

Transcript
“White Light Black Rain” Panel Discussion
June 20, 2007

CHRIS: Thank you for coming and for staying for the discussion. I'm Chris Hill, I'm a professor of Japanese at Yale University. I just wanted to introduce the people we have here tonight, Steven's going to say a couple of comments, and we'll have a few questions just among us and then open up to the audience. I would just like to say first of all thank you to the Asia Society and HBO for inviting me to take part in this, and also I wanted to say thank you to Dutch van Kirk, the navigator on the *Enola Gay*, who is here, and also Shigeko Sasamori will be joining us in just a few moments. And also thank Steven Okazaki, the director. Steven?

STEVEN: I just wanted to make some acknowledgements before we get in to the question and answers. The artist at the end of the film is part of something called the Pikadon (sp?) Project and the artist and the musician Mr. Kondo (sp?) and Mr. Coroda (sp?) have been going all over the world doing this improv painting performance and we're lucky the artist, Mr. Coroda, is here this evening (applause). I want to thank him for his participation. Some of the people involved in the film, there's two of the musicians that are in a band called One Mile North, I haven't met them, we just talked to them on the phone, but they've been incredibly supportive. Johnathan Hills and Mark Barzhouk (sp?), right here, these guys (applause) Thanks guys. Also, let's see, we had two co-producers on the film, Taro Goto (sp?) was based in San Francisco and also someone based in Hiroshima who was just absolutely terrific, her name is Atsuko Shigesawa, Atsuko is here somewhere, way in back (applause). And let's see, Kathleen Sullivan, who's our consulting producer, is here (applause). I also wanted to acknowledge Maryann Fairby (sp?) whose husband was also on the *Enola Gay*, and if I could just acknowledge, I really am so pleased that Shigeko and Dutch could be here, I really appreciate it, thank you (applause).

CHRIS: When Betsy Williams from the Asia Society invited me to take part in this discussion and told me about the film, one question immediately came to mind, because we have been dealing with these events for almost 62 years now. The question was, why this film right now? And I think there are probably a great number of answers we could give to that question, but one I think is that the lessons of 1945 seem to be fading. The nuclear non-proliferation regime, which I think was one of the most important responses to the bombings and the Cold War arms race that followed is in tatters, not only because of the efforts of some countries to gain nuclear weapons but because of the neglect of nuclear powers to their obligations to reduce their own stockpiles which is an important point of balance in the regime. More broadly speaking I think we've seen in the film that memories of these events are becoming gradually less and less immediate, less tangible. In Japan it seems very likely that Article 9 of the Constitution will be revised, enabling the government to expand its military forces which are already large and to send them overseas to arm them with nuclear weapons. In the United States, as Dutch said in the film, it's not unusual to hear people say that America should drop a nuke on Iraq. According to some reports the Bush administration has considered such an attack on Iran. Concretely the administration used warnings of mushroom clouds and uranium from Africa to build the case for invading Iraq. I think that it's not going too far to say that once a threat from which all humanity had to be saved, for some threat of nuclear war has become a scare tactic for rallying or bullying one's side, damn the consequences for the others or for the world. And *White Light/Black Rain* appears in the face of this I think increasingly cavalier attitude of the acquisition and

contemplated use of nuclear weapons. The film centers on the experiences of 18 people who were closely involved with the events of August 6th and August 9th but it uses them to paint a much broader picture and I would just like to start off with a question to Steven on that point. The film uses various techniques to put these 14 survivors, these 4 airmen and observers in a pretty good kind of historical moment, from the opening sequence which talks about the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, to the recurring image of a survivor holding a picture of him or herself as a child to the reflections of the survivors on the political and social atmosphere of the war to the airmen and observers on the expectations they faced in the summer of 1945. I want to ask then, why did you want to make a documentary that was focused on the experiences of these people, also why did you want to make a film in which Japanese survivors and American airmen appear together?

