggests about the morality of the bombing, and whether its lack of explicit political or moral information about the bombing is itself a political and moral position. One could argue that the book implies that the bombing was utterly unjustifiable. Hersey's chilling descriptions of melted concrete and vaporized human bodies emphasize the human misery caused by the bombing—so much misery that there could be no justification for it. By this logic, *Hiroshima* would imply that the bombing of Hiroshima was a horrific crime, and that President Harry Truman was a war criminal. Hersey, writing for *The New Yorker* at a time when the vast majority of Americans believed that the bombing was morally justifiable, could never have said this explicitly. One could argue, though, that his focus on the egregious human toll of the bombing implicitly argues that it was unjustified.

However, others have argued that, by omitting any discussion of the decision to bomb Hiroshima, Hersey implicitly argues that America was morally justified in bombing Japan. Particularly in the second half of the book, characters express their outrage with the Japanese government (rather than the American government) for failing to provide for them after the bombing of Hiroshima. Other characters compare the bombing to a natural disaster—a horrible event that simply couldn't have been avoided. In other words, the characters in *Hiroshima* express their anger with Japan's government, or with the universe itself, but not, for the most part, with America, the country that was literally responsible for the bombing. (It's likely that, had Hersey included any strong criticisms of the U.S., his editor, William Shawn, would have removed them to avoid controversy.) Thus, one could argue, *Hiroshima* reinforces the standard, mainstream interpretation of the bombing in 1940s America: that it was a horrible—though unavoidable and justifiable—tragedy that the Japanese had brought upon themselves. In all, there are persuasive arguments for both interpretations of *Hiroshima*'s take on nuclear war. Perhaps Hersey left his book open-ended not simply to avoid censorship or controversy, but so that readers could make up their own minds about a topic that's too big and complicated for easy answers.

SURVIVAL AND COOPERATION

In *Hiroshima*, John Hersey writes about six main characters who were living in Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, but were far enough from the city center that they survived the bombing. In the immediate aftermath of the Hiroshima bombing—when the city was engulfed in flames, food was scarce, and many must have thought that the world was coming to an end—these characters faced impossible decisions about how to survive and whom to help. Unlike in many other books about life-or-death situations, *Hiroshima* doesn't suggest that its characters must sacrifice their moral principles to survive. Indeed, many of the characters go out of their way to help other people—some devote the rest of their lives to helping their fellow hibakusha (survivors of the nuclear explosion).

Both immediately after the nuclear explosion, and for many years to come, the characters in *Hiroshima* behave selflessly, risking their own health and safety to tend to the wounded and the children who've lost their families in the disaster. Immediately after the explosion, Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge and Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto risk their own safety to help the wounded. Kleinsorge runs into a burning building to save people buried under rubble, and Tanimoto deliberately runs *toward* the nuclear blast to protect his wife and his church congregants. Hatsuyo Nakamura instinctively protects her three children, and Dr. Terfumi Sasaki works tirelessly to help the wounded in Hiroshima's Red Cross Hospital. For many years to come, Tanimoto campaigns for nuclear disarmament and the establishment of a peace center in Hiroshima. There are remarkably few examples of characters in *Hiroshima* stealing food, fighting over supplies, or even disagreeing—in other words, the selfishness and pettiness that can emerge from a crisis seem not to exist in Hiroshima. It's telling that the most selfish thing Hersey describes Dr. Sasaki doing is grabbing a pair of glasses from a nurse—which he does so that he can see clearly and help his patients. Even when the characters in *Hiroshima* sacrifice their morals, they do so for a greater good. In this way, the book suggests that during the aftermath of Hiroshima survival was a "team effort"—all the Hiroshimans

pitched in and helped one another out.

In part, *Hiroshima* depicts the aftermath of the bombing as a relatively organized, civil, cooperative recovery effort because Hersey wanted to portray the Japanese people in the most favorable light, emphasizing their dignity and morality. During his time as a war correspondent, Hersey was known to despise the racist manner in which many other American journalists depicted the Japanese. In *Hiroshima*, he chose to write about doctors, priests, and mothers—in other words, the Hiroshimans who arguably would have been most likely to feel a strong instinct to help other people (and whom U.S. readers might have been most likely to respect). By focusing on these characters, Hersey challenged some of the lingering biases against the Japanese in America media. But the characters in *Hiroshima* aren't especially cooperative simply because Hersey cherry-picked them—there's strong reason to believe that, in the aftermath of the bombing, many Hiroshimans really were cooperative and selflessly devoted to helping one another survive. As the book suggests, the survivors of the explosion were united by a powerful sense of their own mortality. They felt that they'd been blessed with the gift of survival, and they wanted to help others survive, too. It's entirely to Hersey's credit that, at a time when many depictions of Japanese citizens in American newspapers and magazines were offensive and dehumanizing, Hersey emphasized his subjects' selflessness, kindness, and nobility of spirit.

RELIGION

Religion is one of the most overt themes of *Hiroshima*. Of the book's six central characters, two are priests (one Jesuit, one Methodist), and one later becomes a nun. Moreover, most of the characters in the book turn to religion for comfort in times of need: confronted with the mind-boggling destruction of the bombing, they use faith to answer profound questions about the meaning of the day's destruction. Upfront, it's important to notice that *Hiroshima* spends much more time discussing Christianity—a religion imported to Japan from the Western world—than it does discussing either Buddhism or Shinto, the country's two major religions. Perhaps Hersey, or his editor, William Shawn, believed that Hersey's American audience would identify with Christian characters more strongly than with Shinto or Buddhist worshippers. Or perhaps Hersey had an easier time getting in contact with Christians living in Japan, since they might be more likely to speak English and have connections to the United States. But even if *Hiroshima*'s take on religion has an obvious Western, Christian bias, it poses general, open-ended religious questions that transcend any specific religion: What can religion do to alleviate suffering? Can religion "explain" a disaster as unspeakably horrible as the Hiroshima bombing?

On a literal, practical level, *Hiroshima* shows that religion inspires people to provide comfort and safety for their fellow people. In the immediate aftermath of the bombing on August 6, 1945, the priests spring into action: Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge and his peers free people from the wreckages of their homes, gather food and water for those too weak to find them on their own, and comfort the wounded. Religious figures act as important leaders and organizers in times of crisis: because they've spent their entire adult lives learning how to prioritize the needs of other people, they quickly organize themselves in order to help those in need.

But of course, religion doesn't just attend to people's practical, material needs—first and foremost, the purpose of religion is to provide for people's spiritual needs. In particular, priests must quell people's uncertainty about the meaning of the universe and their fear of pain and death. Here, *Hiroshima* provides a more ambiguous interpretation of the power of religion. In the hospital, after sustaining a nasty injury in the bombing, a woman named Toshiko Sasaki asks a priest, Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge, "If your God is so good and kind, how can he let people suffer like this?" As Hersey paints the scene, Kleinsorge replies to Sasaki by explaining "all the reasons for everything." It's difficult to interpret Kleinsorge's response, since Hersey doesn't repeat what Kleinsorge tells Sasaki; he leaves it to the reader's imagination. One could argue that Hersey is suggesting that no religion can provide a satisfactory answer to Sasaki's question—that, in the face of unimaginable destruction, religion cannot repair people's pain and suffering. However, Kleinsorge's comfort and support *do* inspire Sasaki to live a long, rewarding life; she converts to Catholicism and becomes a highly respected nun. Yet even later in life, Sasaki continues to struggle to understand the tragedy of Hiroshima. Thus, even if religion can't provide definitive answers to life's profound questions, perhaps it can still inspire people to lead more fulfilling lives that replace being mired in unanswerable questions with serving others. In all, *Hiroshima* suggests that religion can be an important force for good—not because it provides neat, tidy answers to moral and spiritual problems, but because it inspires people to invest themselves in moral and spiritual matters and live for the betterment of other people.

TRAUMA AND MEMORY

The atomic blast over Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 is over in a matter of seconds. And yet the residents of Hiroshima who survived the explosion remember it in vivid detail for the rest of their lives. For most of the book, and especially in the book's final, long chapter (which was written forty years after the bombing), John Hersey studies the way that Hiroshimans cope with the disaster—an event so vast and destructive that it's arguably beyond human understanding.

More than once, Hersey explicitly states that a character is trying to forget what they witnessed on August 6, 1945. In

psychological terminology, one could say that the Hiroshimans who survive the bombing suffer from trauma: they've experienced a sudden disruption in the way their minds process information and, therefore, a disruption in the way they perceive the "normal." Quite understandably, the Hiroshima survivors want to forget the terrifying spectacle of an entire city's destruction and return to their normal lives. Hersey suggests that the characters pursue many different strategies in order to reclaim an ordinary life and forget about the past. Dr. Fujii turns to drinking and sex, while Dr. Sasaki hurls himself into his medical practice. Fujii and Sasaki respond to Hiroshima in almost diametrically opposite ways, and yet they're trying to accomplish the same thing: escape from the trauma of the past by immersing themselves in the present.

Even if the desire to forget about Hiroshima is understandable, *Hiroshima* suggests that there is something tragic, if not outright dangerous, about the act of forgetting disaster. To paraphrase a well-known quote about history, people need to remember Hiroshima, or else they are "doomed to repeat it." Indeed, the book suggests that, despite their best efforts, the characters in *Hiroshima* cannot forget about the past—their memories of the bombing remain viscerally clear after forty years, and continue to cause them tremendous grief and anxiety. Dr. Fujii, for example, seems to commit suicide in part because of his painful memories of Hiroshima. Furthermore, the book suggests that **radiation poisoning** may become a genetic legacy of the bombing (in more recent years, scientists have confirmed this disturbing possibility). The horrors of the Hiroshima bombing, it would seem, will never be entirely forgotten because they cannot be—the legacy of the bomb is embedded in the DNA of survivors and their descendants. Many of the characters suffer because of their inability to expunge the memory of August 6, 1945, but perhaps it's important that they—and Hersey himself, in writing his book—keep the memory of Hiroshima alive as a warning for future generations.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

RADIATION POISONING

For decades after the bombing of Hiroshima in 1945, Hiroshimans suffered from radiation poisoning caused by the lingering effects of nuclear weaponry. Some survivors of the bombing spent the rest of their lives dealing with chronic exhaustion, which is one of the most common symptoms of radiation poisoning. Others developed symptoms, such as cancers, months or even years after the blast—the bombing caught up to them once they had imagined that their lives had moved on. In this way, radiation poisoning can be interpreted as a symbol of the long-lasting, unforgettable, and inescapable damage caused by the atomic blast.

THE BOOKCASE

At the end of Chapter One, Toshiko Sasaki's leg is crushed beneath a heavy bookcase. The chapter ends with the famous sentence, "In the first moment of the atomic age, a human being was crushed by books." The sentence is often taken to be an ironic observation about how, with the bombing of Hiroshima, years of scientific research resulted in utter destruction, rather than in the betterment of the human race. In this sense, the bookcase symbolizes the inherent danger and destructiveness of all human knowledge.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Hiroshima* published in 1989.

Chapter 1 Quotes

At exactly fifteen minutes past eight in the morning, on August 6, 1945, Japanese time, at the moment when the atomic bomb flashed above Hiroshima, Miss Toshiko Sasaki, a clerk in the personnel department of the East Asia Tin Works, had just sat down at her place in the plant office and was turning her head to speak to the girl at the next desk.

Related Characters: Toshiko Sasaki

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

In the famous opening sentence of *Hiroshima*, John Hersey conveys the shock of the bombing on August 6, 1945. Thousands of Hiroshimans were waking up, going to work, and beginning a normal day, when the U.S. military dropped an atomic bomb on their city, causing the instantaneous deaths of more than one hundred thousand people. When Hersey's writings on Hiroshima were first published in *The New Yorker* in August 1946, readers weren't expecting an entire issue devoted to the Hiroshima bombing—thus, Hersey's first sentence must have felt like a slap on the face. Before Hersey's article, no American journalist had made such a thorough study of the bombing, especially one that reflected the experiences of actual Japanese citizens who

lived through the explosion.

This first sentence has also been celebrating for marking the dawn of "New Journalism," a nonfiction writing style that blends traditional reporting with vivid, literary detail. Thus, Hersey tells the story of the Hiroshima bombing through the eyes of six real-life witnesses to the explosion. As in the first sentence, he moves back and forth between general descriptions of the event (i.e., the first clause of the sentence) and specific, eyewitness accounts (i.e., the second part of the sentence). As commonplace as these journalistic techniques might seem in the early 21st century, they were groundbreaking at the time.

> A hundred thousand people were killed by the atomic bomb, and these six were among the survivors. They still wonder why they lived when so many others died.

Related Characters: Hatsuyo Nakamura, Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge, Dr. Masakazu Fujii, Dr. Terufumi Sasaki, Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

In the first paragraphs of his book on Hiroshima, Hersey sketches out the format of his work: by examining the lives of six ordinary people living in Hiroshima on the day of the explosion, Hersey will paint a vivid picture of what it must have been like in the city on August 6, 1945. At the time, Hersey's method of reporting on Hiroshima was almost unprecedented: journalists tended to report on major events like the bombing using a more removed, objective style of writing.

It's worth thinking a little more closely about how Hersey came to interview these six survivors of Hiroshima, and what forms of bias his reporting might reflect. To begin with, any book on Hiroshima that's structured around the accounts of survivors is, almost by definition, going to be a more optimistic account of the disaster than what truly happened. The Hiroshima bombing was the story of one hundred thousand people who died; *Hiroshima* is, at its most literal level, the story of six people who survived. Second, there's an important selection bias in Hersey's journalistic project. For fairly obvious reasons, the six people whom Hersey was able to contact and write about were significantly more 1) cooperative, 2) morally minded, 3) sympathetic to the United States, and 4) familiar with Western culture than the average Hiroshima resident. (For example, it's no coincidence that two of the six main characters are Christian priests—a Christian priest is exactly the kind of person who would have been likely to agree to talk to an American reporter less than a year after the bombing.) Hersey does a brilliant job of connecting the disparate experiences of his six main characters to the overall event of the Hiroshima bombing; however, it's crucial to understand the forms of bias that might paint a misleading picture of what the Hiroshima bombing was really like.

> The reflex of a mother set her in motion toward her children. She had taken a single step (the house was 1,350 yards, or three quarters of a mile, from the center of the explosion) when something picked her up and she seemed to fly into the next room-over the raised sleeping platform

Related Characters: Hatsuyo Nakamura

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

In the seconds following the detonation of the atomic bomb over Hiroshima, Hatsuyo Nakamura felt an immediate, maternal instinct to protect her children. Watching from the window of her house, she saw a bright light flash through the sky, and then she turned to guard her children from danger. The passage sets the tone for the following three chapters of the book: by and large, the six main characters in *Hiroshima* are remarkably compassionate and selfless; they feel a strong instinct to take care of other people, whether those other people are their church congregants, their children, or their medical patients.

This passage is also a great example of Hersey's unique approach to writing about the Hiroshima explosion. Instead of providing an omniscient, birds-eye view of the event, Hersey relates what happened through the eyes of the different characters. One strength of this strategy is that it gives a sense of the chaos and confusion in the moments after the bombing. An important weakness of this strategy, however, is that it limits readers' knowledge of the bombing to the information that six eyewitnesses would have been able to learn.

Murata-san, the housekeeper, was nearby, crying over and over, "*Shu Jesusu, awaremi tamai!*" Our Lord Jesus, have pity on us!

Related Characters: Mrs. Murata

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

In the immediate aftermath of the Hiroshima bombing, the surviving residents of the city have no idea what to do or think. In their confusion, many of them turn to religion for comfort and guidance. At the Christian church where Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge preaches, the housekeeper, Mrs. Murata, cries out for Jesus. Murata's reaction anticipates the way that many other characters in the book will embrace religion in their desperation to make sense of the horrific, seemingly meaningless disaster in Hiroshima.

Murata's reaction could also be interpreted to imply that, at least as Murata sees it, Hiroshimans *deserve* their punishment—that they've done something to incur the wrath of God, and thus they require God's pity. Other Christian characters in the book allude to a similar notion later in the book, most notably Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge.

There, in the tin factory, in the first moment of the atomic age, a human being was crushed by books.

