Evan Jayne
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Professor Pyle

Conflicting Interpretations of Total War: Dresden and the Japanese Atomic Bombings, Fifty Years Later

The common American narrative of the Second World War paints the United States and its Allies as a force of justice fighting the tyranny of the Axis. However, the February 1945 firebombing of Dresden and the August 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki challenge this narrative. In both events, the Allies unleashed indiscriminate destruction against civilian populations. Although both events pose similar moral obstacles, the bombings' respective fiftieth anniversaries provoked almost opposite responses from the American public. While few Americans discussed the firebombing of Dresden, fierce debates over how to commemorate the atomic bombings erupted. Most notably, congressional hearings and protests from veterans groups practically shut down a planned Smithsonian exhibit on the atomic bombings.

Newspaper stories of historic events offer insight into contemporary perceptions of the past. They address how societies choose to remember their histories. Additionally, large-scale reflection often occurs at an event's fiftieth anniversary. Consequently, February and August 1995 stories from the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Post*, three mainstream publications that both mirror and guide American public opinion, reveal how many Americans had grown to regard the events.

Stories covering the anniversaries reflected the sentiments above. Coverage of both the Dresden firebombing and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki constructed the events as acts of indiscriminate destruction. Additionally, reports on both bombings evoked the concept of total war to explain the targeting of civilians. However, the

unified, calm reflection in the Dresden articles stood apart from the impassioned, and often defensive, rhetoric that engulfed the Japan articles. True, journalists could attribute Dresden horrors to the British, while they had to accept American responsibility for the atomic bombings. However, the inability to self-exonerate did not drive media animosity surrounding the atomic bombings' fiftieth anniversary. The American patriotic orthodoxy's need to defend the Second World War as the "good war" did. This ideological intolerance ran counter toward "good war" ideals.

Despite the contrasting moods at the fiftieth anniversaries of the firebombing of Dresden and the atomic bombings of Japan, American newspapers explained both events in the context of total war. In total war, militaries see their enemies' civilian populations and civilian infrastructures as part of their enemies' fighting capability. Consequently, civilian populations and civilian infrastructures become legitimate military targets. Historians cite both the firebombing of Dresden and the atomic bombings of Japan as consequences of total war. For example, United States Army War College professor Tami Davis Biddle argues that Allied air forces launched their attack on Dresden to create a humanitarian disaster. This would "drain away food, fuel and medical attention from the German war effort." The 1945 mission, she continues, breached a 1939 Allied call not "to bomb civilians or unfortified cities."[1] Biddle neither defends nor condemns the bombing. Rather, she attempts to clarify some common misperceptions surrounding the event. Her understanding of the firebombing of Dresden roots itself in total war. Civilians and soldiers both need "food, fuel, and medical [care]." By wiping out a civilian center's

[1] Tammy Davis Biddle, "Sifting through Dresden's Ashes," *Wilson Quarterly,* (2005): 65.

"food, fuel, and medical" supplies, Nazi Germany would have to redirect supplies destined for its fighting soldiers to its civilian population. This would weaken Nazi Germany's fighting capability. In warfare, a military seeks to neutralize the enemy's fighting capability. Because total war broadens the enemy's fighting capability to include civilian populations and infrastructures, total war broadens wartime targets from expressed military installations to civilian centers. As Biddle shows, this widening of warfare occurred during the firebombing of Dresden.

During the fiftieth anniversary of the firebombing of Dresden in February 1995, American newspapers latched onto the concept of total war to explain the death and destruction in Dresden. In a news report on fiftieth anniversary commemorations in Dresden, Ken Ringle of the *Washington Post* noted that the firebombing mission occurred as a part of a larger operation, Operation Thunderclap. Thunderclap sought to "dehouse a major portion of Eastern Germany, flooding roads and rail lines with refugees to hamstring the German army in shifting forces from the Western front east."[2] This operation turned to incendiary bombs to achieve its goal. The *New York Times'* Alan Cowell recounted that these set "a huge blaze that sucked the oxygen from the air and built a devastating firestorm that tore through" Dresden, in his special report on the firebombing. However, quoting an American bomber part of the Dresden raid, his article reasoned, "War is war... you fight it to win... When you drop bombs and incendiaries, these things happen."[3] First, in line with Biddle's explanation, total war guided

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[2] Ken Ringle, "Dresden and the Horror from Above," *Washington Post,* February 13, 1995, sec. E.

