

The face of mass destruction essay

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Mrs.

Hatsuyo Nakamura - A tailor's widow living in Hiroshima. Mrs. Nakamura narrowly escapes disaster when the explosion destroys her house. She and her three children cope with illness and radiation poisoning for years after the bomb, and she faces tremendous difficulties finding work and housing in the years after the explosion. Mrs. Hatsuyo Nakamura (In-Depth Analysis) Dr.

Terufumi Sasaki - A young surgeon at the Red Cross Hospital in Hiroshima. Dr. Sasaki treats thousands of the dying and wounded after the bomb, and eventually operates on Miss Sasaki's fractured and infected leg. After the war, he studies radiation sickness and other effects of the bomb.

Dr. Terufumi Sasaki (In-Depth Analysis) Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge - A German Jesuit priest living in Hiroshima. Father Kleinsorge comforts many of the dying and wounded, even as he falls prey to radiation sickness. He helps Miss Sasaki recover her will to live and eventually become a nun. In the years after the war, he becomes a Japanese citizen and takes the name Father Makoto Takakura. Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge (In-Depth Analysis)

Toshiko Sasaki - A young clerk who works in a tin works factory. Miss Sasaki becomes trapped in the wreckage of a factory when a bookcase crashes onto her. For weeks she receives no real medical care for her leg, which is badly fractured and infected, and she remains crippled for the rest of her life.

After the war, with the guidance of Father Kleinsorge, she becomes a nun, Sister Dominique Sasaki. Toshiko Sasaki (In-Depth Analysis) Dr. Masakazu Fujii - A physician whose clinic topples into the water when the bomb strikes. He, like other doctors in Hiroshima, is too badly injured to help anybody else.

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Though apparently unaffected by radiation, he falls victim to a sudden, mysterious illness years later. Dr.

Masakazu Fujii (In-Depth Analysis) Reverend Mr. Kiyoshi Tanimoto - A Methodist pastor living in Hiroshima. Mr. Kiyoshi helps bring many of the nameless dying and wounded to safety as fires rage around the city. In the years following the war, he becomes a staunch peace activist and tours America giving speeches and appearing on television. Community Survival in the Face of Mass Destruction Part of John Hersey's goal in writing Hiroshima was to show that there was no unified political or national response to the bombing of Hiroshima, but that there was one definite effect on the people affected by it: they came together as a community. As Hersey states in Chapter Four, One feeling they did seem to share, however, was a curious kind of elated community spirit . .

. a pride in the way they and their fellow-survivors had stood up to a dreadful ordeal. This community spirit pervades the book, most likely because Hersey chooses to emphasize it over other things. For example, very few of the situations Hersey describes revolve around families. Aside from the few mothers and children who are featured (the Nakamuras, the motherless Kataoka children, Mrs. Kamai and her dead baby), most of the people whom we encounter are on their own. The characters who have families do not live with them; Dr. Fuji's wife, for example, lives in Osaka.

However, we do read about people taking care of one another on the riverbank at Asano Park and in the East Parade Ground, providing water, food, and comfort as though they were family. Since the bomb destroyed

real families and homes, the citizens of Hiroshima are forced to come together and make a new kind of family. Father Kleinsorge, whose birth family is presumably back in Germany, creates a family out of his companionship with his fellow priests and later, with Miss Sasaki, the Nakamuras, the Kataoka children and many other people he encounters in the period following the bombing. Japanese Stoicism and Personal Submission Although the people of Hiroshima come together as a community in response to the bombing, as victims, they suffer alone.

Many references throughout the book depict how the people have severe, hideous injuries but do not complain or cry out; they suffer silently. Hersey suggests that this is a uniquely Japanese characteristic that Japanese individuals attach great importance to not disturbing the larger group and do not call attention to their own needs or pain. The book relates that thousands of people die all around, and yet no one expresses anger or calls for retribution. Father Kleinsorge, a foreigner, is especially amazed by this attitude in Chapter Two: . . . the silence in the grove by the river, where hundreds of gruesomely wounded suffered together, was one of the most dreadful and awesome phenomena of his whole existence.