Related Characters: Toshiko Sasaki

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

The concluding sentence of the book's first chapter is nearly as famous as its opening sentence. Where the opening sentence is fiercely literal, and hits the reader like a gut-punch, this final sentence is more abstract and poetic, resting on a heavily symbolic interpretation of the nuclear age. As Hersey sees it, the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima is the product of hundreds of years of cutting-edge science and mathematics. And yet all of that human learning didn't add up to anything positive—instead, the U.S. military used it to build the deadliest weapon in human history. Thus, the image of a human body being crushed under books is tragically apt: Sasaki and the many other victims of nuclear war were "crushed" by generations of accumulated knowledge.

Chapter 2 Quotes

The children were silent, except for the five-year-old, Myeko, who kept asking questions: "Why is it night already?"

Related Characters: Myeko Nakamura (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of Chapter Two, Mrs. Hatsuyo Nakamura and her three small children are crawling out of their ruined house, trying to understand what has just happened. Nakamura can safely assume that the American military has attacked Hiroshima—she and her neighbors had been preparing for that possibility for years—but she couldn't have guessed that she'd just become a victim of atomic warfare. Nakamura's young son, Myeko, asks an innocent question, "Why is it night already?" Myeko's question is deeply poignant because, when push comes to shove, Nakamura is no more capable of answering Myeko's question than Myeko is. While Nakamura might have guessed that the air of Hiroshima is so thick with ash and dust that the sun is temporarily blacked out, she could never have guessed at the broader facts of the bombing. Confronted with an unprecedented form of warfare, Nakamura and the other survivors of Hiroshima are reduced to a state of childlike terror.

Dr. Sasaki lost all sense of profession and stopped working as a skillful surgeon and a sympathetic man; he became an automaton, mechanically wiping, daubing, winding, wiping, daubing, winding.

Related Characters: Dr. Terufumi Sasaki

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

Dr. Terufumi Sasaki is working in the Red Cross Hospital of Hiroshima at the moment when the atomic bomb

detonates. Miraculously, he's uninjured in the explosion, and therefore he sets to work caring for the sick and injured. Sasaki doesn't realize it, but he's one of the few uninjured doctors left in the city; as a result, he has few people to help him take care of the wounded. Burdened with a seemingly endless number of patients, Sasaki finds the strength to concentrate on doing his medical duty by shutting off all emotion or exhaustion and becoming a machine. It's entirely possible that Sasaki went into a state of temporary shock, as many people do in the midst of emergencies. This state of shock, combined with Sasaki's training as a doctor, allowed Sasaki to operate efficiently on his patients without becoming overwhelmed by the sheer futility of the task of caring for tens of thousands of horribly injured Hiroshimans. There's an irony here, of course; in order to perform humane acts of care in crisis, Sasaki had to become almost less than human.

❝ All the way, he overtook dreadfully burned and lacerated people, and in his guilt he turned to right and left as he hurried and said to some of them, "Excuse me for having no burden like yours."

Related Characters: Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, the Reverence Kiyoshi Tanimoto walks toward the atomic blast, while most others—terribly wounded—are running away. Tanimoto moves towards the blast because he is concerned that his church congregants were killed in the explosion, and he also wants to care for his wife and child, who were considerably closer to the blast than he was. But while Tanimoto passes by thousands of horribly injured people, he begins to feel ashamed. At one point, he even apologizes for *not* being injured—for "having no burden," as he says.

Tanimoto's extreme humility and irrational sense of shame could be attributed to his priestly training, to Japanese cultural norms, or even to the traumatic effects of the explosion itself (many survivors of disasters experience a sudden surge of shame). In all likelihood, all three factors were involved: Tanimoto is an extremely humble, selfless person, and during the chaos following the explosion, these qualities "kick in," giving him the drive to risk his own life for the sake of other people.

❝ He experienced such horror at disturbing the dead—preventing them, he momentarily felt, from launching their craft and going on their ghostly way— that he said out loud, "Please forgive me for taking this boat. I must use it for others, who are alive."

Related Characters: Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of Chapter Two, Reverend Tanimoto steals a small boat from a few dead Hiroshimans. Tanimoto needs the boat to serve others: he wants to use it to ferry wounded people across the river toward a Christian Novitiate whose members can provide medical treatment. Tanimoto regrets having to steal the boat—he's a highly moral person who has spent his entire life studying the dictums of Christianity However, Tanimoto breaks one rule—against stealing—in order to honor an even more important one, that people should help others in any way they can.

It's indicative of the book that, even when Tanimoto does something wrong (stealing), he only does so for the sake of an unimpeachably moral task—ferrying people to the nearest medical center. It's remarkable how little fighting, stealing, or even arguing Hersey depicts in the immediate aftermath of the explosion. Perhaps, once again, this is because of *Hiroshima*'s selection bias: the people who would have agreed to talk to an American reporter less than a year after the bombing would have had to be perfectly at peace with they way they'd behaved on August, 6, 1945, meaning that the picture Hersey paints of the survivors' behavior is probably more cooperative and compassionate than the reality of what happened.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ The sounds came from one of the sandspits, and those in the punt could see, in the reflected light of the still-burning fires, a number of wounded people lying at the edge of the river, already partly covered by the flooding tide. Mr. Tanimoto wanted to help them, but the priests were afraid that Father Schiffer would die if they didn't hurry, and they urged their ferryman along.

Related Characters: Father Schiffer, Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter Three, Reverend Tanimoto and some of the other priests who survive the explosion are faced with the challenge of transporting some of their own friends across the river toward a Christian Novitiate, where their friends can get the medical attention they need. Reverend Tanimoto ferries Father Schiffer, one of the priests who works alongside Father Kleinsorge, across the river. During the trip, Tanimoto sees people who are in danger of drowning in the rapidly rising river. However, the other people in the boat, friends of Father Schiffer, insist that Tanimoto prioritize helping Schiffer.

The passage is important because it shows one of the very few conflicts between the characters: Tanimoto wants to stop and save people from drowning, while the others want to continue rowing and save Father Schiffer from bleeding to death. It's significant that this "disagreement" is really a disagreement between two highly moral acts: Tanimoto and the others disagree over how best to act morally, but they can agree that they have a duty to save other people's lives. The passage could represent an example of the priests in the book favoring their own interests over the interests of other people. However, one could also argue that the priests are right to prioritize Father Schiffer's care over saving the other survivors from drowning (since Schiffer is bleeding faster than the river is rising).

> [Fathers Schiffer and LaSalle] thanked God for the care they had received. Thousands of people had nobody to help them.

Related Characters: Father Schiffer, Father LaSalle

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

The Christian priests in Hiroshima arranged for two of their number, Fathers LaSalle and Schiffer, to be transported to a medical center in a Christian Novitiate just outside of Hiroshima. There, priests with some medical experience ensured that neither LaSalle nor Schiffer bled to death. However, as the passage notes, there were literally thousands of other Hiroshimans who weren't so lucky: many of the victims of the bombing weren't immediately killed in the explosion itself, but rather died a slow, painful death afterwards.

The passage is significant for a number of reasons. First, it's one of the rare times when the priests in the book seem to favor their own interests over those of other people (in the sense that they're acting to help their friends, rather than strangers). Second, the passage reiterates the point that Hiroshima was in crisis after the bombing because there were thousands of wounded people and very few doctors. Third, the passage emphasizes the limits of Hersey's approach to writing about Hiroshima: by writing about six survivors, he paints an overly optimistic picture of the bombing, when, to be perfectly frank, the most "representative" way to write about the bombing would be to write about the people who were killed in the blast or died soon afterwards.

> Father Kleinsorge has thought back to how queasy he had once been at the sight of pain, how someone else's cut finger used to make him turn faint. Yet there in the park he was so benumbed that immediately after leaving this horrible sight he stopped on a path by one of the pools and discussed with-a lightly wounded man whether it would be safe to eat the fat, two-foot carp that floated dead on the surface of the water.

Related Characters: Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge is walking through Asano Park, where thousands of Hiroshima survivors have gathered to flee from the explosion. There, Kleinsorge tends to the sick and dying, fetches water from the river for those who need it, and generally puts other people's needs ahead of his own. It's curious that Kleinsorge has the strength to care for so many, considering that he's been squeamish about blood and pain in the past. Somehow, the experience of being surrounded by so *much* pain has the opposite effect on him: instead of becoming overwhelmed with disgust, Kleinsorge becomes numb to his feelings, and therefore he summons the concentration to care for others. This should evoke Sasaki's demeanor in the hospital immediately after the explosion. Like Kleinsorge, Sasaki put aside his human feelings and began to help robotically.

> Japan is dying. If there is a real air raid here in Hiroshima, I want to die with our country.

Related Characters: Mr. Fukai (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55-56

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Fukai is an associate of several of the Christian characters in the book, including Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge. After the bombing, Mr. Fukai begins to behave very oddly, shouting about how he wants to end his life, and eventually running into a burning building. Hersey is, perhaps intentionally, vague about Mr. Fukai's personality—it's unclear if he suffered from mental problems before the bombing or if he was in a state of shock following the bombing. It's strongly implied that Fukai kills himself as a sign of honor and respect for his country. There were many reports of Japanese people performing acts of self-slaughter throughout World War Two (though many of these accounts were exaggerated). Thus, it's possible that Mr. Fukai kills himself because he's in a state of panic and confusion, but it's also possible that his suicide reflects the general patriotic fervor in Japan during the war—Fukai wasn't the only person who would have preferred to die than to live without a country.

> About a week after the bomb dropped, a vague, incomprehensible rumor reached Hiroshima that the city had been destroyed by the energy released when atoms were somehow split in two.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

Gradually, word got out that the United States had bombed Hiroshima with atomic technology—the U.S. had split the atom, creating enough energy to destroy an entire city. It's easy to imagine how bizarre this must have sounded to the average person in the 1940s—at the time, nuclear technology sounded more like science fiction than actual, hard science. The basic science behind the atomic bomb had been in existence since the late 1930s (the physicist Niels Bohr was the first to demonstrate that nuclear fission could set off a chain reaction). However, the vast majority of civilians knew nothing about nuclear physics. In this passage, Hersey conveys the confusion surrounding the bombing by using free indirect discourse—the literary technique by which a third person narrator speaks in the style of the characters. Instead of stepping back and explaining the exact physics behind the atomic bomb, Hersey describes the science of the bombing through the eyes of the average Hiroshima survivor, to whom the idea of splitting an atom would have sounded almost like magic.

> When they came to know the war was ended—that is, Japan was defeated, they, of course, were deeply disappointed, but followed after their Emperor's commandment in calm spirit, making whole-hearted sacrifice for the everlasting peace of the world—and Japan started her new way.

Related Characters: Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto (speaker), Emperor Hirohito

Related Themes:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of Chapter Three, Hersey quotes extensively from a letter written by Kiyoshi Tanimoto. In the letter, Tanimoto describes the radio broadcast made by Emperor Hirohito, the supreme leader of Japan. Hirohito exerted very little true political power, but he was an important symbolic figurehead, and when he announced that Japan was surrendering to the Allied forces, it was clear to all Japanese citizens that this was the final word on the matter. The vast majority of the Japanese people listening to Hirohito's broadcast had never heard the Emperor speak before; previously, the Emperor was a mysterious, almost mythical figure.

Tanimoto's letter conveys the mixed emotions caused by Hirohito's surrender. The surrender was, of course, devastating for Japanese citizens, since it meant that their country had been soundly defeated in World War Two. At the same time, Hirohito's surrender provided the people of Japan with the closure that they'd been craving for a long time. No longer did they have to live in uncertainty about the next bombing—they could finally breathe easy, regroup, and move on with their lives. The passage bridges the gap between the first half of the book, which revolves around the bombing itself, and the second half, about how the survivors of the bombing lived the rest of their lives.

Chapter 4 Quotes

Lieutenant John D. Montgomery, of Kalamazoo, as its adviser, began to consider what sort of city the new Hiroshima should be. The ruined city had flourished—and had been an inviting target—mainly because it had been one of the most important military-command and communications centers in Japan, and would have become the Imperial headquarters had the islands been invaded and Tokyo been captured.

Related Characters: Lieutenant John D. Montgomery

Related Themes:

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hersey briefly describes the American military government that took control over Japan following the country's surrender to the Allied Forces. For much of the late 1940s, the U.S. military governed Japan, and when it pulled out, it ensured that the people leading the country would cooperate with the United States. In the meantime, however, American leaders such as Lieutenant Montgomery were tasked with running Japan.

It's worth stopping and noting that the passage characterizes Hiroshima as an important military and communication center—a claim that needs some careful qualifying. While it's certainly true that Hiroshima housed Japanese soldiers, historians have vigorously disputed the claim that Hiroshima was a true military center. In the immediate aftermath of the bombing, President Harry Truman claimed that Hiroshima was a military base, without a large civilian population—a claim that was a half-truth at best and a lie at worst. (A journalist later claimed that if Hiroshima could be considered a military base, then so could Seattle.) In this passage, it could be argued, Hersey takes Truman at his word, echoing Truman's misleading claims about the city's population. However, the rest of *Hiroshima* contradicts Truman's claims, showing that, in fact, the vast majority of Hiroshimans were ordinary civilians.

"My child," Father Kleinsorge said, "man is not now in the condition God intended. He has fallen from grace through sin." And he went on to explain all the reasons for everything.

Related Characters: Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge (speaker), Toshiko Sasaki

Related Themes:

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

Father Kleinsorge visits Toshiko Sasaki in the hospital, where she's undergoing serious surgery to repair her mangled leg. Sasaki is understandably overcome with despair and sadness, and in the depths of her despair, she turns to Kleinsorge as a friend, a confidante, and even a father figure. Here, she poses a profound and arguably unanswerable question about Hiroshima—how could a just God allow such a tragedy to occur? Kleinsorge begins to answer this question with a traditional Christian idea: that man lives in a state of imperfection, as a result of the sins of Adam and Eve. However, Hersey "cuts away" from Kleinsorge before Kleinsorge can elaborate on his answer.

The passage paints an ambiguous portrait of the power of religion. It's clear that religion can be an important source of comfort and peace, especially in the aftermath of a tragedy as enormous as Hiroshima. But, because of the way Hersey frames the scene, it's unclear if religion can really answer Sasaki's question. In light of the second half of the book, perhaps it's fair to say that religion can be a force for good, but not because of the literal, explicit answers it provides. Rather, the power of religion is to encourage people to live decent, rewarding lives, during which they struggle to answer profound questions about the human condition.

She would say, "It was war and we had to expect it." [...] Dr. Fujii said approximately the same thing about the use of the bomb to Father Kleinsorge one evening, in German: "*Da ist nichts zu machen*. There's nothing to be done about it." Many citizens of Hiroshima, however, continued to feel a hatred for Americans which nothing could possibly erase. "I see," Dr. Sasaki once said, "that they are holding a trial for war criminals in Tokyo just now. I think they ought to try the men who decided to use the bomb."

Related Characters: Dr. Masakazu Fujii, Hatsuyo Nakamura (speaker), Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge, Dr. Terufumi Sasaki

Related Themes:

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Hersey conveys some of the characters' responses to the politics and ethics of the Hiroshima bombing. Some of the characters treat the Hiroshima

bombing as an elemental tragedy, almost like a natural disaster. Others blame the United States government for the bombing, and demand that the leaders responsible be tried for war crimes. Still others adopt a stoic acceptance of the disaster—rather than dwell on blame, they try to move forward with their lives.

Historians, journalists, and literary critics have debated the passage's depiction of the Japanese response to the Hiroshima bombing. To begin with, Hersey makes it clear that there was no *single* response to the bombing—different Japanese citizens had vastly different opinions about it. Some critics have praised Hersey for having the courage to raise the possibility that the Hiroshima bombing was a war crime—especially considering that, in 1946, the vast majority of Americans believed that the bombing was morally justified. Other critics and historians have suggested that the actual reaction to the Hiroshima bombing was much *less* contentious than Hersey suggests here—the vast majority of Japanese citizens took the position that the United States had committed an unforgivable crime (whereas here, it's just one character out of six, Dr. Sasaki, who says so). The passage is another good example of the selection bias inherent to Hersey's journalistic project: the survivors who'd be willing to cooperate with an American journalist in 1946 are probably more likely to have a neutral or friendly attitude toward the United States than the Japanese population overall.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ The bombing almost seemed a natural disaster—one that it had simply been her bad luck, her fate (which must be accepted), to suffer.