[3] Alan Cowell, "With Pain and Guilt, Dresden Marks Firebombing," *New York Times*, February 11, 1995, sec. A.

Thunderclap and the Dresden firebombing. Allied militaries attacked civilians and civilian infrastructure to impede Nazi troop movement. Second, as military targets, Dresden's civilian population suffered the effects of military weapons. Finally, as Cowell's quote underscored, total war made violence against civilians acceptable. It explained their suffering in the broader frame of war. Horrors occur in war, the bomber evaluated, but war's ultimate objective is victory; thus, one must accept the suffering of civilians if they stand in the way of victory.

Six months later, in August 1995, American newspapers returned to the concept of total war to explain the atomic bombings of Japan. Just like Dresden, historians cite Hiroshima and Nagasaki as consequences of total war. University of Wisconsin professor Paul Boyer asserts that "the instantaneous annihilation" of two population centers stood as the "chilling culmination of a long process by which the rhetoric of 'total war' undermined the centuries-old 'just war' that sought to shield civilian populations from the worst horrors of wartime."[4] By the end of the Second World War, not only did nations cease to distinguish soldier from civilian, but nations liquidated entire unarmed populations with a single bomb. The indiscriminate nature of this feat, then, epitomized total war.

Regardless of how much they supported the bombings, American newspaper reporters followed in the footsteps of this scholarship. Philosopher and essayist Jim Holt, who condemned the bombings in a special written for the *New York Times*, argued that

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[4] Paul Boyer, "Whose History Is It Anyways? Memory, Politics, and Historical Scholarship," In *History Wars*, ed. Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996), 123.

"the people of [Hiroshima and Nagaski] were intentionally executed en masse to send a message of terror to the rulers of Japan[, and this represented] the triumph of utilitarian thinking in the conduct of war."[5] On the other side of the debate, the *Washington Post*'s Jonathan Yardley maintained that while "the use of the atomic bomb was a morally ambiguous act[,]... the morality of war is not the same as the morality of peace."[6] Both writers framed the bombing in the context of total war. Holt saw that the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki became targets of war, the destruction of which had the power to influence Japanese leaders. This, he concluded, represented "the triumph of utilitarian thinking in the conduct of war." This referenced the fact that American leaders hoped the atomic bombings would force Japan to surrender, thus annulling the need to launch an invasion of Japan. This invasion would have resulted in massive American causalities. According to Holt, because American leaders saw they could sacrifice Japanese civilian lives to save the lives of American soldiers, the atomic bombings of Japan exemplified total war. Similarly, while Yardley acknowledged the bombings' immorality, he rationalized the bombing by emphasizing that they occurred during war. With this, he implied that the "morality of war" applied to civilians as well as combatants. Because both equally fell under the sway of war, Yardley's interpretation tapped into total war to explain the atomic bombings. In line with fiftieth anniversary interpretations of Dresden, interpretations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki evoked total war to contextualize the atomic bombings' civilian deaths.

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[5] Jim Holt, "Morality, Reduced to Arithmetic," *New York Times,* August 5, 1995, sec. A.

[6] Jonathan Yardley, "Hiroshima and the Brutal Realities of War." *Washington Post*, August 7, 1995, sec. D.

However, American newspapers did not just reference total war. Often, they saw its indiscrimination as justified. Some reporters called out the Axis's culpability to justify the targeting of civilians. The firebombing of Dresden incinerated the city's residents along with buildings. However, a *New York Times* editorial leveled, "in this bloody century, Germans have sinned more than they have been sinned against[, and the firebombing] was not the first traumatic fire in Dresden." Just as the bombing's flames targeted Dresdeners, the flames many Dresdeners lit in the Nazi-led Kristallnacht pogroms targeted the city's innocent Jews. The article concluded that the flames had come full circle: in the aftermath of Kristallnacht, a German painter wrote, "This fire will come back... it will make a great arch and return to us."[7] By including this quote in article that begins by reminding the reader of overriding German guilt, the authors excuse the firebombing. The death and destruction hammered out against the city's Jewish population warranted incinerating its remaining residents. Here, the enemy's wrongdoing legitimized total war.