We witness this attitude with Mr. Tanimoto, who is unharmed and runs through the city in search of his wife and child. As he passes the masses of injured people he apologizes to them for not suffering more himself. In the stories he shares later in Chapter Four, he cites a few people, including thirteen-year-old girls, who died with noble visions that they were sacrificed for their country, and were not concerned for themselves or bitter over their unlucky fate. This stoicism becomes a major source of pride for the Japanese

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people they could be strong and supportive of their country and receive whatever hardship they were given with powerful silence.

The Unnatural Power of the Bomb Hiroshima testifies to the unnatural, unbelievable power of the atomic bomb. The bomb turns day into night, conjures up rain and winds, and destroys beings from the inside as well as from the outside. When the Japanese learn how the bomb was created by releasing the power inside an atom they call it the genshi bakudan, or original child bomb. This name seems to recall the bomb's biological rather than man-made origin, emphasizing that when men made this bomb they were dealing with forces far beyond their own power. When Miss Sasaki notices the new, lush greenery growing up through the ruins in Chapter Four it [gives] her the creeps because it almost seems like nature is impatient it cannot wait to take over once humankind has destroyed itself and its own civilization. Ironically, the most awesome achievement of man causes the land to revert back to a pre-human state.

These images seem to convey that man's harnessing of the destructive power of atoms may lead to unknown and unnatural consequences. The narrative conveys the unsettling sense that the creation and use of the atom bomb crosses an important line between the natural and unnatural world. Also, the images of the greenery growing in Hiroshima show that even if the unnatural occurs, and mankind tries to control nature, nature will regain control in the end. Motifs Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes. Death Although we never get to know any of the people who died when the bomb detonated over Hiroshima, every character we meet inevitably has had to

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deal with the death of close family members and friends, as well as being surrounded by death on a massive scale. Most of the deaths in the book take place out of sight. Mrs. Nakamura's noisy neighbor is there one minute, gone the next; the severely burned people that Mr.

Tanimoto helps to the shore one night are drowned by the next morning. But even though Hersey does not give the reader many direct views of death, its presence pervades the narrative. There is a constant, oppressive, and almost suffocating feeling that death is all around. Acceptance of Lifes

Capriciousness The fact that the six main characters of Hiroshima survive the bombing by chance speaks to the power of chance in their lives. Whether they attribute their survival to fate, luck, or a higher power, the fact is that all six were just as vulnerable to the bomb as the 100,000 people who died. Mrs.

Nakamura was one house away from her neighbor who was killed instantly; Dr. Sasaki could have been on a later train; Dr. Fujii could have drowned; Miss Sasaki could have been completely crushed by the bookcase that fell on her; Father Kleinsorge could have been outside the mission house if he were feeling better. Any of them could have died when the typhoon swept through the city a month later.

As Hersey presents the story, none of the characters question their fates, struggle with survivors' guilt, or reinvent themselves after the bomb.

Throughout the narrative there seems to be a basic acceptance of the fact that life is capricious and random. The bomb made no value judgments about whom or what it destroyed, and the people do not seem to make value

judgments about who survived the catastrophe just happened. Confusion and Ignorance Starting with the noiseless flash and continuing through the lingering effects of radiation sickness forty years later, the people of Hiroshima are faced with many unexplained phenomena. In the days after the bomb hits, nobody knows what could have caused such tremendous destruction. Theories are developed and explored, but mostly people are left with ignorance and confusion for an entire week, until the news starts to spread that it was an atomic bomb. Yet even when the facts are out, since this was the first atomic bomb ever used as a weapon, nobody the Americans, the Japanese, or anyone else has any idea as to what the short- or long-term effects will be on the land and the people. Doctors are faced with baffling symptoms, such as the spot hemorrhages, and injuries that will not heal, such as Father Kleinsorges cuts.

Seemingly healthy people, such as Mr. Tanimoto, are overcome by exhaustion; Mrs. Nakamuras hair starts to fall out; and wildflowers begin to proliferate amid the ruins. Compounding the effects of the deaths and devastation is the fearful lack of knowledge about what is to come, and insecurity regarding the future health of the city.