Related Characters: Hatsuyo Nakamura

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

In the final chapter of the book, written forty years after the bombing, Hersey shows how the six main characters from his original article tried to move on with their lives. First, he writes about Mrs. Nakamura. Hersey suggests that Mrs. Nakamura tried to "make peace" with the memory of Hiroshima by accepting the bombing as a kind of natural disaster, like an earthquake or a hurricane.

Throughout the chapter, Hersey suggests that the survivors of Hiroshima managed to live relatively happy, fulfilling lives because they found ways of coming to terms with their rage, confusion, and guilt about Hiroshima. Put another way, the six main characters in *Hiroshima* all find ways of answering two questions: 1) "Why did the bombing happen?" and 2) "Why did I survive?" Instead of dwelling on the political implications of the attack, Nakamura seems to treat it as an inevitability. Furthermore, she seems to decide that she was caught in the bombing for the same reason that she survived it—luck, pure and simple.

❝ Dr. Terufumi Sasaki was still racked by memories of the appalling days and nights right after the explosion—memories it would be his lifework to distance himself from.

Related Characters: Dr. Terufumi Sasaki

Related Themes:

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

In the second portion of Chapter Five, Hersey discusses the life of Dr. Sasaki, who spent the aftermath of the Hiroshima bombing working hard in the city's Red Cross Hospital. Hersey suggests that the bombing left a dark mark on Sasaki's life: a mark that he spent the rest of his life trying to erase. To begin with, Hersey suggests, Sasaki was traumatized by the sheer, overpowering horror of so many dead bodies packed into so little space. Second, Hersey suggests that Sasaki may have dealt with survivor's guilt, and guilt at having been unable to save many of the victims of Hiroshima who were in the hospital.

As Hersey will show, Sasaki works hard for the remainder of his life, trying to help the sick and injured. Even as an elderly man, he devotes long hours to patient care, and goes out of his way to set up a home for the elderly. While it would be a little reductive to claim that Sasaki works so hard simply because of his traumatic memories of Hiroshima, there can be little doubt that Hiroshima exerted a strong influence over the rest of Dr. Sasaki's life.

❝ He registered himself as a Japanese citizen under the name he would henceforth hear; Father Makoto Takakura.

Related Characters: Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

In the third portion of Chapter Five, Hersey writes about the later life of Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge, a German priest who was living in Hiroshima on the day of the bombing. Kleinsorge suffered from the symptoms of radiation poisoning for the remainder of his life; however, he remained in Japan until his dying day, working hard to spread Christianity. Even more surprisingly, Kleinsorge embraced Japanese culture to the point where he took on a Japanese name.

In the first four chapters of the book, Hersey has shown Kleinsorge to be a kind, selfless man. However, Hersey also showed Kleinsorge to be a little uneasy in his adopted country—during the 1940s, xenophobia was rampant in Japan, and so Kleinsorge, a Westerner, was often bullied or harassed by his peers and neighbors. However, during the bombing, Kleinsorge experienced a strong sense of community and connection with his fellow Hiroshimans. Hersey strongly implies that, partly because of his experiences with the bombing, Kleinsorge was inspired to spend the rest of his life in Japan and immerse himself in Japanese culture.

❝ Her greatest gift, she found, was her ability to help inmates to die in peace. She had seen so much death in Hiroshima after the bombing, and had seen what strange things so many people did when they were cornered by death, that nothing now surprised or frightened her

Related Characters: Toshiko Sasaki

Related Themes:

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

In the fourth part of Chapter Five, Hersey studies the later life of Toshiko Sasaki, the woman whose leg was injured in the Hiroshima bombing. Sasaki spent long, miserable months in the hospital as a result of her injury. Furthermore, her fiancé walked out on her, and her entire family died. In her depression, Sasaki turned to the power of religion. She converted to Catholicism, became a nun, and eventually became a highly respected religious figure. As the passage makes clear, Sasaki excelled as a nun partly because of her traumatizing experiences during Hiroshima. Having lived through so much destruction, Sasaki learned to keep calm in the midst of any danger—as a result, she exceled at comforting the sick and dying.

The passage is an especially clear example of how some Hiroshimans managed to live fulfilling lives after the bombing. Instead of simply dwelling on the past or trying to repress it entirely, a lucky few found ways of using their traumatic memories for the good of others. Unlike some of the other main characters in the book, Sasaki never tried to forget about Hiroshima—rather, she used her memories as pillars of her new life.

❝ As the bearers were carrying Dr. Fujii downstairs, he stirred. Swimming up toward consciousness, he apparently thought he was being rescued, somehow, after the atomic bombing. "Who are you?" he asked the bearers. "Are you soldiers?"

Related Characters: Dr. Masakazu Fujii (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

In the fifth portion of Chapter Five of *Hiroshima*, Hersey discusses the later life of Dr. Fujii. In many ways, Dr. Fujii's life is the least like the lives of the other five main characters: he doesn't seem to feel any strong moral obligation to other people, and, in fact, he seems perfectly content to live a life of hedonism and superficial pleasures, such as drink and travel. And yet, as Hersey suggests in the passage, Dr. Fujii was no less traumatized by his memories of Hiroshima than any of the other characters. In early 1964, Fujii was rushed to the hospital, possibly because of a suicide attempt. Delirious, Fujii called out, behaving as if he were living through the Hiroshima bombing once again.

Without saying so explicitly, Hersey strongly implies that Dr. Fujii was suffering from trauma: he'd survived an incredible tragedy and, like so many traumatized survivors, he had no way to wrap his head around what had happened to him. As a result, he relived the tragedy again and again, sometimes trying to hurt himself. Another possibility that is implicitly raised here is that, for the other five main characters, devoting themselves to helping others meant that they could better cope with their memories of the bomb's

devastation. Fujii—the only one who doesn't seem morally inclined—is also the only character shown to have been destroyed by the bomb. The implication, perhaps, is that helping others was not just an act of generosity towards others, but also an act of self-preservation that allowed trauma to give meaning and purpose to peoples' lives. Without that, Fujii succumbed.

> Nor did he have any place in the Japanese peace movement, for he had been out of the country at crucial moments in its development and, besides, his Christian outlook made him suspicious of the radical groups that were on the cutting edge of antinuclear activity.

Related Characters: Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

In the sixth and longest portion of Chapter Five, Hersey writes about the later life of Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto. Tanimoto's later career was more explicitly political and tied to the Hiroshima bombing than those of the other five main characters in the book. Indeed, Tanimoto became a noted activist, traveling to America to raise funds for pacifist causes, the rebuilding of his church, the construction of a global peace center in Hiroshima, and for reconstructive surgery for female survivors of the explosion. However, as the passage makes clear, Tanimoto's activism had only limited success. He raised funds for various causes, but he was never a real player in the antinuclear movement in his own country—the antinuclear movement was too secularized and left-wing for a Christian leader like Tanimoto to play a major role. Furthermore, Tanimoto's activism couldn't slow the steady growth of the world's nuclear arsenal. Country after country stockpiled nuclear missiles, making the possibility of nuclear war extremely high. In all, Tanimoto's later career exemplifies the weakness of the pacifist and antinuclear movements following World War Two: instead of working together against nuclear war, the various factions of the two movements quarreled with one another about their precise aims, making it easier the U.S., the Soviet Union, and many other countries to amass more weaponry.

> He was slowing down a bit. His memory, like the world's, was getting spotty.

Related Characters: Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 152

Explanation and Analysis

Hiroshima ends on a melancholy note. Reverend Tanimoto is now an old man. Although he's lived a fulfilling life, during which he's provided comfort, food, and medical care for thousands of people, he's been unable to do much to reverse the growth of the world's collective nuclear arsenal. It seems a near-certainty that there will be a full-scale nuclear war one day—there are simply too many missiles and too many politicians willing to use them. The only real deterrent to nuclear war, one could argue, is the memory of the nightmarish aftermath of Hiroshima. And yet, as Hersey writes here, the world seems to be forgetting about Hiroshima, heightening the chances of another bomb being dropped.

Perhaps the key word in this passage is "memory." The long final chapter of the book is, in one way or another, all about forgetting. Some of the characters in *Hiroshima* try to forget about the bombing altogether, while others confront their traumatic memories of the day, and then move on with their lives. Forgetting about tragedy, one could argue, is a crucial survival mechanism. It's only because people have the power to forget—or at least to remember in less and less detail—that the survivors of horrible catastrophes can go on to lead relatively happy lives. And yet, as the passage makes clear, forgetting can be dangerous. People need to remember the horrors of Hiroshima, or else the human race will one day relive those horrors. In this way, Hersey brings *Hiroshima* to an ambiguous ending. Humanity's memory is spotty, and in that spottiness lies our survival, but also our doom.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER ONE: A NOISELESS FLASH

It is 8:15 am on August 6, 1945, in Hiroshima, Japan, and an atomic bomb explodes over the city. At this precise moment, a clerk named Miss Toshiko Sasaki is sitting down to her job at the East Asia Tin Works. Also at the same time, Dr. Masakazu Fujii is reading the paper in his hospital; Mrs. Hatsuyo Nakamura is standing in her kitchen; Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge, a German priest, is sitting in his mission house; Dr. Terufumi Sasaki is walking through the city hospital; and Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto is standing outside a house in the western suburb. A hundred thousand people die in the explosion, but these six are among the survivors.

Readers had no idea what they were in for when they opened the August 31, 1946 issue of The New Yorker *to find John Hersey's full-length article on the atomic bomb that had been dropped almost exactly a year before. For Hersey to confront the reader with an abrupt first sentence about the explosion echoes the way that the bomb itself devastated tens of thousands of unsuspecting Hiroshimans who had thought they were going to have a fairly ordinary day. In his study of the bombing, Hersey will focus on six major characters, moving back and forth between their separate "storylines." In 1946, his technique was groundbreaking—since then, it has been imitated thousands of times.*

Reverend Tanimoto awakes early at his parsonage. His wife and child are staying with a friend in Ushida, a northern suburb. Hiroshima is one of the only Japanese cities that hasn't been bombed during the war with America—as a result, city dwellers are "sick with anxiety." Rumors circulate that America is "saving something special for the city." Tanimoto is a talkative, energetic man. In the days leading up to the bombing, he moves most of the items from the parsonage to a neighboring district. Today, he's risen early to help a friend, Mr. Matsuo, remove some of Matsuo's daughter's belongings.

As he goes about his business, Tanimoto seems vaguely apprehensive. In general, the bombing of Hiroshima both was and was not a surprise. Hiroshimans knew that they were incredibly lucky to have escaped being bombed since the beginning of America's involvement in World War Two—however, nobody could have predicted the destructiveness of the atomic bomb that was eventually dropped on Hiroshima.

Tanimoto has studied theology in Georgia, so he speaks good English. He has many American friends, and has kept up with them in the years leading up to World War Two. The police have questioned him about his ties to America and, partly to compensate for police suspicion, he's volunteered to lead the local Neighborhood Association. As a part of his duties, Tanimoto has to organize air-raid defenses.

During World War Two, the Japanese government investigated many people like Tanimoto who'd spent time in America (and the U.S. government interned many Japanese citizens). It's important to notice that many of the characters in the book have, or went on to develop, strong Western or American ties. While this might be indicative of a broader trend in Japanese culture, it could also be an example of "selection bias"—while researching his article, Hersey may have had an easier time interviewing Hiroshimans who spoke English, respected American culture, etc., and therefore he could have included a disproportionate number of "Westernized" Japanese characters).

Around six am, Tanimoto leaves for Mr. Matsuo's house. When he arrives, he finds that Matsuo wants help moving a cabinet. The two men carry the cabinet through the streets, until the air-raid siren goes off. Neither of them is perturbed, since the siren often goes off, whether or not planes are coming. At the time, Hiroshima is home to about 245,000 people. It is also a notable manufacturing center. Matsuo and Tanimoto make their way through the city streets, eventually reaching the house where they are supposed to store the cabinet. Then, out of nowhere, a flash of light appears in the sky. Matsuo and Tanimoto are terrified—they have time to react, since they are about two miles from the center of the explosion. Matsuo dives under the steps of the house, while Tanimoto crouches beside some large rocks. Tanimoto feels pieces of board and tile falling on him.

The techniques that Hersey uses in this section have become so commonplace in journalism that it's hard to understand how groundbreaking they were at the time. Notice how the passage alternates between general observations about the city of Hiroshima and descriptions of two specific Hiroshimans, Matsuo and Tanimoto. In the explosion, the two men don't try to save one another; their first instinct, quite understandably, is to protect themselves (whereas certain other characters in the book instinctively protect their families).

When Tanimoto rises again, he sees the house collapsing. There is dust in the air, to the point where it seems like twilight. He sees soldiers coming out of their secret underground dugouts, blood streaming from their heads.

Tanimoto faced the surreal sight of an entire city in ruins. At the time, there were soldiers stationed throughout the city—many of them were killed or wounded in the bombing.

The narrative shifts back to the night before the bomb drops. The radios announce that a fleet of B-29s is coming for Hiroshima and advise civilians to go to their "safe areas." Mrs. Hatsuyo Nakamura, a tailor's widow, gathers her three small children—a boy named Toshio, a girl named Yaeko, and a girl named Myeko—and walks them to the East Parade Ground, a military area for evacuated families. They put out some mats and fall asleep until two in the morning, when the fleet of planes fly over the city. Afterwards, Nakamura wakes her children and brings them back to her home. Although the radio is broadcasting a new warning, she decides to stay in the house that night.

In the days—indeed, the years—leading up to the attack, the Hiroshimans knew that they had to be on guard. There was a citywide protocol for how to respond to an air raid or a bombing: city dwellers were supposed to evacuate their houses and make their ways to a designated safety zone. However, by the time Hiroshima was bombed, many Hiroshimans had become so numbed to the constant warnings and sirens that they didn't take the threat too seriously.

Around seven am, Nakamura wakes up to the sound of the siren. She runs to the home of Mr. Nakamoto, the head of the Neighborhood Association, and asks for advice. Nakamoto tells her to stay at home. Around eight, the siren stops, to Nakamura's relief. She feeds her children breakfast, and notices that there is a man outside, trying to build special fire lanes in case of a bombing. Nakamura has had a hard time during the war. Her husband fought in the Army and died in 1942. Since her husband's death, she's begun sewing to support her children—however, she isn't very good at her job.

Like many people living in Japan during World War Two, Mrs. Nakamura tried to go about a fairly normal life while facing the daily possibility that her city would be attacked. In addition to the inherent dangers of living in a big city during a war, Nakamura struggled with the challenges of supporting her three small children without her husband.

As Nakamura watches the man building the fire lanes, light flashes across the sky. Instinctively, she runs to take care of her children, but the explosion reaches the house before she can move more than a few feet. Her house collapses around her, and she sees Myeko buried in rubble, crying out for help. Nakamura can't see or hear her two other children.

Notice that Nakamura's first instinct is to protect her children, not herself—in a moment of crisis, her selflessness blossoms. Notice, too, the vivid, almost cinematic way that Hersey moves between the six different "storylines" in his book: here, instead of letting us know that Nakamura's three children are alive (and they are), he "cuts away," building the suspense.

Dr. Masakazu Fujii, aged fifty, is a rich, hedonistic man. He usually sleeps late, but he wakes early on the day of the bombing. Around six am, he gets up and walks to the train station with his friend. He returns to his home (which doubles as a private, single-doctor hospital) around seven, and eats breakfast on the porch overlooking the Kyo River. Fujii is the proprietor of the hospital, but lately he's decided not to admit too many patients, recognizing that, in an air-raid, he wouldn't be able to evacuate them all. Fujii's wife and son are living in Osaka, and his other son and two daughters are living in the country. He is a successful, middle-aged man.

Unlike the other characters in the book, Dr. Fujii doesn't seem to be a particularly generous or principled person. He's a doctor, meaning that he spends all day caring for others, but Hersey also makes clear that he's an easygoing, pleasure-loving guy. In this sense, Dr. Fujii is arguably the book's most representative example of the "average" Hiroshiman caught in the bombing.

