

Dwelling on Violence- Discussion 2

World War II is known to the world today as the deadliest conflict in human history, with estimates exceeding more than 75 million dead, including more than 40 million civilians. With this conflict came genocide, massacres, mass-bombings, disease, and starvation. When most people think of war, they immediately think of the death and destruction that is associated with it, while a small portion of people may think of other aspects such as strategies or specific battles. We dwell on the violence associated with WWII because it makes it seem more real to us. It's one thing to look at something from a strategic standpoint, Army X moved into Position Y and flanked Army Z, but to look at first-hand accounts, primary resources, it makes everything you learn about that much more real. It is necessary to focus on this violence because if we lose touch with the human side of what warfare truly is then we will forget the significance of our actions and our past, and history will be doomed to repeat itself. Reading stories, even fictional ones such as "Cold Nights", reminds us not to forget the past; these stories give us a glimpse into the violence that humans are capable of imposing upon one another. It is extremely necessary to focus on the violence associated with World War II because if we try to forget the past and wash over what truly happened, we forget those people who suffered so greatly and we will be one step closer to repeating what has happened in the past.

The Rape of Nanjing for example, is undoubtedly one of the worst displays of atrocities against civilians during the war, coming second only behind the Nazi holocaust. "During this time, unarmed Chinese prisoners of war were used as living targets for bayonet and rifle practice; drunken mobs of Japanese infantry roamed the streets looting, murdering, and raping; and large parts of Nanjing were burned to ground by fires that were deliberately set by the invading forces" (SFMC). The estimates in this same article claim that the pre-war population of at least one million was reduced to less than 200 thousand in that month alone. In a section of this article "Bearing Witness", it is described how one single woman was raped 37 times, and numerous others were raped and stabbed with bayonets, among other atrocities (SFMC). To forget what these people in just one city in one month of the war went through, would be to dishonor their memories forever; that is why we must dwell on the violence. "War is hell" has been a common phrase since William Tecumseh Sherman uttered those words in a speech during the American Civil War times. In looking at the effects of "total war" such as Nanjing and the Japanese "Three Alls" policy, most would be inclined to agree with him. Another example of the atrocities from the Rape of Nanjing is the Nanjing "Murder Race" between Sub-lieutenants Toshiaki Mukai and Takeshi Noda, in which they had a "friendly contest to see which of them will first fell 100 Chinese in individual sword combat before the Japanese forces completely occupy Nanjing" (SFMC). They were having so much "fun" murdering Chinese civilians that they even extended the kill count to 150, further showing the small price that invading forces placed on the lives of others. The worst part about all of this, as discussed in "The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II" by Iris Chang, is that many would keep the whole thing quiet if they could. "The Rape of Nanking should be remembered not only for the number of people slaughtered but for the cruel manner in which many met their deaths" (Chang). Even the Nazis were horrified by the cruel acts of the Japanese, calling it "bestial machinery" (Chang). Despite everything that happened, we never actually learn about occurrences such as this, which

according to Chang, is because politics want it to remain shrouded. Everyone wanted to maintain trade during the Cold War with Japan, so they just decided to forget the atrocities that had happened. Even in Japan to this day, any expression of what happened in the dark past could be career or even life-threatening (Chang). In interviews with people who were actually there, they deny any and all evidence of the violence that was inflicted upon Chinese civilians, and Japan has even gone as far as to enshrine war criminals as heroes. They were not forced to pay reparations as Germany was forced to, and it is obvious that they are not willing to come to terms with their past (Chang). As Chang stated in her concluding remarks quoting Elie Wiesel, "to forget a holocaust is to kill twice" (Chang). That quote alone is reason enough to dwell on the violence associated with such a devastating war, and why we must focus so heavily on remembering what happened, because as stated by George Santayana, "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (Chang). If we focus on the statistics and not on the more intimate aspects of WWII, we lose touch with what humans truly went through, and we will undoubtedly be destined to repeat ourselves in the future.

