
Book Review: Hiroshima

Hiroshima, a book by Pulitzer-award winning author John Hersey was published in 1946. This book described the horrors and hardships the survivors of the attack on Hiroshima went through. John Hersey himself traveled to Japan the summer after the attack had occurred and spent three weeks there doing research and interviewing the bombing survivors. When he returned to the United States, he promptly began writing the book, which revolves around six of the survivors and how the attack affected them and their experience before, during and after the bomb was dropped. The bombing of Hiroshima was a tragic and horrible event, and with the in-depth knowledge of how people that lived through such hardship is how the story gains views and more people want to know how it really was. As the story progresses, it gets even more heart wrenching and more terribly real, it is not surprising that the book became a New York Times bestseller. (The way the author composed the book made it appealing to the audience and informed people of the true horrors of war and the effect it had on the people that were affected.)

The book talks about the stories of six survivors of the attack on Hiroshima, two doctors, two women, and two religious leaders; Kiyoshi Tanimoto, a pastor of the Hiroshima Methodist Church he did not suffer any injuries because of the explosion, Mrs. Hatsuyo Nakamura, a tailor's widow, she was uninjured along with her children, Dr. Masazazu Fujii, owner of a private hospital, he was not able to help anyone else but himself due to his severe injuries, Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge, a German priest who helped others despite his own injuries, Dr. Terufumi Sasaki, a young member of the Red Cross Hospital, he was the only uninjured doctor on the hospital, he spent his days and nights helping others despite being terribly overworked, he wanted to be able to help others that had suffered worse, and Toshiko Sasaki, a clerk in the East Asia Tin Works, she suffered a fracture to her leg, which got infected because she did not receive any medical attention. All of them were real people, who had no idea of what was in the future for them, but they were all aware of what could happen, other cities in Japan had already been attacked by the United States, it was only a matter of time until Hiroshima too was attacked. It was all unexpected, a flashed that blinded them for a moment, some were paralyzed with fear, the alarm that signaled a potential threat did not sound, no airplanes were heard, when it all passed everything was in ruins, people they were talking to moments ago, dead, neighbors, dead. "They still wonder why they lived when so many others died" (1.1). Once they told the story to Hersey, none of them remember any sound of the explosion, only a flash of white before everything came down, people that were too far to be affected distinctly remember hearing it though. The story goes on to tell what happened next after the bombing going until a few months after.

Personally, I found interesting and heart wrenching all of the stories of the survivors. The book was written in simple prose, direct and more focused on the stories than anything else, it did not state any frivolous imagery, only the real, crude descriptions that they saw. The stories themselves were fascinating, not that everything they went through was not completely devastating, but their stories and how Hersey merged them made them so inspiring and, for me, full with the hope of a better outcome for the future, their stories could not have been better told they show the readers the true extent humans will go just to destroy one another. As the story develops everything starts to unfold and the effects the bomb had on them were clear for the

readers. Their way of living had totally changed, no human being ever expects to see that much death and destruction, along with desperation to contact family and friends to see if they made it or not. It would be almost impossible for them to go back to the life they had before, after experiencing such destruction, no one could ever come back from that unscratched, physically and mentally. "... their faces were wholly burned, their eye sockets were hollow, the fluid from their melted eyes had run down their cheeks." (Hersey, Hiroshima) This is a description that, to me, sounds almost like fiction, but was sadly true. If this was not explained from the point of view of those who lived through this, others may have no idea of the real gruesomeness that war really is. Hopefully, none of us will have to live this, and this book will just remain a heartbreaking story of the bombing in Hiroshima. No person should have to understand what such devastation caused by mankind is. "There, in the tin factory, in the first moment of the atomic age, a human being was crushed by books" (Hersey, Hiroshima) the mere thought of someone being crushed to death, a woman that moments ago was chatting with co-workers, is almost unimaginable how much your life can change in just a few seconds, it makes one reconsider all the things we prioritize, is almost having no sleep just to finish work worth it, is not talking to your friends and family due to being "too busy" worth it? I will certainly try to always make time to spend with loved ones, as to not have any regrets in case something as awful as this bombing happens. It is a fact that Hiroshima which had a population of 250,000, 10,000 were killed and another 10,000 were severely injured, making the story of these survivors even more shocking.

It is admirable that Hersey decided to go visit Hiroshima a year after the bombing happened. He, along with the editors of the New York Times Magazine wanted to provide an eye-opening story that really depicted the true horror that it was. This was a very on-point decision, the newspaper sold out the day it printed, people were curious about the details it would go into, and they were buying the story even if it did cost twenty dollars, which in that time was a big amount. The newspaper was also unable to procure Albert Einstein's order of one thousand copies. It is also outstanding that Hersey went back to look for the former people he interviewed and interviewed them again ten years after it happened, and how, even if it was ten years ago, still affected them and the way they went on living their lives

People are entitled to their own opinions regarding this book, but we can all agree that this tragedy happened and it is no matter of fun. Reader Timothy Miyahara rated this book four out of five stars, (on Goodreads). He found the story "moving, shocking and disturbing" He also said that the prose in this book is simple and is able to grasp all the events and the environment the people were in. While Mr. Miyahara enjoyed this book there were some others that did not. Like; Charlie Doherty, who rated it two out of five stars. The low rating was due to the style of writing and the characters, this reader felt that the character's stories were "shallow and didn't go into much detail" Something that other readers that give low ratings to the book have in common is the dislike of John Hersey's style of writing, it may seem slow-paced and it did not keep their attention to it for the most part. Although some people either love or hate Hersey's writing style, he says that he made the decision of a "flat style that was deliberate" and that he did not want it to "show passion" so the reader's experience would be as unbiased as possible.

All in all, the depiction of Hiroshima was done greatly by Hersey. The use of personal experiences by the survivors gave it another feeling rather than just a textbook-like feeling It really made people see and sympathize with the survivors and what they went through once they knew what it really was to live through that. In Japan, any printed stories that contained any mention of that tragic day were banned, this did not stop some from trying to get this book. It

was not until 1948, two years after its original publication that it became available in Japan as well. I think they did not want to print something so controversial so it did not give the feeling of disrespect towards all of those that lived and died through such horror, but after it became available, others could sympathize and really understand that it was not easy to see so much death and illness caused by the “enemy”.