When the light flashes across the sky, Fujii barely has time to react. Before he knows what is happening, the porch has collapsed into the river below. Fujii finds himself beneath two heavy timbers with the remains of his hospital all around him.

The bombing threatened Dr. Fujii's life and destroyed his source of income, his private hospital.

Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge, aged thirty-eight, has been in poor health in the months leading up to the bombing. He's had very little to eat all week, and he is feeling paranoid because of the xenophobia common in Japan at the time—although the Germans have allied with Japan, Germany had surrendered to the Allies (the coalition fighting Japan and Germany in WWII) just a few months before. At six am, he reads Mass in his mission's chapel. The only worshippers that morning are a theological student, the mission's housekeeper (named Murata), and some priests. When the siren sounds, Kleinsorge changes into the military uniform that he always wears during air raids, but when no planes arrive, he retires to his room.

Father Kleinsorge, like Reverend Tanimoto, has strong ties with the Western world, since he is from Germany. At the time, Japan was an intensely xenophobic country (though, of course, one could say the same thing about the United States), with the result that Kleinsorge put up with lots of harassment. Nevertheless, Kleinsorge was a respected figure among his Christian congregants. (It's a bit odd that Hersey chooses to write about not one but two Christian priests, rather than Buddhist or Shinto religious leaders—he may have thought that his readers would have an easier time identifying with Christians).

When the bomb drops, Kleinsorge's mind goes curiously blank. He still has no memory of how he left his house, but somehow he manages to stumble out of the mission into the garden nearby. Murata staggers out to the garden and cries, "Our Lord Jesus, have pity on us!"

Murata's reaction to the bombing exemplifies the confusion that many Hiroshimans must have felt at the time. In this moment of danger, furthermore, Murata and thousands of other Hiroshimans turned to religion.

On the morning of the bombing, Dr. Terufumi Sasaki, a twenty-five-year-old Red Cross Hospital surgeon, is on the train back to Hiroshima from the country. In addition to his duties at the hospital, Sasaki practices medicine without a permit—a major crime—and he has dreams about being arrested and punished for his actions. On the train, he thinks about how he should give up his private practice, since it isn't worth the risk.

Sasaki was a "doctor" in the sense that he practiced at a hospital; however, he hadn't yet received the proper medical degree, meaning that he was technically breaking the law by practicing medicine on his own. The passage is suffused with dramatic irony: Sasaki is lost in his own, relatively unimportant thoughts, unaware that a massive disaster is about to hit.

Dr. Sasaki arrives at the terminal and takes a streetcar to the hospital. There, he draws blood from a patient and carries the blood to the laboratory. When the bomb drops, Sasaki is a few steps away from a window. Seeing the explosion in the distance, Sasaki ducks down and tells himself, "Be brave!" The blast is so powerful that it rips the glasses off of his face, and he shouts out the name of the hospital's chief surgeon. He runs into the surgeon's office, where he finds that the surgeon is bleeding heavily. Sasaki seems to be the only doctor in the hospital who hasn't been injured. He quickly finds some bandages and begins tending to the wounded—an act that will make him "forget his private nightmare for a long, long time."

Two things to notice about this passage. First, Sasaki begins practicing medicine without the supervision of his head surgeon—the very thing he had been worried about. Second, Hersey writes that Sasaki's actions help him to forget his "private nightmare." This suggests that Sasaki forgets his fear of being prosecuted for practicing medicine without a degree. However, it also foreshadows the way that Dr. Sasaki immerses himself in work to forget his traumatic memories of the bombing.

Toshiko Sasaki, aged twenty, isn't related to Dr. Sasaki—she is a clerk for East Asia Tin Works. At three am, she wakes up to do some housework. She is the cook and housekeeper for her father, brother, and sister while her mother is in the hospital with a baby. Around seven, Sasaki takes the train to the tin works; at the plant, she prepares to attend a funeral service for a coworker who has recently committed suicide. When the bomb drops, Toshiko Sasaki is thrown to the floor and loses consciousness. A heavy **bookshelf** collapses in the explosion, crushing her left leg, so that "in the first moment of the atomic age, a human being was crushed by books."

Like many of the other characters in the book, Toshiko Sasaki spends a significant portion of her life caring for other people—in this case, her family. The final sentence of Chapter One is famous, and it's a good example of how Hersey uses techniques most commonly associated with literature, such as symbolism and irony. The atomic age, one could say, was a triumph of human ingenuity, the product of hundreds of years of physics, mathematics, and chemistry. And yet all this ingenuity didn't better the human race—on the contrary, it resulted in the deaths of more than a hundred thousand people. Thus, the image of a body crushed under books is an apt symbol for the dawn of the nuclear era, which used centuries of knowledge and progress to destroy human lives.

CHAPTER TWO: THE FIRE

After the explosion, Reverend Tanimoto stares at the wounded soldiers crawling out of their dugout. He sees an old woman with a small child in her arms; Tanimoto carries the child and leads the old woman down the street to a grammar school that has been designated as an emergency base. Inside, Tanimoto is amazed to see dozens of injured people.

Tanimoto sprang into action: as a religious leader, he'd spent most of his life learning how to help other people. Tanimoto had no way of understanding what had just happened to his city, but he knew that it was his duty to make sure other people were all right.

Tanimoto runs back to the garden outside the house where he'd been carrying the cabinet. From this high point, he can see that Hiroshima is covered in smoke, and he wonders how the Americans could have caused so much damage without a huge fleet of airplanes. He suddenly hears Mr. Matsuo calling out. Tanimoto begins to worry for his wife and child, as well as his congregants. He runs back into the city center.

Much like Mrs. Nakamura, Tanimoto instinctively thought about his family and his church congregants (although Nakamura did so right away, while Tanimoto took a few minutes). Very bravely, he ran into the city, toward the explosion.

Hatsuyo Nakamura crawls through the ruins of her house, toward her youngest child, Myeko. As she moves, she hears the crying voices of her two other children. Faced with a dilemma, Nakamura turns away from Myeko—who is clearly breathing—and toward her other two children, Toshio and Yaeko. Underneath some wreckage, she finds Toshio and Yaeko. Miraculously, neither child is injured. Nakamura gathers her children and brings them outside. Myeko asks, "Why is it night already?"

Nakamura immediately tries to rescue her three children from the wreckage—miraculously, all three are alive. Myeko's heartbreaking question exemplifies the shock and awe that the Hiroshima bombing provoked around the world: childish as the question was, Nakamura didn't have any idea how to answer it.

Nakamura's neighbor, Mrs. Nakamoto (wife of Mr. Nakamoto), runs to the house and asks Nakamura if she has any bandages; Nakamura gives her a white cloth. Nakamura also finds that her sewing machine—her only source of money—has survived the bomb. She decides to store it in the water tank outside her home and then she leaves her house, along with her children and a neighboring family. Carrying a blanket, some clothes, and a suitcase, Nakamura and the others venture toward Asano Park nearby. On their walk, they only see one other building still standing—the Jesuit mission house, from which Father Kleinsorge emerged, carrying a suitcase of his own.

In the chaos following the Hiroshima bombing, thousands of Hiroshimans must have thought that the world was coming to an end. And yet, at least according to the book, Hiroshimans behaved compassionately—instead of hoarding bandages, for example, they shared them, ensuring that everyone was safe. It's remarkable how little immoral behavior of any kind there is in the book: no Hiroshimans fighting over food, looting stores, or doing any of the other unsavory things that people have been known to do in disasters.

Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge wanders out to the garden outside his mission; meanwhile another priest, Father LaSalle, runs around the corner of the building, covered in blood, followed by two other priests, one of whom, Father Schiffer, is badly cut. The young daughter of Mr. Hoshijima, the mission catechist, runs up to Kleinsorge, saying that her mother and sister have been crushed in wreckage. Kleinsorge runs to help the mission catechist's family, while Father LaSalle helps others out from under the wreckage. Luckily, Kleinsorge is able to free Mrs. Hoshijima and her daughter. Then he runs to save some of his things from his room. Somehow, his flimsy, papier-mâché suitcase, which contained his account books, his money, and his breviary, has survived the bombing—an event that he attributes to God's mercy.

After Hiroshima, Father Kleinsorge immediately began helping others. He saved people from the wreckage of their houses, at times risking his own safety to do so. The passage strongly implies that Kleinsorge behaved the way he did because of his religious faith. Even in a moment of horrendous destruction, Kleinsorge continued to believe in God and God's mercy—as a result, he continued to behave morally, help other people, and risk his own safety.

Dr. Fujii is still in the river, struggling beneath two beams that had once been a part of his hospital building. He is able to free himself from the beams and wade out of the river—somehow, he hasn't been seriously injured. As he runs away from the river, he sees a colleague, Dr. Machii. They wonder why there are few fires in sight—as one would expect fire in the aftermath of a bombing, especially considering how many burn victims are moving through the streets. Fujii helps his servants to free themselves from the hospital wreckage. However, four nurses, two patients, and his niece die that day.

Dr. Fujii and Dr. Machii tried to understand the explosion that had just destroyed their city, but of course couldn't—at the time, only a few people on the planet even knew that it was possible to power a bomb with nuclear fission. While there weren't many fires in sight at the moment, fires gradually broke out for the rest of the day: the atomic bomb had been enormously hot, and most of the surviving buildings in Hiroshima were made of wood. Also, notice that even Dr. Fujii, whom Hersey described as a fundamentally self-interested person, helps free others from the wreckage.

There were about 150 doctors living in Hiroshima on August 6, 1945—approximately sixty-five die immediately. The city's hospitals are in ruins, like most other buildings. The only uninjured doctor in the Red Cross Hospital is Dr. Sasaki, who is frantically gathering bandages from the storeroom. Without his glasses, Sasaki can barely walk—he grabs a pair of glasses off a wounded nurse's face and gets to work helping the most serious burn victims. Sasaki tries to focus on one patient at a time, but the hospital is full of screaming, wounded people. In the city itself, 100,000 people have been wounded in the explosion, in addition to the 100,000 who've died immediately. Forced to work quickly, Sasaki "becomes an automaton," mechanically treating each patient.

After the explosion, there were thousands in need of medical care, but very few doctors to provide that care. Sasaki, one of the only uninjured doctors left in the city, seems to have gone into a state of shock following the explosion. In emergencies, people sometimes behave as Sasaki does here: they become automatons, shedding emotion and calmly doing exactly what they need to do.

In the East Asia Tin Works office, Toshiko Sasaki lies on the floor, crushed by books. After about three hours she regains consciousness and immediately becomes aware of a pain in her leg. She hears voices calling, "Please help!"

Toshiko Sasaki, like so many of the victims of Hiroshima, was horribly injured but had nobody to take care of her.

Father Kleinsorge treats priests' injuries with bandages that Dr. Fujii gave him a few days before. Then, he runs into the mission and puts on his military uniform. Staring out at the thousands of wounded people, Kleinsorge feels a strange sense of apathy. Suddenly, a woman calls for his help—her husband is buried under her house, which has just caught fire. Kleinsorge runs to the house, but doesn't hear anything when he shouts for the woman's husband. The house is burning down—Kleinsorge shouts, "We must get away or we will all die."

As the book goes on, readers begin to realize that some of the characters know one another—Kleinsorge and Fujii are friends, for instance. Notice that even Kleinsorge experiences a brief moment of apathy—a sense that there is too much pain and suffering for him to be of any use. But then, when a woman cries out, Kleinsorge's moral instincts kick in, and he resumes helping others.


A kindergarten teacher points Father Kleinsorge to the mission, where the secretary, Mr. Fukai, is standing by a window, weeping. Kleinsorge runs to the slowly burning building, where he finds Mr. Fukai in a state of eerie calm. Fukai asks Kleinsorge to leave him alone, but Kleinsorge begs him, "Come with me or you'll die." When Fukai refuses, Kleinsorge, along with another priest, forcibly pull Fukai out of the building. Fukai murmurs, "I won't leave." As Kleinsorge looks out in the distance, he sees fires breaking out in the few buildings left standing. When Kleinsorge notices a group of passing soldiers, he asks them to keep an eye on Mr. Fukai, but it is too late—Fukai runs away from Kleinsorge, back into the burning mission.

Mr. Fukai is one of the most mysterious characters in the book, and it's never entirely explained why he behaves so strangely following the explosion. In crises, however, people sometimes lose their sense of self-preservation, or feel a strong sense of survivor's guilt. This suggests that Mr. Fukai may have been a perfectly ordinary person who, in the midst of an emergency, lost all reason and willingly threw himself into danger.

Mr. Tanimoto runs into the city of Hiroshima, desperate to find his family and his church. He brushes shoulders with hundreds of people fleeing the city center, many of whom are severely injured. Most of these people are totally silent. Tanimoto makes his way over the Kannon Bridge, and, as he gets closer to the city center, the destruction grows more severe. He passes by thousands of ruined buildings and burning houses. He feels overwhelmed with shock, and he also feels guilty for being unharmed. As he passes others, he mutters, "Excuse me for having no burden like yours."

As Tanimoto looked at the thousands of horribly injured people passing by, he felt ashamed that he wasn't injured, too. Such a reaction isn't uncommon during emergencies. Furthermore, Tanimoto's behavior suggests why he risked his own safety to help other people following the bombing: his sense of survivor's guilt, in addition to his religious faith, impelled him to act selflessly.

Tanimoto comes to a large Shinto shrine surrounded by burning buildings. There, by incredible coincidence, he runs into his wife, who is carrying their infant child. Instead of embracing his wife, he simply says, "Oh, you are safe." She explains that she'd nearly been buried in the wreckage of her home, and that she is going to the suburb of Ushida. Mr. Tanimoto nods and says he wants to visit his church. They part without another word.

Strangely, Tanimoto didn't express much emotion around his wife and child—one would assume that he would have been overjoyed to see them. Hersey doesn't provide much information about why Tanimoto reacted so passively, but it's possible that he was still in shock, or that he was so anxious about his church congregants that he didn't have time to express his feelings fully.

Mr. Tanimoto continues toward his neighborhood, which is full of injured, bleeding people. He notices a small boat ferrying people across the river into Asano Park; Tanimoto jumps into the boat and travels across, into the park, where he finds some of his neighbors and Neighborhood Association colleagues. He also notices Father Kleinsorge, a friend, but can't find his friend Mr. Fukai. Kleinsorge simply says, "He ran back."

By this point, Mr. Fukai had run into the burning building and, presumably, was dead—however, Kleinsorge didn't go into any detail about what happened, perhaps recognizing that Tanimoto didn't need to hear such a painful piece of information right away.

Toshiko Sasaki hears voices crying out for help. She begins calling back to them—the closest person to her, she quickly finds, is a high school girl who's been working in the factory. A while later, a digger finds his way into Sasaki's office. Seeing that Sasaki's leg has been crushed under the **bookcase**, he calls some other men to drag her outside, where it is raining. Sasaki's leg is badly broken, and as a result Sasaki spends the morning in the courtyard with two other victims.

Of the six main characters in the book, Toshiko Sasaki arguably had the toughest experience on the day of the bombing: she spent her day in excruciating pain and without medical care of any kind. Sasaki's experience is emblematic of the experiences of thousands of other Hiroshimans who survived the explosion only to spend the next couple hours—or days—in agony.

The former head of the Catholic priests' Neighborhood Association is a man named Yoshida. As Mrs. Nakamura and her children, along with Father Kleinsorge and Mr. Fukai, run through the streets, Yoshida cries out for help from beneath the ruins of his house. But there are so many other people crying for help that nobody notices him. As he cries out, Yoshida sees the mission house go up in flames. Frantic, Yoshida manages to free himself from the rubble and run away from the fire.

In the chaos following the explosion over Hiroshima, thousands of people were trapped underneath the ruins of their houses. There were so many people in need of help that some of them had to free themselves and, presumably, many more were crushed or suffocated to death.

Dr. Fujii wades into the river to avoid the heat of the fire. Along with his two surviving nurses, he moves along the river to a sandspit near Asano Park. There, Dr. Machii sits with his family, including his daughter, who is horribly burned. Fujii begins to feel ashamed of his appearance—he is still dressed in nothing but his underwear from that morning, He stares out at the victims of the bombing and wonders what kind of bomb could have caused so much damage. That evening, he makes his way to his family's house, miles away. The house is in ruins.