Numerous other massacres took place in the years of Japanese occupation in China; for example, the Yanwo Massacre on May 20th, 1938. "Within an hour the Japanese had killed more than 200 people on the village streets. Then they herded 670 young men into the courtyard.....all but 5 of the 670 were killed" (Lary). This is yet another massacre that has been relatively unknown to the pages of history; nearly 1000 people were murdered immediately following occupation of the town but there was no real mention of it. The Xuzhou Region was also victim of massacres. This region is known as a military strongpoint and has seen over 200 episodes of warfare in the past four to five thousand years (Lary). The first terror in the region came with terror bombings in 1937, as civilians had never even seen a bomber plane before. Aerial bombings killed a large amount of civilians, and examples can be seen in instances such as the town of Taierzhuang in which the population was reduced from twenty thousand to seven; a man that was 85 years old and six women (Lary). These bombings and further Japanese occupation led to a massive increase in the amount of refugees, but unfortunately, most had nowhere to go. Many were murdered, raped, and looted by both Japanese invaders and Chinese gangs who took advantage of the situation when they could (Lary). If there was one violent thing that caused as much terror and bloodshed as the Japanese soldiers themselves, it was their bombing.

In first-hand accounts, we can see the true terror that must have gone through the minds of civilians on an almost daily basis. Accounts such as "Bombs in Yishan" by Feng Zikai offer us primary sources to see into the minds of those struggling to survive. For example, he mentions the first time Yishan was bombed in the autumn of 1938 and it was a cause for celebration because no one was killed (Zikai). Unfortunately their luck did not hold up, as in the second bombing "quite a lot of people were killed by the bus station, quite a lot injured, and quite a lot more were frightened out of their wits. I was one of those frightened out of their wits" (Zikai). We live through these episodes of violence through the people who write these accounts; we feel the terror they felt, and we remember those who they mention who may not have survived that next air raid. We even feel sympathy for them, as he states that "I hated to have my right to life controlled by the enemy!" (Zikai). From this quote we can feel his frustration and sympathize with him; who were they to decide that they had the power to control who lives or who dies, especially when it is simply unarmed civilians who have absolutely nothing to do with the war? As he states, "the matter of dying was secondary, what was intolerable was the moral injustice

and affront to one's feelings" (Zikai). You can't help but to agree with him here, despite how one may feel. They are being attacked by cowards in the sky who give no opportunity for the civilians who have been through this suffering to have a fair fight. In another example, "Bombs Don't Discriminate", we see how bombings indirectly created even more death and rifts between the people. This account is focused on the war-time capital of Chongqing, and the prolonged bombings that lasted roughly five years. These bombings may have strengthened solidarity against the Japanese oppressors, but they also displayed the ugliness of social stratification. It is described how upper class civilians had the luxury of private villas with private air raid shelters, therefore they were not subject to the misery of squeezing into suffocating shelters with large groups of other people (Jui-te). Disease epidemics were prominent in these confined areas, and some people even took to creating a business out of the entry-pass system. With the continuous increase in population from refugees, there was unfortunately never enough space for everyone in the shelters (Jui-te). Probably the worst occasion of indirect death via bombings was the Great Tunnel Tragedy of June 5th, 1941, in which roughly ten thousand people died of suffocation or trampling due to panic (Jui-te). As stated by Jui-te, "although bombs do not discriminate, the presence of different social classes and categories generated contrasting degrees of vulnerability among the population in Chongqing in the face of heavy Japanese bombardments" (Jui-te). As evidenced by these numerous accounts, violence was very much a part of every-day life for these people, so who are we to decide that what they actually went through should be censored and forgotten from history?

We dwell on the violence associated with World War II not necessarily by choice, but because war is war due to violence. You could not teach a class about something that influenced the world so greatly and leave out what the war really entailed. You watch a war movie and you see actor's fictional characters dying, while in reading these primary sources you read into the lives of other people who actually experienced what is being portrayed in these films. To forget these atrocities and the names and faces of the people who were actually affected by them, and like Elie Wiesel said, to forget a holocaust, is to kill twice. It is necessary to focus heavily on this violence, to see what humans are capable of putting other humans through. It puts us in the shoes of someone who lived during that time and makes us think, what would we have done, if we could even do anything, to change what happened to the millions of people who had their lives ended from the decisions of someone else? The purpose in dwelling on this violence is to remind us of our past, as those who are uneducated about the past are doomed to repeat it. A famous man known as Albert Einstein once said, "I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones". With this quote he explains exactly what would happen if we do not learn from the violence that occurred so many years ago. Even with the far inferior weapon capabilities of that age, more than 70 million people died, and the world saw the devastation that just two nuclear missiles caused. Now, imagine what the world would look like after a war in which everyone taking place had this same technology. If we ignore the gruesome past and forget the last words of those who have fallen before us, there won't be anyone left after World War III to read the last words any of us may write.