STEVEN: Well, I think that, for me, people are always asking “What are you doing?” and when I would say I was doing a film about Hiroshima or Nagasaki, people just jump into an argument. I had to go to the eye doctor, and while she was putting drops in my eyes, she said “What are you working on?” and I said “This film about Hiroshima and Nagasaki” and immediately she tried to get me into an argument about the right and wrongs of it, and I said, well you know, that’s fine, whatever you believe, but to me, the interesting thing is to hear the stories, I mean before you start arguing. And I think in a way it’s a way of avoiding hearing the stories, to argue instead, and around the 1980s there was a film festival at UC Berkeley that I went to and there were perhaps ten or a dozen films about the making of the bomb, about the dropping of the bomb, about the aftermath and what was surprising to me was that there were almost no survivors in the films, they were all with journalists, historians, and scientists talking about it. There was one film out of the ten or twelve, it was a Swiss film that had one survivor in it, and I was shocked because to me we should hear the stories from the people that know the story best before all the other stuff, and it just seems to me we go to the argument immediately. I think that on both sides, both the Americans and Japanese go the... there are different arguments but I think we need to hear the survivors’ story and I think shockingly there just hasn’t been a film really that relies just on the testimony and for me that’s the most powerful thing. And they can believe whatever they want afterwards, but I think we should stop and just let’s hear what happened from the air and from the ground first.

CHRIS: Could I ask Dutch and Shigeko, what you think the particular experiences and the particular memories of people who have been so closely involved with the bombings can bring to the debate about these particular events and the construction and use of nuclear weapons more broadly?

DUTCH: Well from my viewpoint, you know, you’ve heard all four of the other people, the scientists, the people who were involved in the dropping of the bomb, all of them saying it should never happen again. Every one of them, every person feels the same way. Other than that, I would just point out that Steven’s film does point out the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors, but I guess I would also point out that they’re not unique to just Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They’re really horrors of war, not just of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Yes, they were caused by the atomic bomb, but the 50 million Russians that were killed during the war and everything, I think we could point out that they have the same types of stories in their history. We could point out the same types of stories of the Londoners who were killed during the German bombing or the Dresden people who were killed during the Dresden bombing or

something of that type. So these are not unique pictures to just Hiroshima or Nagasaki, they are just things that happen in war. And what it says is you should not have a war. I don't know how you prevent it, but you shouldn't have it (applause).

CHRIS: Shigeko, could I ask you the same question?

SHIGEKO: As you know, my English is not so well, and some words that you are saying I don't understand, but this is just what I feel about your question. One thing he said is war, war is most against... If all over the world, we stop the war, and peace comes, but that is a very difficult subject. But everybody, I'm sure, doesn't want to have a war. Everybody wants to have peace. But many people don't realize how the world, right now, is in very critical danger of being destroyed. So Steven's movie is a very good education for everybody, not just America and Japan, but all over the world. And I understand that the survivors of the atomic bomb, and war all over the world, (inaudible). I went to Belarus and I talked to the war men, and I heard their story, and on the islands where they were testing bombs, were many survivors. All over the world, there are many survivors. So the most important thing everybody must look at this movie and realize how horrible war is, and so many people lost their lives and were hurt. Survivors suffer too. Maybe survivors suffer more than dead people, we cannot say. Once war is started, everybody becomes victims because their lovers, husbands, fathers, brothers, children die in the war, and survivors suffer. So it's everybody's responsibility to do something, and this kind of occasion is wonderful (applause).

CHRIS: I think that we should open to the audience at this point. This gentleman, and there's someone there as well?

QUESTION #1: Thank you. And first I want to thank you for the personal sacrifice and courage to make this film, and the courage of HBO to put it on. My name is Johnathan Granoff (sp?); I'm the President of the Global Security Institute which was founded by Senator Alan Cranston and Mikhail Gorbachev, because they believe that nuclear weapons are unworthy of civilization. My children, absent of a film like this, don't really know why I gave up my lucrative law practice and joined up with other people who have made similar sacrifices to devote their lives to this specific issue. This film puts a human face on it. But I have a constructive criticism and a suggestion to how it might be remedied. The film carefully, and skillfully for the most part, avoids any political analysis. It doesn't deal with the theory of why we have nuclear weapons now, and yet there are two political opinions offered at the end by bombardiers, not experts in diplomacy, international relations, or treaties. One suggests that the genie cannot be put back in the bottle, the other suggests that it's inevitable that there will be proliferation. I beg to differ about that. I believe that there is an international set of rules to constrain proliferation, and, the NPT for example, contains a provision calling for legally verifiable elimination, and there is an enormous international movement for that. One of the leaders of that is one of the members of my board of advisors, the mayor of Hiroshima, Tadatoshi Akiba, who leads an initiative of 1500 cities which have committed themselves to the abolition of nuclear weapons. The question is, the film will definitely be used by those who possess nuclear weapons to say we must not let bad people get them. I believe it's important that we have a public debate, on HBO, in which the other alternative, the legally universally verifiable elimination, can be similarly debated – not non-proliferation, but disarmament. Can that happen? That debate, can that happen publicly?