It's telling that Dr. Fujii was ashamed of his half-naked appearance, whereas Tanimoto was ashamed for being alive and uninjured. This comparison might suggest that Fujii was a less compassionate, more self-interested person than Tanimoto. While Tanimoto helped save people from the wreckage, Fujii didn't seem to have a strong instinct to help—and as he walked to his family's house, he seemed not to be thinking about the victims at all.

All day long, the population of Hiroshima floods into Asano Park. The park is far enough from the bombsite that its flora is still alive. Mrs. Nakamura and her children arrive at the park and later become so nauseated that they begin to retch and vomit. There is a strong odor of ionization ("electric smell") in the air, and some people think that the Americans have dropped gas on the city. Father Kleinsorge and the other priests come into the park, and Father LaSalle falls asleep almost immediately.

Strangely, the Hiroshima bombing caused the plants in the city to flourish, even while it destroyed most of the animal and human life. There was a palpable smell of ash and decay in the air, and quite understandably, the survivors of the disaster assumed that they were being gassed—reminding readers that, at first, nobody knew what kind of weapon had been dropped on the city.

Mr. Tanimoto arrives in the park, where he finds it difficult to distinguish between the living and the dead people gathered there. Tanimoto greets Kleinsorge and the other priests, who are gathering water from the river to give to burn victims. Tanimoto walks along the river, searching for a boat to transport bomb victims away from danger. He finds a small punt, in which there are three dead bodies, and removes the bodies, murmuring, "Please forgive me for taking this boat. I must use it for others, who are alive."

It's telling that Mr. Tanimoto committed one, and only one, morally dubious act during the day of the bombing—he stole a boat in order to transport other people to safety. Even when the characters in Hersey's book do something "wrong," they do so for the greater good of their fellow Hiroshimans.

Later in the day, a fire breaks out in the woods near Asano Park. A team begins filling buckets of water to put out the fire. However, the crowd begins to edge closer and closer to the river. This makes it difficult for the team to fill their buckets, and it also pushes people into the water, some of whom drown.

This is one of the remarkably few passages in the book in which Hersey gives readers a sense of the chaos and disorganization of the survivors of the explosion: despite an effort to prevent further harm, some survivors of the explosion died in the panic caused by the fires.

The sound of airplanes fills the air, and people naturally assume that there is another attack. Someone yells out for victims to take off their white clothing in order to hide from the planes. The airplanes pass overhead, evidently part of a reconnaissance mission of some kind. Then, it begins to rain. However, some people believe that the rain is really gasoline, which the Americans are dropping on the city in preparation for another bombing. A rumor circulates that the city was destroyed by a single plane, which sprayed the city with gasoline and then ignited it.

Understandably, the survivors of the explosions assumed that they were going to be attacked again—after all, the last American plane to fly overhead had wrought devastation. The rumors about how Hiroshima was destroyed might seem ridiculous in retrospect, but at the time they were no less plausible than the idea that the American military had set off a bomb by splitting an atom.

The rain subsides, and Mr. Tanimoto and Father Kleinsorge resume helping the bombing victims. Tanimoto and Kleinsorge decide to run into town to get rice from the mission shelter, but when they arrive they find that the shelter is nothing but ashes now. However, Kleinsorge finds that a pumpkin from the garden outside has roasted on the vine—quickly, he eats some of it. Kleinsorge and Tanimoto gather pumpkins, along with potatoes that have been baked in the ground. In the end, this food is enough to feed almost a hundred people.

Tanimoto and Kleinsorge continued to act selflessly. Although they ate some food from the garden before sharing it with others, they succeeded in feeding over a hundred people with the produce they harvested. The irony here is also notable: the bomb destroyed so much, and yet it also prepared food to help save those who survived.

As evening falls, Mr. Tanimoto encounters his neighbor, a young woman named Mrs. Kamai. She begs him to help her find her husband, who had been inducted into the army the day before. Knowing he has no way of finding this man (who is probably dead, since he must have been in the city's army barracks) he just says, "I'll try."

Many of the Hiroshima survivors lost friends or family in the explosion, but weren't yet willing to accept their loved ones' deaths. Tanimoto's decision not to tell Kamai the obvious truth—her husband was dead—was arguably one of his gentlest and most merciful acts.

CHAPTER THREE: DETAILS ARE BEING INVESTIGATED

On the evening of August 6, 1945, a Japanese naval launch is traveling down the rivers of Hiroshima to make announcements to civilians. Ships reach Asano Park around twilight, and an officer announces, "Be patient! A naval hospital ship is coming to take care of you!" The officer's calmness calms many of the people in the park. Some of them begin to settle down to sleep. Father Kleinsorge is about to fall asleep when his mission bookkeeper, Mrs. Murata, rouses him to ask if he's prayed before sleep—Kleinsorge grumpily replies that he has, and afterwards can't get back to sleep. To his irritation, the bookkeeper continues chatting with him: she wants to know if Father LaSalle, along with another wounded priest, Father Schiffer, would be evacuated.

From a psychological standpoint, the officer's announcement to the people gathered in Asano Park served an important purpose: it reassured civilians that, even though their city was destroyed, their society was intact. While some people were able to sleep in the park that evening, many others were too paranoid, anxious, or otherwise distressed to do so. The passage represents one of the few times in the book that Kleinsorge is anything other than kind and selfless. This reminds readers that, in spite of his good character, he's a flawed, occasionally irritable person.

Earlier that afternoon, Father Kleinsorge sent a messenger—a theological student who'd been living in the mission—to the Christian Novitiate in the surrounding hills. There, the student enlisted the help of the sixteen priests living at the Novitiate, and the priests made their way back into Hiroshima. They arrive at Asano Park late at night and quickly find Schiffer and LaSalle. The priests want to evacuate both men, but they worry that walking will cause the men to lose too much blood. Mr. Tanimoto volunteers to use the boat to transport the priests away from the city, where they might be able to find a clear roadway.

On a purely practical level, Kleinsorge's religious training was important in the aftermath of the Hiroshima bombing because it provided him with a network of helpful, compassionate people on whom he could rely: the sixteen priests living in the Novitiate. Furthermore, Mr. Tanimoto volunteered to help ferry the wounded toward the Novitiate, partly because he felt he had a religious duty to help others.

Mr. Tanimoto helps to lower Father Schiffer into his boat, along with two other priests, and he paddles them down the river. He drops Schiffer and the priests a few miles downstream and then paddles back, shouting that he needs help saving some children, who are standing up to their necks in the rising river. A group goes out, rescues the children, and brings them back to where Father Kleinsorge is resting. Then, Tanimoto, some priests, and LaSalle push off again. As Tanimoto rows, he hears cries for help—some of the people lying on the banks of the river are too weak to move themselves, meaning that they are in danger of drowning as the river floods. Tanimoto wants to stop and help the people, but the other priests insist that they needed to keep moving or they'll risk Father Schiffer's death. Tanimoto brings the priests to the area where he's left Father Schiffer.

Tanimoto faced a serious moral quandary; he had to choose which people to save. There simply wasn't enough time for Tanimoto to help everyone who needed help, and therefore, he had to make tough decisions about whom to prioritize. However, Tanimoto clearly took it for granted that he had an obligation to help somebody (whereas many of the other Hiroshimans who survived the explosion must have faced a choice between helping other people and helping themselves).

Father Kleinsorge takes care of the two young children that the priests rescued from the river. One child has burns on her body, and she is very cold. Kleinsorge finds a blanket for the child, but it's too late—she dies a few hours later.

Kleinsorge devoted himself to helping the wounded and suffering, but sometimes there was nothing he could do: the child was already doomed to die, with or without a blanket.

Mr. Tanimoto paddles the boat to the sandspit, where he finds about twenty men and women. He tells a few of them to climb aboard his boat, but he then realizes that they are too weak to move. He tries to help a woman aboard, but when he takes her hand her skin rips off. This disgusts him to the point where he can't do anything for a few minutes. Though he is horrified by the victims' swollen skin and disgusting odor, he tells himself, "These are human beings." Over the course of three trips, he transports all twenty people across the river to a higher sandspit, and then decides to go back to the park and rest. In the park, Tanimoto begins to feel furious—why haven't the naval officers sent doctors to help these suffering people?

This passage must have shocked readers when Hersey's article was first published in 1946: before this point, most Americans hadn't read about the gruesome injuries that the Hiroshima survivors sustained (partly because reports had been censored by the U.S. government). Tanimoto's statement, "These are human beings," could be said to sum up Hersey's frank yet compassionate approach to writing about the Hiroshima bombing. Regardless of political convictions, one should have compassion for the victims.

Dr. Fujii sits on the floor of his family's house at the edge of the city. His left clavicle is fractured, he's broken a few ribs, and his body is riddled with cuts. If he hadn't been hurt so badly himself, he could have been assisting the wounded in Asano Park.

Like so many doctors in Hiroshima, Dr. Fujii was too heavily injured to lend his services to the thousands of victims.

That night, the Red Cross Hospital is overflowing with bombing victims. Dr. Sasaki is utterly worn out—he's been treating burns non-stop. A few other doctors, some of them injured, have joined him, but all they can do for their patients is apply saline compresses to the burns. There are so many dead bodies in the hospital that the doctors can't take care of them—the hospital is beginning to smell disgusting. Eventually Sasaki has to carry hundreds of bodies out to the driveway. Sasaki tries to sleep, he but can't—the wounded and sick find him and insist that he help them. He works all through the night, worrying that his wife will think he has died.

Dr. Sasaki heroically devoted himself to helping the wounded. However, he often reached a point where there was nothing he could do except ease his patients' deaths. Sasaki had to remain focused on his medical work while surrounded by thousands of dead bodies; his experiences working in the hospital after the bombing were arguably even more gruesome and unforgettable than the bombing itself.

Mr. Tanimoto transports the priests upriver. Nearby, there is a large case of rice cakes, which a rescue party has brought but not yet distributed. When the priests find the case, they eat some of the rice cakes—then, a group of soldiers arrives, speaking a foreign language. Terrified, the priests prepare themselves for the worst, but then realize that these are German soldiers allied with Japan.

Tanimoto and the other priests were understandably paranoid—after their city had been so heavily bombed, they must have anticipated some further military attack. This is a moment in which the complexity of the German presence is revealed. Tanimoto's relief at finding Nazi soldiers contrasts with his selfless behavior.

The priests transport Fathers LaSalle and Schiffer to the edge of the city, where a group of Novitiate priests waits. The trip is excruciating for both of the injured men—at one point, one of the healthy priests trips and drops his end of the litter, throwing Schiffer to the ground. However, once the priests join up with the Novitiate group, the Novitiates, some of whom were trained as doctors, treat Schiffer and LaSalle's wounds. Thousands of Hiroshimans, injured as badly as the two priests, or much worse, receive no medical care whatsoever.

In this passage, Hersey does a particularly elegant job of tying descriptions of individual people involved in the bombing to overall descriptions of the city: as miserable as LaSalle and Schiffer's experiences were that evening, they paled in comparison to those of thousands of other victims scattered throughout the city of Hiroshima.

In the Park, Mrs. Murata continues to talk to the exhausted Father Kleinsorge. The Nakamura family can't sleep, either—the children are sick, but too anxious to rest. When a gas storage tower bursts into flame, they shriek with delight. Mr. Tanimoto, however, falls asleep immediately. The next morning, he awakens to the sight of dead bodies floating above sandspit—the river levels have risen, drowning them.

One of the greatest tragedies of the aftermath of Hiroshima was that, despite the heroic efforts of Kleinsorge, Tanimoto, and countless other people, thousands of victims passed away slowly and painfully. Here, for instance, Mr. Tanimoto realizes that he hasn't dragged the victims far enough from the tides—meaning that, even though he isn't directly responsible for the victims' deaths, he didn't do enough to save them.

It is the morning of August 7. Japanese radio broadcasts issue emergency announcements about how Hiroshima has been bombed by "a few B-29s," seemingly with a "new type of bomb." Few survivors of the bombing ever hear this broadcast. However, it is obvious enough to them that a new kind of military technology has been used to destroy their city. Unbeknownst to them, this weapon represents, "the first great experiment in the use of atomic power."

While the Hiroshima survivors didn't understand that an atomic bomb was responsible for destroying their city, they knew perfectly well that some entirely new kind of weapon had been used to attack them. The magnitude of difference between a normal bombing and this bombing shows the marked difference ushered in by the atomic era.

Mr. Tanimoto decides to find a doctor to bring to Asano Park. He crosses the river in his boat and walks to the East Parade Ground. There, he finds an Army medical unit, but he notices that its doctors are overburdened already. Nevertheless, he tells one doctor that he is "badly needed" in Asano Park. While Tanimoto argues that the doctor's services would be most useful in the Park, the doctor, clearly exhausted, replies that he is under orders to tend to the "slightly wounded," claiming, "there is no hope for the heavily wounded." Furious, Tanimoto gathers some rice cakes and biscuits and takes them back to the Park.

In the aftermath of the Hiroshima bombing, doctors had to make tough calls about how best to use their skills. The standard protocol was to prioritize patients who already stood a good chance of surviving. Tanimoto found this protocol callous, but he couldn't interfere with it. (Notice that this is one of the only times in the book when two characters disagree—and even here, they're disagreeing about the best way to help other people.)

The morning of August 7 is hot, and the healthy survivors go to gather river water for the sick and injured. Father Kleinsorge ventures outside the park and finds a faucet—he gathers buckets of water for the victims of the bombing. Coming back from the faucet, he crosses paths with a group of twenty soldiers, whose faces are horrifically burned. He offers them water, but realizes that their mouths are so swollen that they can barely open them to drink. He forms a straw from a piece of grass and lets the soldiers sip from his bucket. Kleinsorge realizes that the sight of so much death and injury has made him numb—ordinarily, he'd get queasy at the sight of a cut finger, but now he feels curiously calm.

Throughout this chapter, the uninjured characters try to help the injured, and although they sometimes succeed, they often fail, too. For the second time in the book, Kleinsorge is described as experiencing a strange sense of calm regarding the devastation that he witnesses. Here, Hersey implies that Kleinsorge's sense of calm is a defense mechanism, allowing him to preserve his sanity and care for others instead of going into shock.

Back in Asano Park, Father Kleinsorge watches as the young children in the park play with each other—sometimes, unexpectedly, a child bursts into tears and calls for its mother. An elderly Japanese woman offers Kleinsorge some tea, and Kleinsorge is so touched that he almost cries—he's been so used to xenophobia in the last few months that any genuine kindness makes him "a little hysterical."

The passage paints a poignant image: even the innocent little children playing in Asano Park were aware of the tragedy in their city. The passage further shows that many different Hiroshimans came together in sympathy and compassion after the bombing.

The Novitiate priests arrive at Asano Park around noon with a handcart. They pack Father Kleinsorge's suitcase into the cart, along with Mrs. Murata's things and the two Nakamura children. Suddenly, a priest brings up an interesting point: Japanese laws state that, if families suffer property damage as a result of the war, they are entitled to compensation. The priests decide that Father Kleinsorge should be the one to enter the claim—thus, while the others "go off in the handcart," Kleinsorge walks to a police station to fill out a claim form. While returning to the Novitiate from the station, he begins to comprehend the extent of the damage to the city.

It's more than a little surprising that so many of the surviving Hiroshimans would think about claim forms and property insurance so soon after the bombing. Perhaps this reaction is another kind of defense mechanism—a way for the survivors to wrap their heads around the extent of the damage by translating it into the more readily comprehensible language of law and money.

Toshiko Sasaki spends two days and nights in the courtyard. Her leg becomes swollen, and she has to survive without food or water. On August 8, some friends come looking for her at the factory—they find her and tell her that her mother, father, and baby brother are, in all probability, dead. Later, men carry Toshiko Sasaki to a relief station, where two army doctors examine her. The doctors are worried that she'll die of gangrene unless they amputate the leg. A moment later, a doctor explains that she does not, in fact, have gangrene, meaning that, according to the hospital's emergency rules, she'll have to leave. But then, the doctor takes her temperature, and decides that she needs to stay after all.

