



Tamara L. Roleff, ed. *The Atom Bomb*. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2000. 272 pp.
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Tamara Roleff has chosen an extraordinarily broad and eminently readable collection of essays concerning the atomic bomb from the discovery of the neutron in 1932 to the so-called Enola Gay controversy in 1995. This book is an ideal vehicle for triggering lively and informed discussions by students of many and diverse disciplines. A cursory glance at its contents page reveals essays that explore political trends and their consequences; social, literary, cultural and technological ramifications of the bomb; and still others which examine pivotal leaders and other influential figures.

Chapter One comprises an intelligible discussion of the atom bomb's development. In a clearly definable thread, the chapter weaves from atomic research when it was little more than "intuitions backed by firm reasoning" (p. 36); to a scientific experiment on a squash court at the University of Chicago (p. 49); to an alarming "vision of Hitler in possession of an atomic bomb," (p. 59); and, finally to the secretive Manhattan Project in the United States, of which "it is probably safe to say that never before in the history of the human race have so many brilliant minds been gathered together in one place," (p. 71).

This reviewer admits, however, to having read with particular interest the essays contained in the Second Chapter, which treats of the decision to use the bomb

at the end of World War II. First, former United States Senator Alan Cranston in an argument considerably removed from much historical debate maintained in his short essay that throughout the momentous events of August 1945, no "mature deliberation," or "fundamental questioning" (p. 88) ever took place with regard to the bombing of Japan. Juxtaposed against Cranston's argument is that of Henry L. Stimson, who as Secretary of War played a leading role in the ultimate recommendation to use the bomb. He emphasised Japan's potential to inflict damage on Allied forces in spite of that country's increasingly desperate position through 1945, explaining that his "chief purpose was to end the war in victory with the least possible cost in the lives of the men in the armies which [he] had helped to raise." (p. 101).

Following Stimson's contribution is its 1949 critique by Hanson W. Baldwin, military analyst for the New York Times. Baldwin contended that the atomic bomb had no effect on hastening the defeat of Japan. He maintained that Japan was already in a severely weakened state and was attempting to negotiate a peace settlement when the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This was indeed the case, yet Baldwin's argument remains flawed. Certainly Stimson knew of the Japanese peace feelers throughout 1945, yet he, unlike Baldwin, made the vital distinction between a prostrate power and

one that had conceded defeat.

The essay which concludes the second chapter is a well-researched revisionist history by Gar Alperovitz. He argued that it was merely a matter of time before Japan surrendered to the Allied powers, and as such it was not merely military considerations which were involved in the decision to use the bomb. Instead, Alperovitz argued persuasively that diplomatic issues played a significant role in the decision. Alperovitz's contention that "from April 1945 on, top American officials calculated that using the atomic bomb would enormously bolster U.S. diplomacy vis-vis the Soviet Union," (p. 119) comprised a much more solid critique of Stimson's argument than did Baldwin's essay, and perhaps more than the other essays in this collection clearly conveyed the myriad of ideas, beliefs, and assumptions which informed the decision to use the bomb.

The next chapter is a sombre collection of essays emanating from the ruins of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. First, Tsujioka Atsuko recounted the horror of seeing, among other things, "a mother weeping and holding above her head a naked baby that was burned bright red all over its body." (p. 129). Second, Charles W. Sweeney, who flew both atomic bomb missions in World War II, narrated the sight which greeted him upon entering Nagasaki within a month of Japan's surrender: "The valley floor was a stretch of rubble dotted by grotesquely twisted lumps of steel beams and columns. There were very few people around as I surveyed the surroundings." (p. 137). The final essay of the third chapter told of the devastating effect the bombs had on two "centres of human life and livelihood." (p. 142). As such it investigated the enormity and indiscriminate nature of atomic destruction, the effects of subsequent radiation, and the unforgivably passive response of the Japanese Government to the desolation.

Chapter Four is an examination of the United States, the atomic bomb, and the Cold War. The first contribution considered the thousands of US soldiers and sailors

who were exposed to radioactive fallout in military studies which explored the feasibility of surviving a limited nuclear war. The second contended that Americans have experienced several cycles of apathy and fear relating to the atomic bomb, whilst the third is an interesting examination of the atomic bomb in pop culture. The final chapter is a collection of essays written in hindsight by the scientists involved in the Manhattan Project. Joseph Rotblat's contribution examined how his fear of a nuclear-armed Nazi Germany overrode his opposition to nuclear technology. Yet Rotblat left the Manhattan Project in 1944 when he learned the Americans intended to use the bomb as an offensive weapon, as opposed to one of deterrence. William Laurence based his essay on a series of fascinating interviews with Robert Oppenheimer, Edward Teller, Eugene Wigner, Emilio Segre, Luis Alvarez, Leslie Groves, and John McCloy. According to Oppenheimer: "I think that it was a damn good thing that the bomb was developed, that it was recognised as something important and new, and that it would have an effect on the course of history. In that world, in that war, it was the only thing to do. I only regret that it was not done two years earlier. It would have saved a million or more lives."

To conclude then, this book is an excellent starting point for students of the atomic bomb. The diversity of the book's readings ensures the readers' grasp of the considerable historiography of such a vast topic, which is further enhanced by an excellent recommended readings section. Although no general conclusions are offered (in lieu of a conclusion, Roleff included an essay on the controversy surrounding the Smithsonian Institute's atomic bomb display) it is clear from the individual essays that the bomb comprises truly a turning point in world history.

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