SHEILA NEVINS: Why don't we discuss it over lunch?

QUESTION #1: Thank you, God bless you, thank you.

QUESTION #2: I hope nobody objects to a short question... This was one of many horrific acts, probably the most horrific, that has occurred in war before and since and unfortunately probably in the future. I would ask, as a survivor, assuming this saved lives, assuming that this saved lives, which it may or may not have, was it worth it or was it merely an act of terror in getting at the Russians? Was it worth it – assuming it saved lives, both Japanese, American, and an invasion – if it did, was it worth it?

SHIGEKO: Dropping a bomb on a human being, especially innocent people, did not end the war faster (applause).

CHRIS: Other questions?

QUESTION #3: I want to know what the cancer rate is now in Nagasaki and Hiroshima. And then the other thing is, I wonder how concerned Americans are with the fact that the United States now has been using so-called depleted uranium bombs in Iraq, in Yugoslavia, contaminating the area for generations to come and impacting on the people that live there now.

STEVEN: The first question about the cancer rate, well the cancer rates really peaked about 10, 15 years after the bombing, primarily with leukemia, and well most of the people that had cancers relating to the radiation had the cancer. But I've been surprised recently that thyroid cancer is a really typical radiation-related cancer. For most of the people the cancer had really leveled off and most of the medical people consider that it had completely leveled off, but just from my experience I think there's some question about that because I'm surprised by how many survivors I meet who are suffering from very typical radiation-related cancers particularly thyroid cancer, so... Shigeiko?

SHIGEKO: Yes, four years ago I had very intense cancer, I had 20 inches cut off my intestines, that was four years ago. And now I have thyroid cancer. I just came back from Japan to get a test of how fast the cancer was growing, and I asked how soon they had to take it out. He said as soon as possible, but we should take it out within a half a year or a year. That's what he said. See, many people, as Steven said, most people who had radiation had thyroid cancer – it's very common, of course, many other cancers are, too.

DUTCH: Let me comment here. I've followed this problem for a number of years and I think currently the people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki do not suffer any more instances of cancer than any other population in this world, and that's a fact. I've gotten that from many doctors, many books, many studies of that particular problem. The people who were there at the time, of course, did suffer very heavily from it but since that time it has leveled off. Current populations and populations to come, populations of pregnant women and that sort of thing, do not suffer from any greater instances of cancer than the current population of any other section of the country, any other section of the world.

CHRIS: There was a question over here.

QUESTION #4: This question is for Dutch. You were saying, right after the bomb was dropped you had a sense that the war was over. After you went home, what were your immediate thoughts about what you had participated in, and how did your thoughts evolve over the next 60+ years?

DUTCH: Well, my immediate thoughts were that we were relieved that it worked. It was quite possible the bomb could have been a dud. And we dropped a uranium 235 bomb because it was the least likely to be a dud and that's the reason we selected that bomb to be the first one dropped. All subsequent bombs were plutonium bombs. Immediately when we were on the way back from the mission, we had the definite feeling that the war was over, that we didn't see how the Japanese militaristic government could stand up to that type of punishment. The fact is, that the Japanese also had an atomic program. Based on their program, they thought we only had one bomb, and that's probably the reason why they did not react to the Hiroshima bomb but it took two of them before they reacted. Over the 63 years, I don't think I've changed my philosophy a lot. I think the bomb saved a lot of lives. I've also developed a profound feeling.... Pardon me? You want to have a comment?.....that it saved a lot of lives, period, mostly Japanese lives, Chinese lives, and Malaysian lives.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Could you say more about what you mean by that?