Toshiko Sasaki endured more pain and fear than any of the other five main characters in the book. Furthermore, the passage suggests that there were hundreds of other Hiroshimans in more or less similar situations. With too many victims and not enough doctors, it was sadly inevitable that some Hiroshimans go days without food, water, or medical care. The fact that Sasaki's doctors would even consider throwing her out of the hospital further emphasizes the insufficiency of medical care in Hiroshima following the bombing.

On the same day, August 8, Father Cieslik goes into the city to find Mr. Fukai, the man who ran back into the burning mission. He begins in the neighborhood where the priests last saw Fukai, but he can't find any trace of the man. At the Novitiate that evening, the mission's young theological student tells the priests that Mr. Fukai had said, "Japan is dying … I want to die with our country." The priests conclude that Fukai has run back into the mission and killed himself. Fukai is never seen again.

Mr. Fukai's motive for killing himself (if, indeed, he meant to kill himself) is never explained. Perhaps his behavior is meant to evoke the Japanese people's intense loyalty to their country and their government. Furthermore, Fukai's last words suggest how many Hiroshimans perceived the bombing: they thought of it as an apocalyptic event, signaling the end of their country and their culture.

At the Red Cross Hospital, Dr. Sasaki works for three days on an hour's sleep. He begins treating serious wounds on the second day, by which point most of the wounds have festered. On the end of day three, he goes home and sleeps for seventeen hours. On August 9, Father Kleinsorge wakes up in the Novitiate, to which he walked the previous evening. The rector examines him and tells him that his wounds can heal in as little as three days. During the day, Kleinsorge walks around the city, trying to comprehend the damage. On the morning of that same day, the U.S. military drops the second atomic bomb on the city of Nagasaki.

Dr. Sasaki worked without pause for three days, so understaffed were Hiroshima's hospitals. Seemingly just as the city of Hiroshima was beginning to recover from the bombing and make sense of the disaster, the U.S. military dropped another bomb on Nagasaki. The rationale for dropping this second bomb has been energetically debated by historians—some have argued that Japan wouldn't have surrendered before the second bombing, while others argue that the second bombing was a brutal, pointlessly destructive display of force.

On the morning of August 9, Mr. Tanimoto is in the park, tending to the wounded. He notices that his neighbor, Mrs. Kamai, is holding onto her baby, even though the baby has died days earlier and the body is rotting. When he gently suggests that the child be cremated, she holds the body tighter.

As Mrs. Kamai's behavior might suggest, many of the survivors of the Hiroshima bombing were in denial about the extent of the damage to their city and to their personal lives.

The priests take some fifty refugees to the Novitiate chapel, where the rector provides the best medical care he can. The Nakamuras are provided with blankets and food. One night, Toshio wakes up screaming—earlier in the day, he learned that his older friend was burned alive in a factory.

Priests were crucial in tending to the victims of the Hiroshima bombing (although Hersey doesn't really talk about the contributions of non-Christian religious leaders). Notice, also, that the devastation of Hiroshima traumatizes all Hiroshimans, even young, innocent children like Toshio.

On August 10, Father Kleinsorge learns that Dr. Fujii has been injured and has gone to stay with a friend named Mr. Okuma. Kleinsorge sends Father Cieslik to check up on Fujii in Okuma's home. Cieslik finds Fujii sitting in a chair with a broken collarbone, and Fujii gives Cieslik some medical tools that the rector can use back at the Novitiate. He also claims that the bomb that has been dropped on Hiroshima is made of "fine magnesium powder."

Dr. Fujii did not go out of his way to help other survivors, partly because he was injured. Fujii's remarks about magnesium powder might seem foolish in retrospect, but at the time, such a theory seemed no more or less ridiculous than the theory of nuclear fission.

On August 11, Mr. Tanimoto returns to his ruined parsonage. In the ruins, he finds church records and cooking tools. While he is there, a neighbor named Miss Tanaka finds him and says her father wants to see him. Tanimoto dislikes Tanaka's father for having accused him of being an American spy. However, Mr. Tanaka is about to die, and he wants religious counsel. Fulfilling his duties to the Neighborhood Association, Tanimoto reads from the Bible as Tanaka dies.

Tanimoto set aside his personal feelings about his neighbor in order to perform his priestly duties—above all, giving comfort and counsel to the dying. This passage also highlights the climate of fear and xenophobia that permeated Japan during WWII; even Tanimoto, who is Japanese, was subject to xenophobia.

On August 11, radios broadcast the news that civilian patients are to be evacuated from Hiroshima immediately. Toshiko Sasaki is taken to a hospital in a nearby town. At the Novitiate, Father Cieslik tries to entertain the orphaned children; he also tries to track down their parents. He is able to contact one mother, who has been moved to a nearby island, and he arranges for her children to reunite with her. Meanwhile, rumors get out that Hiroshima has been destroyed by the energy released from a split atom. This concept seems no more or less ridiculous than magnesium powder.

Gradually, the Japanese state began to take care of its own citizens—in the meantime, however, priests continued to take care of unaccompanied children and wounded adults. Hersey doesn't explain how, exactly, news of splitting the atom reached the Hiroshimans; at first, there must have been many other rumors about what had caused the explosion (Fujii mentioned magnesium powder, for example).

On August 12, the Nakamura family goes to a nearby town to stay with Mrs. Nakamura's sister-in-law. There, Mrs. Nakamura learns that her mother, sister, and brother are dead. Meanwhile, in the Red Cross Hospital, Dr. Sasaki returns to work and begins to establish some order. With the help of some other medics, he disposes of the dead, making sure to cremate and enshrine the bodies in a civilized manner.

Mrs. Nakamura and the other survivors slowly began to face the fact that they'd lost friends and family members in the bombing. Dr. Sasaki had a much broader perspective on the destruction caused by the bombing: during his time in the hospital, he was forced to take care of thousands of dead bodies.

On August 15, Emperor Hirohito makes a radio announcement: on behalf of the Japanese state, he is surrendering to the Allied forces. Mr. Tanimoto later explains that hearing the Emperor's voice is an almost religious experience. It feels depressing, yet strangely inspiring, to hear the Emperor say, in a calm, clear voice, that Japan is surrendering and the war is over. It is on this day, Tanimoto wrote, that "Japan started her new way."

Emperor Hirohito's surrender represented the first time that many Japanese citizens had heard the Emperor's voice. At the time, Hirohito wielded very little true political power, but was still an important symbolic leader, to whom millions looked for guidance. His surrender was a tragic milestone in Japanese history, since it signaled the country's military defeat, but it also allowed Japanese citizens to come to terms with the war and move forward with their lives.

CHAPTER FOUR: PANIC GRASS AND FEVERFEW

On August 18, 1945, Father Kleinsorge sets out for Hiroshima from the Novitiate to deposit the Jesuit Society's money in a bank. As he walks to Hiroshima, he notes the city's ruined buildings and crumbling streets. All this damage, he now knows, has been achieved with one bomb. As Kleinsorge deposits the money in the bank, his wounds barely trouble him. A few days later, however, he collapses in the middle of Mass.

As the chapter begins, Hersey alludes to the onset of radiation poisoning—a consequence of the atomic explosion that nobody seems to have anticipated (most of the scientists who designed the atomic bomb didn't think that anybody exposed to nuclear radiation would survive the initial blast).

On the morning of August 20, Mrs. Nakamura complains of nausea and notices that her hair is falling out—a few days later, she is bald. Her daughter, Myeko, begins to feel weak, but her son and other daughter seem perfectly fine. Mr. Tanimoto begins to feel ill, too. Nakamura, Myeko, Tanimoto, and Kleinsorge don't realize it, but they are all suffering from **radiation sickness**.

Gradually, the world realized that radiation sickness could be as deadly as the explosion itself. For reasons that are still unclear, not everyone within range of the explosion contracted radiation sickness—some avoided it entirely, while others experienced intense symptoms within a few days.

Toshiko Sasaki has a horrible infection in her left leg. In the hospital, the doctors conclude that she needs better care, and they arrange for her to be moved to the Red Cross Hospital in Hiroshima. As she is carried into the hospital, Toshiko Sasaki notices the incredible beauty of Hiroshima's flora: the atomic blast has stimulated plant growth. Dr. Sasaki cares for Toshiko Sasaki, noting that his new patient seems to be suffering from strange "spot hemorrhages."

Like many other doctors in Hiroshima at the time, Dr. Sasaki faced the challenge of treating the victims of radiation sickness without understanding what was wrong with them.

By the end of August, Dr. Fujii is still staying in the home of Mr. Okuma. His health seems to be improving, and he begins treating patients again. Then, one day, Dr. Fujii comes home to find that a flood has swept away Mr. Okuma's house—thankfully, Okuma wasn't home at the time.

By a strange coincidence, two of Dr. Fujii's homes collapsed—the first because of the atomic explosion, the second because of a flood. Perhaps this event could be said to symbolize the random, meaningless destruction inherent to life itself.

Rumors arise that the atomic explosion has poisoned Hiroshima, and Japanese physicists suggest that there could be lingering radiation in Hiroshima; after investigating, they find evidence of persistent radiation. However, they conclude that Hiroshima is safe for people—even if radiation levels are higher than usual, they aren't deadly enough to hurt anyone.

Scientists quickly determined that Hiroshima was habitable. However, Hersey doesn't discuss whether people were apprehensive about visiting the city due to the threat of radiation poisoning—perhaps the public was so dimly aware of the issue that they didn't even consider this danger.

By the first week in September, Father Kleinsorge is seriously ill from radiation. In the hospital, doctors try to treat him, but they don't know how to deal with **radiation poisoning**. They prescribe vitamins and iron pills, to no avail—his condition won't improve, and his wounds refuse to heal. However, Mrs. Nakamura and Myeko, her daughter, seem to improve. Toshio and Yaeko lose some hair, probably because of radiation poisoning, but they don't seem to have other symptoms.

Radiation poisoning continued to eat away at the bodies of many Hiroshima survivors—moreover, the medical community had very little experience treating radiation victims, meaning that doctors could provide only simple, relatively ineffective remedies.

Mr. Tanimoto is hospitalized with a fever of 104 degrees; doctors treat him as best they can. He is sent to live with his father in the town of Shikoku. Meanwhile, Dr. Sasaki and his fellow doctors begin to understand **radiation poisoning**. Radiation from an atomic explosion can vaporize a human being almost instantaneously. It can also kill more slowly by inducing a fever and diarrhea and destroying the white blood cells. Finally, radiation can cause persistent harm to the body by tricking the body into producing too *many* white blood cells, resulting in infections of the chest cavity. Doctors already have some basis for treating radiation, since they know about the victims of X-ray overdoses.

It's gruesome but undeniable that the bombing greatly advanced the medical community's knowledge of radiation poisoning: scientists began to understand the different ways that radiation interfered with homeostasis. While doctors had studied radiation victims in the past, these victims had mostly been exposed to small amounts of radiation over a very long period, whereas the Hiroshima survivors had been exposed to massive amounts of radiation in the span of a few minutes.

After Mr. Okuma's home is destroyed in a flood, Dr. Fujii lives in a house in the mountains. He later moves to a suburb outside Hiroshima, where he resumes practicing medicine; he even treats Allied soldiers, with whom he practices his English. Dr. Sasaki treats Toshiko Sasaki on October 23. Her bones heal very slowly, but her leg is going to be shorter than its mate, with the foot turned inward. She thinks about the man to whom she was engaged, and wonders if he's left her because of her injury. Father Kleinsorge leaves the hospital on December 19; two days later, he meets with his friend Dr. Fujii—this is the first time they've spoken since the bombing. Fujii cracks jokes about how his buildings "keep falling into rivers," and Kleinsorge mentions that he is supposed to rest for two hours every afternoon.

The characters slowly began to adjust to their new lives, but with great difficulty: they couldn't forget what had happened on the day of the bombing, and most of them bore literal, physical wounds that acted as a constant, painful reminder of the catastrophe. Kleinsorge and Fujii, who'd known each other long before the explosion, tried to come to terms with their new lives—Fujii even managed to laugh about his misfortune, suggesting that he was beginning to cope with his trauma.

Hiroshima is now under the control of a new government whose single biggest responsibility is providing for victims of **radiation sickness**. By November, the population of Hiroshima is down to about 137,000, and the government has brought in workers to rebuild the buildings. Electricity is re-installed, and the public transportation system resumed. The new Military Government adviser, a man named Lieutenant John D. Montgomery, is tasked with rethinking what kind of city Hiroshima should be (previously, it had been an important military and communication center). Now, the government proposes various non-military projects for the city, such as a group of buildings to house an "Institute of International Amity."

In the aftermath of World War Two, the United States established its own government in Japan, with the intention of eventually ceding control to Japanese leaders (albeit leaders of whom the U.S. government approved). Notice that Hersey characterizes Hiroshima as a "military center"—a claim that President Truman made in the immediate aftermath of the bombing. Historians have since disputed this characterization—one writer argued that Hiroshima in the 1940s was a military center to the same degree that Seattle was (not very much).

Scientists and statisticians crowd Hiroshima, running tests and trying to determine just how many people have died. The initial statistic is 75,000, but that number later grows to well over 100,000. Scientists also find that the heat of the bomb melted solid granite and concrete. The American military tries to prevent scientists from publicizing their findings, but by then the word is out: the U.S. has detonated a uranium bomb in Hiroshima.

While the U.S. government tried to hide specific information about the uranium bomb, the U.S. certainly wanted the rest of the world to know about its weaponry. Put another way, the U.S. wanted to broadcast its new military power without giving away scientific data that might allow other countries to build nuclear missiles.

In February 1946, Father Kleinsorge is summoned to Toshiko Sasaki's hospital bed. He speaks sympathetically about her condition, and he doesn't even mention religion. Then, on a later visit, Sasaki asks, "If your God is so good and kind, how can he let people suffer like this?" Kleinsorge replies that humanity is living in a state of sin and then goes on "to explain all the reasons for everything."

Throughout the book, religion is a source of comfort for the characters; in this scene, for instance, Kleinsorge suggests that Christianity and the Christian definition of God can explain why disasters like Hiroshima occur. However, it's unclear if Hersey himself buys into such an idea—notice that ends the section before Kleinsorge can articulate any of his "reasons."

Mrs. Nakamura has lost all her savings in the bombings, but she is able to petition the bank to return her money. Then, she sets to work rebuilding her house and making sure her children attend school. However, within a few months, Nakamura has spent all her savings. She asks Father Kleinsorge for advice; he suggests that she work for the Allied forces, or that she repair her sewing machine, which has rusted after being stored in water.

The characters in the book slowly begin to rebuild their lives, often relying upon religious leaders such as Father Kleinsorge for advice about how to do so. Even though they want to resume regular lives, their everyday circumstances have been irrevocably altered.

Mr. Tanimoto becomes friendly with Father Kleinsorge. He is jealous, however, that Kleinsorge and his fellow priests have so much wealth—Tanimoto, on the other hand, has no money or property anymore. Kleinsorge supervises the building of a new Society of Jesus. He keeps busy—so busy that he is unable to find time to rest, as his doctors insisted, and by July, he has no choice but to go back to the hospital.

Kleinsorge worked tirelessly to help the victims of Hiroshima, and he did so to the point where he intensified the effects of radiation poisoning on his body and had to go back to the hospital.

By April of 1946, Toshiko Sasaki's wounds have healed. Her fiancé has abandoned her, but she takes comfort in her talks with Kleinsorge. Then, in the early summer, she converts to Catholicism. Meanwhile, Dr. Sasaki continues to work hard at the Red Cross Hospital—he almost never leaves. In March, he gets married. However, he finds that he gets tired very easily—partly because he never eats anything.

One could argue that both Sasakis—Toshiko and the doctor—were motivated by a desire to forget about, or escape, the horror of the Hiroshima bombing. Toshiko turned to religion as a means of burying the trauma of Hiroshima, while Dr. Sasaki tried to use his medical practice to do the same thing.

One year after the bombing of Hiroshima, "Toshiko Sasaki was a cripple, Mrs. Nakamura was destitute, Father Kleinsorge was back in the hospital," and "Dr. Sasaki was not capable of the work he once could do." Furthermore, Dr. Fujii has lost his hospital, and Mr. Tanimoto has lost his church. In other words, even six of the luckiest Hiroshimans present on August 6, 1945 have been severely harmed by the disaster. Yet they share "an elated community spirit" and a pride in their own survival. In a letter, Mr. Tanimoto writes about how some of his friends have died "for their country." A professor who Tanimoto knew well dies in a fire following the bombing—his last words are, "Let us give *Banzai* to our Emperor." He finds that the Hiroshimans died "believing that it was for Emperor's sake."

It's important to consider that, by definition, the Hiroshimans Hersey interviewed for his book were six of the luckiest, least traumatized people living in Hiroshima on the day of bombing—they survived the explosion with the power to think and speak. By structuring his story around these six survivors, one could argue that Hersey crafts an inherently optimistic story, in which tragic things happen, but the characters escape death. The passage also discusses the way that Japanese citizens used love for their Emperor to rationalize the Hiroshima bombing. The bombing was a horrific and, some might argue, incomprehensible tragedy, but may of the characters in the book find ways of convincing themselves that the tragedy happened for a reason—whether that reason was God or "the Emperor's sake."

Many Hiroshimans seems "indifferent about the ethics of using the bomb." Mrs. Nakamura says of the explosion, "It is war and we had to expect it." However, others, including Dr. Sasaki, believe that America's leaders are war criminals—Dr. Sasaki wants American generals to be hanged. Father Kleinsorge and many other priests maintain a neutral view of the bombing. Some priests say the bombing was a grotesque crime; others argue that it was justified, since it pushed Japan to surrender and avoid further conflict.

This is one of the only times in the entire book when Hersey raises the possibility that the Hiroshima bombing was a war crime. In 1946, when the book was published, the vast majority of Americans believed that the Hiroshima victims were acceptable casualties of war (or even that the bombing was "payback" for the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941). Some have faulted Hersey for presenting a lopsided view of the Japanese response to Hiroshima, making it seem that the Japanese were somewhat more accepting of America's attack than they really were. Others have praised Hersey for raising the possibility that the bombing wasn't justified—a point of view that was scandalous in American society at the time.

One wonders how the children who survived the bombing will remember the day. Toshio Nakamura writes an essay for his teacher, in which he describes going for a swim the day before the bombing. On the morning of the explosion, he explains, he saw a light—later, his mother brought him to a park. In his essay, he describes going to play with his friends, one of whose mothers, "alas was dead."

In a chapter that offers many different interpretations of the Hiroshima bombing—that it was an act of God, that it was a war crime, that it was a justifiable preemptive strike, that it was all for the Emperor's sake—Hersey ends with Toshio's simple, childish perspective on the disaster. Toshio, who's just a kid, doesn't have any elaborate way of understanding the bombing—all he knows is that people are dead. But in a way, Toshio's unbiased perspective on the bombing is the one that the book itself ultimately offers: there are many different ways of understanding the attack, but all revolve around the inescapable fact that a hundred thousand people died.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE AFTERMATH

After the Hiroshima bombing, Hatsuyo Nakamura struggles to support her children. She repairs her sewing machine and earns enough to support her family. Then, she is forced to sell the machine to pay for her medical treatment, which she later describes as the "saddest moment of her whole life." Afterwards, she becomes a "hibakusha"—literally, an "explosion-affected person" (in particular, one who lives in harsh economic conditions as a result of the explosion). The Japanese government does little to help hibakusha until 1954, when it passes a relief law.

Originally, Hiroshima *ended with Chapter Four; forty years after the bombing, however, Hersey published another magazine-length essay on Hiroshima in* The New Yorker. *In a way, Nakamura's experience after the bombing is exemplary of what other hibakusha had to endure: she was penniless, injured, and had no government assistance.*

The postwar years in Hiroshima are bleak, and there is a strong prejudice against the hibakusha, because they are believed to be sick and weak. During these years, Nakamura often tells herself, "It can't be helped," and maintains a strange sense of her own powerlessness to challenge the Japanese state. She almost seems to think of the bombing as a natural disaster, for which nobody can be blamed. Nakamura finds jobs peddling food and collecting money for paper deliveries.

In the face of society-wide indifference to her plight, Nakamura came to regard the Hiroshima bombing with a stoic, grudging acceptance. Instead of regretting the logic of war that led to her city being bombed, Nakamura conceived of the bombing as an inevitable part of her life, much like a storm.

In 1951, Nakamura is assigned to live in a brand-new house. This enables her to take better care of her children. Yaeko and Myeko grow up anemic as a result of **radiation poisoning**, but none of her three children has any of the more serious complications of radiation sickness. Toshio begins delivering papers to support himself through high school. Later, Nakamura begins working for the Suyama Chemical factory. The work is tiring and often sickening, but she works hard and makes more money.

Nakamura managed to support herself and her family by taking a menial job at a chemical factory. Even though she was still impaired by her experiences in the bombing (she must have faced a lot of prejudice when applying for jobs, for example), the Japanese and American governments didn't provide her with compensation or reparations of any kind.

In 1954, the American military accidentally injures a boatful of Japanese citizens sailing near Bikini, where the U.S. military has been testing nuclear missiles. In the ensuing outrage, the Japanese government begins providing medical care for victims of **radiation sickness**. Many hibakusha speak out against governmental neglect for their pain, and in 1957, the government passes a comprehensive Atomic Bomb Victims Medical Care Law. Nakamura is now eligible for various free medical treatments, and—later on—monthly allowances. Over time, Nakamura's children grow up and get married. Interestingly, "like their mother, all three children avoided … antinuclear agitation."

The Japanese government began providing for Hiroshima victims after the U.S military accidentally detonated an atomic bomb near a boat of Japanese citizens. Recognizing that it couldn't convincingly demand that the U.S. care for these Japanese citizens when Japan didn't even provide for its own citizens, the Japanese government began giving the hibakusha the care they desperately needed. After this point, Nakamura's life became markedly easier.

In 1966, at fifty-five, Nakamura retires from the chemical factory. She's earned a decent wage, and her children aren't financially dependent on her anymore. She takes up embroidery and goes dancing. In 1967, she visits the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, dedicated to the spirit of the Japanese people who've died fighting for their country. Nakamura still struggles to accept her husband's death—"she returns home in an uneasy state of mind."

Even after she gained some financial stability in the 1960s, Mrs. Nakamura hadn't entirely made peace with the events of the war. For example, she couldn't accept that her husband wasn't coming home, although he'd been dead for over a decade. Many other survivors of the war struggled to comprehend their own experiences, refusing to accept the painful truth.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Japan's economy is on the rise. Nakamura begins to receive more money from the government. In the fortieth year after the bombing, she participates in a folk-dance festival. Later on, she feels "woozy," and her friends take her to the hospital. At the hospital, she says she is fine, and is permitted to leave.

Mrs. Nakamura's story ended fairly happily: she gained some financial stability, raised three happy children, and kept up with her friends. Even so, she continued to suffer from radiation sickness, perhaps symbolizing the ongoing presence of the bombing in her life. There were tens of thousands of other hibakusha, furthermore, whose life stories weren't as pleasant as Nakamura's, and who suffered severely as a result of the bombing.

In a way, Dr. Terufumi Sasaki spends the rest of his life distancing himself from his memories of the bombing. He continues to work in the Red Cross Hospital, but also works on his doctoral dissertation at the University of Hiroshima. In all, it takes him ten years to receive a medical degree. His family has plenty of money, and they support him during this period. However, his marriage doesn't go well; he has his pick of eligible partners, but, after he marries, he finds that his bride "was wiser and more sensible than he."

Dr. Sasaki distinguished himself as a doctor in the immediate aftermath of the bombing; however, he didn't get his degree until the 1950s. Furthermore, Hersey suggests that Sasaki remained traumatized by the memory of Hiroshima and attempted to forget what had happened by burying himself in his studies and later his medical practice.

Dr. Sasaki spends the next five years at the Red Cross Hospital working on treating keloid scars, a common problem for hibakusha. However, doctors later realize that a better treatment is to wait for the scars to shrink over time and then remove them. In 1951, Sasaki quits working for the hospital and begins working for his father in the town of Mukaihara. For forty years, he almost never speaks about the bombing.

Dr. Sasaki's silence speaks volumes about his attitude toward the bombing—forty years later, it continued to haunt him, to the point where (very understandably) he couldn't talk about it openly.

Dr. Sasaki tries to open his own clinic, but finds that he can't get enough credit; as a result, he opens a clinic in his wife's parents' house. His practice does very well, and within a few years he's receiving more than a hundred patients a day. In 1954, he opens up a proper clinic building, and his practice continues to prosper for many years.

In spite of his trauma, Sasaki led a highly successful career as a private practitioner. As with Mrs. Nakamura, Sasaki's life story was fairly optimistic: he found ways of moving past his experiences at Hiroshima and living a long, rewarding life.

By the 1950s, the medical community is well aware that **radiation poisoning** can cause long-term damage. Leukemia is especially common in hibakusha, as are other forms of cancer. Children who've been exposed to the radiation grow up shorter than expected, and many mothers who were pregnant on that day gave birth to children with shrunken heads. Dr. Sasaki, however, doesn't treat or pay much attention to hibakusha—in a way, "he lived enclosed in the present tense."

Radiation poisoning continued to afflict the Japanese population for many years, a constant, painful reminder of the overall devastation caused by the bombing. By and large, Sasaki's response to the memory of Hiroshima was to avoid thinking about it altogether—instead, he buried himself in medicine and refused to dwell on the past.

In 1963, Dr. Sasaki visits with the director of the Red Cross Hospital in Yokohama, Dr. Tatsutaro Hattori. Hattori had once been Sasaki's boss in Hiroshima, but he's contracted **radiation sickness** and moved to Yokohama. Hattori suggests that Sasaki get some X-rays, and the X-rays reveal that Sasaki has lung cancer. Hattori recommends immediate operation, and "when Dr. Sasaki came out of the anesthetic he found that his entire left lung had been removed" due to surgical complications. Shortly after the operation, Sasaki almost dies from a burst blood vessel. Dr. Sasaki later thinks of his near-death experience in 1963 as the defining event of his life, not the Hiroshima bombing.

Even though the Hiroshima bombing was a catastrophic event, Dr. Sasaki didn't come to think of it as the defining experience of his life—he actually came much closer to dying in the 1960s, due to surgical complications. It's odd to think that anyone could live through the Hiroshima bombing and not think of it as the deadliest experience in their entire life. This might suggest that Dr. Sasaki, simply by virtue of the fact that he survived without injury, isn't truly representative of the experiences of other bombing victims.

In 1972, Dr. Sasaki's wife dies of cancer. Sasaki is devastated by this, but he throws himself back into his work; in particular, he begins focusing on elderly care. In 1977, he gets a bank loan and founds a brand-new clinic, hiring his two sons (both doctors) to assist him. Even in his old age, he works long hours, seeing as many as 250 patients a day. He lobbies to build an old-people's home, but is turned down by the county medical association; later, someone else in the association builds a similar home. Undaunted, Sasaki builds a beautiful bathhouse near his clinic.

As he grew older, Dr. Sasaki became even more invested in his medical practice. He developed a powerful desire to help other people, especially the elderly. In psychological terms, one could argue that Dr. Sasaki was trying to compensate for his experiences on the day of the bombing, when he lacked the resources or training to care for everyone in the Red Cross Hospital.

As Dr. Sasaki's fortunes boom, he develops other plans for public works, including a hot-springs spa. In 1985, he obtains a loan and begins building. In his old age, he finds the strength to visit Hiroshima—a city that now claims more than a million people as residents, in which only ten percent of the population is hibakusha. Dr. Sasaki has made peace with his past, but he continues to regret that, on the day of the bombing, he'd been unable to keep track of all the corpses he'd seen in the hospital.

Over time, the city of Hiroshima began to heal from the wounds caused by the bombing—the population grew and the economy boomed. By the same token, Dr. Sasaki began to move past his traumatic experiences, even if he couldn't entirely forget about them. Specifically, Sasaki seems to have been haunted by his inability to keep track of his hospital patients—a "failure" for which, Hersey suggests, he tried to make up later in his life by caring for the sick and the elderly.

In 1946, Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge goes back to the hospital for **radiation sickness**, from which he suffers for the rest of his life. Nevertheless, he lives "this life of misery" with a "selfless spirit." After being promoted to a new church in 1948, he devotes much of his time to comforting the dying. He is hospitalized two more times, and his colleagues wonder if he might be "too concerned for others, and not enough for himself." He presides over hundreds of baptisms. As he spends more time in Japan, he begins to go by a new name: Father Makoto Takakura.

Both on the day of the bombing and for the rest of his life, Father Kleinsorge prioritized the happiness and well being of other people above his own. It's interesting that, even after the end of World War Two, when Germany and Japan ceased their political alliances, Kleinsorge remained in Japan and went by a Japanese name. Kleinsorge faced plenty of xenophobia and discrimination in Japan as a consequence of being a foreigner, but perhaps in part because of his experiences on the day of the bombing, he developed a deep, compassionate connection with his adopted country's people.

In 1956, Kleinsorge's health worsens. However, he continues to teach Bible classes to the children of Japanese families, many of whom adore him. During this time, he's treated for leukopenia, caused by a shortage of white blood cells. In 1961, he's transferred to a smaller church, where he'll have more time to rest. The church is located in Mukaihara, the same town where Dr. Sasaki is practicing. Father Kleinsorge's new church is lonely, and sometimes nobody shows up for Mass. His energy decreases, though he visits Hiroshima once a week for a checkup at the Red Cross Hospital. In Mukaihara, he wears Japanese clothes and goes by his Japanese name. In 1966, he hires a new cook for the church, a woman named Satsue Yoshiki. Yoshiki gradually becomes one of the key people in Kleinsorge's life: "part daughter, part mother."

Kleinsorge remained an energetic preacher even after his health deteriorated. Interestingly, and unlike some of the other main characters in the book, Kleinsorge made an effort to return to Hiroshima very frequently, suggesting that (unlike Dr. Sasaki, for example), he had no desire to forget about Hiroshima or the bombing. Kleinsorge remained a friendly and gregarious person even after he moved to a smaller town—in particular, he developed a close, loving relationship with his cook (Hersey doesn't describe this relationship in any detail, however).

In 1971, Kleinsorge is hospitalized again, this time for serious liver dysfunction. Hundreds of adoring visitors come to visit him. Then, in 1976, he slips and falls in the bathroom. After going to Dr. Sasaki for X-rays, Kleinsorge finds fractures in his vertebrae and is, from then on, bedridden. He spends the final months of his life reading the Bible, chatting with Yoshiki, and catching up with his fellow priests. He dies in 1977.

Kleinsorge died much as he'd lived: surrounded by friends and admirers, and immersed in Biblical teachings. He lived a happy, fulfilling life, attending to the needs of others and always prioritizing other people's well-being above his own.

In 1946, Toshiko Sasaki is beginning to recover from her injuries. Then, very suddenly, "a new blow came." She'd previously been engaged to a young man—after the Hiroshima bombing, however, he disappeared. Now, he is back in Hiroshima, though he's visibly shy around her. Sasaki suspects that her former fiancé's family doesn't want him to marry a hibakusha. The only comforting person in Sasaki's life is Father Kleinsorge, who visits her often and inspires her to convert to Catholicism.

After the bombing, Toshiko Sasaki's situation was probably bleaker than that of any of the other main character in the book: not only was her body injured, but she'd also lost her fiancé and her family. Like many people in times of crisis, Sasaki turned to religion for comfort and guidance.

By 1947, Toshiko Sasaki has taught herself to walk without crutches. She sends her children to live in an orphanage, and then gets a job working as an attendant there. Sasaki enjoys her work, and she later transfers to another orphanage on the island of Kyushu. During this period, she spends more than a year in the hospital, receiving additional leg surgery. Afterwards, her leg continues to irk her; however, she can now walk normally, since her legs are the same length again.

Sasaki gradually adjusted to her new life, learning how to walk normally, providing for her children as best she could, and finding a decent job. Though her injuries were severe, her recovery mirrors the renaissance of the city of Hiroshima after the bombing.