DUTCH: What do I mean by that? Well I described the fact that the largest single air raid of the war, over Japan, was flown after Nagasaki. We had 1,000 B29s up over Japan on that particular day after the Nagasaki bombing. You never hear how many casualties occurred in Japan because of that particular raid. There were so many B29s we couldn't even find targets for them all. We had multiple targets for them. All of them, on the way up there and back, were waiting for recall, in the case that the Japanese had accepted the terms of unconditional surrender. They were saved. In China alone over 6,000 people were being killed every week by the Japanese forces. In Malaysia alone, all the people that the Japanese had put into prison camps and all that sort of thing were not being fed, were not being put on medical treatment or anything of that type, they were dying. I have many, many letters from the August 14th Society, which is a society of Dutch people that were in those Malaysian prison camps, saying that "I was in such and such a camp, we were not being fed, we were not being cared for, I was a young man and would not have lasted another three months."

CHRIS: I wonder if we could just take a pause at this point. As many here will know, the debate about the number of lives that may have been saved by the bombings has been ongoing since the mid-60s with (inaudible) and this is far from settled. This is a debate that is going on in statistical tables and footnotes, it is going on newly in archives that have opened up since the end of the Cold War. We probably have time for one more question so I would like to get away from that debate for a moment and toward what really is the center of the film. Right in front, yes?

QUESTION #5: The film begins with young people not knowing the date. What I'm wondering is happening in Japan now is to what extent is the discussion of Article 9 something that the general population cares about, either keeping Article 9 or revising it greatly. We know what the Prime Minister feels, but what do the real people feel?

(Another inaudible question)

STEVEN: The easy question first – the film is going to be played theatrically in Japan, starting on July 28th, it's going to open in Tokyo and then play theatrically in 19 cities. I've been told by people in Japan that we probably will not get on Japanese television because the film is critical of Japanese treatment of the survivors immediately after and continuing after the war, and that generally, although what's in the film is basically common knowledge, we probably still won't get a broadcast. But we may, I'm hoping we will, but it will at least be out theatrically. Uh, the harder question. I think there's a certain confusion about the public polls about Article 9, about whether or not Japan should rebuild its military. I think many people are for the change, and it seems like the public is truly split although often it seems like a small majority is in favor of Japan remilitarizing. I think much of the pressure comes from the United States and has been for many years before the war in the Middle East, before Japan's participation. I think during previous administrations, the Clinton administration, there has been the desire for Japan to become a partner in case war breaks out in Asia. But it's unclear I think, I'm not an expert on it – things seem to be leaning that way, clearly, but it's a bit muddled I think. But it certainly has mobilized the activists in Japan, I was surprised when we were there for the 60th anniversary how much activity there was and I had been there previous years and felt like, boy, the peace movement's really lost steam, but it seems to be alive and well again because the threat seems so real to the Japanese in many ways. I think you have to look at the global situation, I mean I think if there are issues in North Korea it will affect the people in Japan, they would be very concerned with that.

CHRIS: I would just add that it does seem that there's a sizable majority of people who are opposed to revision of Article 9, in part because this Article is really a part of political post-war identity, you know, how people think about the government and their relationship to it. But there also does seem to be a bit of despair at the political momentum that's behind revision which people I guess seem frustrated that they're not able to affect. Shigeeko, could I just ask for a final comment about the efforts to revise Article 9 and your experiences?

SHIGEKO: No change, of course not (applause). Just now, it was said that it saved a lot of human life and ended the war faster, but I don't believe that. I was young, so I didn't know what was going on in the government and the war, I was only 13 years old, but I know very well, I will never forget, in Japan it was getting very, very poor. No food, no clothes, and people had to eat grass sometimes, I did. And also the government even asked people for jewels to make the weapons. There was no material to make the airplanes and the weapons, and everybody knew that was going to be the end of war very, very soon. (inaudible). Why they dropped the atomic bomb on the people, instead we have this kind of strong weapon to show the world, they tested it in Nevada or somewhere. Why they didn't broadcast this secret then bring it to Hiroshima. Then, not just one, another one, Nagasaki. I personally feel we were the guinea pig. How did the bomb affect human beings? We were guinea pigs, I feel. That's why it must never happen again, I feel very, very strongly. I'm sure everybody feels the same way (applause).

CHRIS: We're going to end the evening there. I want to thank the Asia Society and HBO and thank you again for coming, thank you Steven and Shigeeko and Dutch as well, thanks very much.