Toshiko Sasaki loves working at the orphanage, and she feels tremendous compassion for the children. Many of the children's mothers were prostitutes, and others lost their families in the war. Sasaki holds an unusually bitter opinion about the atomic bomb, even for a hibakusha: she believes that too much thought is given to the power of the atomic bomb itself, and "not enough thought was given to" the overall injustice of World War Two, during which millions of civilians on both sides were "killed or maimed."

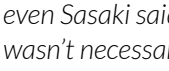
Unlike many other hibakusha, including Dr. Sasaki and Mrs. Nakamura, Toshiko Sasaki exhibited little desire to forget about the catastrophe of the Hiroshima bombing; on the contrary, her work at the orphanage meant that she was constantly reminded of it. Furthermore, Sasaki never accepted the bombing as an inevitability in the way that Mrs. Nakamura did; instead, she seemed to take the extreme pacifist position that Hiroshima, and World War Two overall, was a crime.

Toshiko Sasaki keeps in touch with her family in Hiroshima; during one of her visits, she runs into her old fiancé, but he refuses to acknowledge her. Father Kleinsorge asks her if she would consider getting married to someone else. By 1954, however, Sasaki has made up her mind to go into a convent. With Kleinsorge's help, she moves to a convent in Misasa. She's irritated to find that she'll have to learn Latin and French, contrary to what Kleinsorge told her. Nevertheless, in 1957, Sasaki takes her vows and becomes Sister Dominique Sasaki.

After the bombing, Toshiko Sasaki arguably experienced a more radical transformation than any of the other characters: she embraced a new religion and found comfort and fulfillment in the life of a nun. While it would be too reductive to say that Sasaki became a nun simply to cope with the bombing, the bombing clearly inspired her to make big changes in her life—the biggest of which was her conversion.

Toshiko Sasaki is assigned to work at a home for the elderly in Kyushu, where she wins a reputation for hard work. Perhaps her greatest strength is her ability to comfort the sick and dying—after witnessing so much death, she knows how to remain calm in a crisis. On one occasion, she sits with a dying man for three full days. In the 1970s, Sasaki spends two years as Mother Superior of her convent, and she later becomes the superintendent of a music school. She suffers from a variety of problems probably brought on by the bombing, including liver dysfunction and blood spots. In 1980, she is honored at a dinner celebrating the 25th anniversary of her becoming a nun. At the dinner, she says, "It is as if I had been given a spare life when I survived the A-bomb. But I prefer not to took back."

As Hersey makes clear in this passage, Sasaki's experiences during Hiroshima proved to be a major asset during her long, successful career as a nun: she'd experienced so much grief and devastation already that nothing could rattle her, and she was able to concentrate on her duties to other people. Instead of allowing the events of August 6, 1945 to wreck the rest of her life, Sasaki found ways to use these experiences for the betterment of others. And yet even Sasaki said that she'd prefer not to "look back": while she wasn't necessarily trying to forget about Hiroshima, she wasn't trying to relive it, either.



Dr. Fujii continues to practice medicine for the rest of the 1940s, and in 1948 he opens a new clinic where he treats about eighty patients every day. He continues to visit with his friend Father Kleinsorge. Two of his sons become doctors (the third becomes an X-ray technician), and both of his daughters marry doctors. Luckily, Fujii doesn't suffer from **radiation poisoning**. To the extent that the bombing of Hiroshima affects him psychologically, it encourages him to enjoy life. He doesn't work too hard, and he travels a lot. In 1956, he sails to New York, where he works closely with some of the women who were maimed in the bombing and are now receiving plastic surgery. Fujii acts as an interpreter and medical adviser for the women.

Dr. Fujii, no less than the other characters, spent the rest of his life trying to move past the events of the Hiroshima bombing. Superficially, at least, Fujii fully succeeded in "forgetting" about the catastrophe: he seemed to be living a perfectly happy, successful life, raising happy, successful children, making enough money to live a good life, and even donating his time and experience for the benefit of those who'd been wounded in the bombing.

In the 1960s, Dr. Fujii seems to become less active and happy-go-lucky; he also quarrels with his friends and his wife. At the end of 1963, he hosts a New Year's Eve party, and retires to bed just before midnight. The next morning, his family finds him unconscious in his bed, next to a gas heater, which is "turned on but not burning." The family rushes him to the hospital, unsure if he's made suicide attempt. In the hospital, Fujii makes comments suggesting that he thinks he's back in Hiroshima during the bombing. He spends the next eleven years in the hospital as a vegetable—he seems to have no energy left. He dies in 1973, and shortly afterward his wife sues one of his sons over the inheritance.

Although Dr. Fujii had seemed to be a perfectly content, complacent person, Hersey gives readers reason to believe that he was still traumatized by the events of Hiroshima. Perhaps, beneath his calm, self-satisfied exterior, Fujii was still tormented by the bombing—this might explain why he tried to kill himself and eventually lost the energy to live a normal life. But Hersey doesn't provide enough evidence for readers to decide if Fujii's condition was or wasn't a product of his experiences during Hiroshima. Perhaps Hersey is bending the evidence ever so slightly, in order to make Fujii's later life seem more determined by Hiroshima than it really was.

A year after the bombing of Hiroshima, the city's residents begin to rebuild their former homes, and the political atmosphere begins to change subtly. Where before, Hiroshimans were primarily angry with America for attacking their country, many Hiroshimans now reserve their anger for their own government, which involved the country in "doomed aggression."

Notice that, although Hersey briefly alludes to Japanese citizens' anger with the United States, he gives much more space to their fury with their own government. Even forty years later, it could be argued, Hersey glosses over the U.S. government's role in the Hiroshima catastrophe.

In 1946, Kiyoshi Tanimoto is trying to rebuild his church. He has very little money, especially since his building hasn't been insured for much, but he and other parishioners loyally set to work rebuilding. Meanwhile, on July 1, 1946, the U.S. military tests an atomic bomb near Bikini (it tests another bomb on May 17, 1948). Tanimoto corresponds with American classmates and arranges to travel to the U.S. to raise money for his church. On his voyage to the U.S., he begins planning a new life for himself: he'll "spend his life working for peace."

In the final pages of the book, Hersey discusses Kiyoshi Tanimoto, whose later life was more overtly influenced by the events of Hiroshima than those of other five main characters in the book. Tanimoto actively campaigned against the expansion of America's nuclear arsenal, and used his influence in the United States to support a variety of pacifist causes.

In America, Tanimoto campaigns for world peace, making emotional speeches and forging useful connections with American activists. In 1949, he publishes an editorial in the *Saturday Review of Literature* called "Hiroshima's Idea." Therein, he proposes the establishment of a World Peace Center—a "laboratory of research and planning for peace." Shortly afterwards, the Japanese government passes a law establishing Hiroshima as a "Peace Memorial City," complete with a memorial park.

In the period following World War Two, there were many pacifist movements around the world. Some movements supported nuclear disarmament in order to ensure that the events of Hiroshima would never be repeated; others supported the founding of the United Nations to ensure that countries never again use violence to settle their problems. Without committing himself to any single ideology, Tanimoto supported a World Peace Center, where people could research different ways of promoting peace.

Tanimoto and Norman Cousins, the editor of the *Saturday Review*, launch a petition for the United World Federalists—a society supporting a world government—which gains more than 100,000 signatures. They submit the petition to President Harry Truman, who ordered for the bomb to be dropped on Hiroshima. Truman refuses to accept the petition, and a few months later, the Soviet Union develops its own nuclear weapons. By the end of 1949, Tanimoto has traveled to more than 200 cities, raising money for his church and lobbying for peace.

Tanimoto's courageous activism resulted in many donations and supporters. However, he didn't succeed in swaying the policies of the U.S. government; on the contrary, the United States (and later the Soviet Union) stockpiled nuclear missiles throughout the 1950s, sparking the Cold War, a decades-long conflict between the world's two remaining superpowers, America and Russia.

Back in Hiroshima in 1950, Tanimoto uses the 10,000 dollars he raised to build a new church, and he returns to the U.S. in 1950 to raise money for the World Federation. In Washington, D.C., he speaks to a group of U.S. Senators, one of whom says he's astounded that Tanimoto has the courage to appear before the U.S. government and argue for peace.

Tanimoto was a passionate, charismatic speaker, and he knew how to use his experiences in the Hiroshima bombing to gain respect and authority over his audience—even an audience of American senators.

Tanimoto returns Japan and sets to work founding a Bible study group for his proposed peace center. He raises money to provide plastic surgery for people who were maimed in the explosion, collaborating with a journalist named Shizue Masugi. Together, Tanimoto and Masugi raise funds for nine girls to receive surgery. Meanwhile, in 1952, Great Britain concludes its first atomic bomb tests; in 1953, the Soviet Union tests its first hydrogen bomb. Around the same time, Tanimoto begins to face criticism from his peers: he's accused of spending too much time in America and of being more interested in self-promotion than in helping others. Some wonder why only women are receiving surgery.

The passage juxtaposes Tanimoto and Masugi's attempts to raise money for pacifist causes with the slow buildup of nuclear weaponry in other countries. The implication of the passage is that, admirable as Tanimoto's pacifist activism may have been, it didn't prevent countries from preparing for another World War. Oddly, Tanimoto—the same man who acted selflessly during the bombing—gained a reputation for being self-absorbed. Hersey doesn't clarify if this is a fair assessment of Tanimoto's behavior, or whether others were merely trying to discredit his activism.

In 1954, a Japanese boat is "showered with radioactive fallout" from a nuclear test near Bikini. Norman Cousins, still in contact with Tanimoto, travels to New York to raise funds for more plastic surgery—he wants New York doctors to perform the surgeries, meaning that these doctors will have to choose from a long list of candidates the women who stand the best change of benefitting from surgery.

The politics of providing plastic surgery for the female victims of the bombing—the so-called Hiroshima Maidens—proved highly contentious. Cousins wanted American doctors to provide the surgery, symbolizing American society's compassion for the Japanese. Others argued that Japanese doctors should perform the surgery on its own citizens.

In 1955, Tanimoto travels to America with some of the women who are to receive plastic surgery. He appears on "This is Your Life," the NBC talk show, where he talks about his experiences on the day of the bombing, and—to his surprise—sits next to Captain Robert Lewis, the copilot of the *Enola Gay*, the airplane that dropped the bomb on his city. Between questions, ads sell nail polish remover. At one point, Lewis buries his head in his hands—millions of viewers assumed he was crying, but in fact, he was just drunk. Several of the female victims of the bombing appear on the show, as well.

Tanimoto's unexpected encounter with Robert Lewis on an NBC talk show is one of the most surreal episodes in the annals of the Hiroshima bombing (it can still be viewed on YouTube). Hersey conveys the crassness and tawdriness of the event, with NBC cutting back and forth between tacky ads and emotional, intense questions about the bombing. Many Japanese people thought that Tanimoto had cheapened the pacifist movement by appearing on NBC, and they accused him of simply wanting to be famous (although, as Hersey explains, Tanimoto didn't know that he'd be sitting next to Robert Lewis, or that the format of the program would be so vulgar).

The day after the interview, the Japanese government telegrams the United States, explaining that Tanimoto is "something of a publicity seeker," more interested in raising funds for a memorial peace center than representing his country honorably. American government officials worry that Tanimoto might "pursue a leftist line" during his campaigning.

Tanimoto was caught between a rock and a hard place: his American connections increasingly thought of him as a dangerous radical (at the time, many who opposed the U.S. government's military policies were unfairly accused of being Communists and un-American), while his Japanese connections thought of him as an attention-monger. In other words, neither side took him, or his plans for a peace center, too seriously.

Tanimoto's tour of the United States raises lots of money—from the TV interview alone, he earns fifty thousand dollars. He gains a reputation for being energetic—not usually a quality associated with hibakusha. However, Tanimoto realizes that Norman Cousins has more control over the funds than he does. Cousins corresponds directly with the Japanese government, bypassing Tanimoto. Around the same time, one of the women scheduled to receive plastic surgery dies while under anesthesia in New York—later, her father isn't even invited to her funeral. Tanimoto becomes something of an outcast in Japan: because he's a Christian, he is never a big part of the left-wing antinuclear movement, and because Norman Cousins has more power with fundraising, he has no clout with the government. Meanwhile, in 1957, Britain conducts its first hydrogen bomb tests.

Hersey never takes a firm position on whether Tanimoto was or wasn't as starved for attention as other people portrayed him to be (although, based on Tanimoto's behavior in the first four chapters of the book, it's pretty hard to imagine that he was). During the fifties and sixties, the antinuclear movement, both in Japan and in the U.S., was predominately a left-wing project, meaning that Tanimoto's Christian ideology didn't really have a home there. Hersey juxtaposes the disorganization and occasional pettiness of the various pacifist movements of the era with the seemingly inevitable growth of the world's nuclear arsenals.

Mr. Tanimoto's daughter, Koko Tanimoto, was only an infant during the bombing. Later on, she begins traveling to America with her father to receive medical treatment. During a visit in the late 1950s, someone tells her to remove her gown and stand naked—she does so "for what seemed an eternity." Koko is so traumatized by the experience that "she was unable to tell anyone about it for twenty-five years."

Although Koko was too young to remember the Hiroshima bombing, the bombing nonetheless led her to her own traumatizing experiences (being humiliated and, it would seem, sexually harassed during her time in the American hospital).

In 1959, a baby girl is left outside Tanimoto's church, and Tanimoto decides to raise the child, along with others who lost parents during the bombing. Then, in 1960, France tests its first nuclear weapons—a few years later, China follows. In the late 1960s, Koko Tanimoto begins attending American University. She falls in love with a Chinese-American man, but his father forbids them to marry because Koko is a hibakusha. She later begins working in Tokyo, where she marries someone else. She has a miscarriage, which her family attributes to the bombing, and she later adopts two children.

There's a lot going on in this passage. Notice, first, that Tanimoto began running an orphanage—even if his plans for a peace center didn't really succeed, he found other, more modest ways of caring for the victims of the bombing. Koko's experiences could be said to symbolize the long-lasting effects of the bombing on Japanese people's lives: even though Koko couldn't remember the bombing, it led her to face discrimination throughout her life and may have prevented her from bearing children.

In the 1960s, the Japanese antinuclear movement becomes intensely partisan and fractured. On the far left, some argue that the U.S. is going to use nuclear weapons for war, while the Soviet Union is going to use them for peace. Others argue that no countries should pursue nuclear technology. In 1974, India begins nuclear tests.

The tragedy of the antinuclear movement, both in Japan and in general, was that it turned on itself. At a time when the movement needed cooperation, its leaders divided more than they united. Meanwhile, many more countries gained access to nuclear technology, further underscoring the anti-nuclear movement's failure.

Almost forty years after the bombing, the Hiroshima peace center that Tanimoto proposed is "nominally still in place," though it consists mostly of an orphanage for children whose parents died in the explosion. Tanimoto returns to the U.S. to raise funds, but retires from the pulpit in 1982. In 1984, a poll finds that more than half of hibakusha believe that nuclear weapons would be used again. Tanimoto, now an old man, lives a modest life in Hiroshima. In the papers, he reads about how the U.S. and the Soviet Union are "climbing the steep steps of deterrence." His memory, "like the world's, was getting spotty."

Hersey has shown how the six main characters of his book found ways of adjusting, some more successfully than others, to their lives after the bombing. In many ways, the characters who lived the happiest, most fulfilling lives, found ways of moving past the trauma of the bombing. At the same time, all the evidence would suggest that, at some point in the future, nuclear weapons will be used during the course of a war: there are too many nuclear missiles and too many powerful people willing to use them. In all, the final passage of the book paints an ambiguous picture of the act of memory. Often, people move past tragedy by forgetting about it—and yet it's important that people remember tragedy in order to ensure that they don't repeat it.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Arn, Jackson. "*Hiroshima*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 29 Jun 2017. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Arn, Jackson. "*Hiroshima*." LitCharts LLC, June 29, 2017. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hiroshima.

To cite any of the quotes from *Hiroshima* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Hersey, John. Hiroshima. Vintage. 1989.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Hersey, John. Hiroshima. New York: Vintage. 1989.