When American newspapers turned their attention to Japan, again, they tended to cite the enemy's war guilt to justify total war. Evaluating whether the Japanese deserved two atomic bombs, the *Wall Street Journal's* John McDonough reasoned, "Their leaders certainly did.... The war was always Japan's to end, not America's. Had a molecule of common sense or self-interest pierced the shield of religious and cultural armor that encapsulated and paralyzed Japanese leadership, millions might have lived."[8] According

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[7] Christian Habbe and Donald Koblitz, "Dresden's Undying Embers," *New York Times,* February 12, 1995, sec. E.

[8] John McDonough, "They Were There to Win a War," *Wall Street Journal,* August 11, 1995, sec. A.

to McDonough, the Japanese leadership's "religious" fanaticism, which prevented national surrender, entitled the United States to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The crimes of the few in the Japanese government necessitated the deaths of many. This quote exemplified fiftieth anniversary rationale for the bombings. McDonough erased any line that divided the Japanese government from its citizenry and argued that wrongdoings in Tokyo warranted firm reprisals anywhere in Japan. The American press turned to the misconduct of the enemy leadership to excuse violence against those living under their rule.

In fiftieth anniversary depictions of the Dresden firebombing and the atomic bombings of Japan, American newspapers tended to explain the violence by bringing up the concept of "total war." They then justified total war by reminding their readers of the Crimes of the Nazi and Showa governments. However, from here, the two narratives departed. Calm reflection characterized the coverage of Dresden, whereas impassioned, often defensive, rhetoric characterized the coverage of Japan. As noted, how American articles on Dresden attributed culpability differed from how American articles on the atomic bombings attributed culpability. However, event responsibility did not drive outrage. An analysis of British newspaper coverage of the fiftieth anniversary of the Dresden bombing highlights the British media's willingness to apologize for British actions in Dresden. Rather, American outrage did not emerge out of assessing guilt of a single event. It emerged out of the American patriotic orthodoxy's need to preserve the broader "good war" narrative.

While these trends prevailed throughout coverage in the *New York Times,* the *Washington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, one cannot dichotomize the era's press.

Indeed, many journalists spoke out against what they saw as needless bickering surrounding the atomic bombings. For example, while the *New York Times* saw "it [as] right and proper that the debate over Hiroshima should continue," it preached civility, arguing, "the spirit of the debate is all-important."[9] Similarly, although Yardley defended the United States' dropping of the atomic bombs, he advised that both sides of the argument listen to one another. "To some measure[,] both sides are right," he insisted, "the entire business is under a cloud of 'tragic ambiguity.'"[10] While animosity plagued the fiftieth anniversary debates of the atomic bombings, not everyone became embroiled in conflict.

Nevertheless, the impassioned rhetoric that surrounded the fiftieth anniversary of the atomic bombing differed from the more somber writing found in coverage of the fiftieth anniversary of the Dresden firebombing. Despite German guilt, American journalists agreed in condemning the bombing and encouraged moral reflection on its fiftieth anniversary. Ringle evaluated that while "Hiroshima and Nagasaki tend to divide historians by generation and ideology, Dresden has tended to unite them, with scholars of both the right and left debating the whys of its destruction but generally united in declaring it a needless loss." Ringle endorsed this scholarly consensus.[11] By doing so, he advanced that history should decry the bombings. With their immorality sealed, he suggested that society should focus its attention on investigating this horrific event's cause. Similarly, *Washington Post* foreign correspondent Rick Atkinson offered the

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[9] "Hiroshima, 50 Years Later," *New York Times.* August 6, 1995, sec. E.

[10] Yardley.

[11] Ringle.

firebombing's fiftieth anniversary as a time for "somber discussion of guilt and innocence [and] justice and injustice."[12] This suggested that society come together and assess the event. Communities would work together to uncover what led to the tragedy rather than debate its validity. Coverage of the Dresden bombings' fiftieth anniversary conveyed calm reflection.

Conversely, rhetoric on the atomic bombings was bitter and often defensive. Yardley advanced that the bombings were "not controversial on August 6 [and 9], 1945. Most Americans rejoiced on learning that a miraculous new weapon had been used against a fierce and fanatic enemy."[13] However, fifty years later, *New York Times* columnist A. M. Rosenthal charged, "now Hiroshima nuclear revisionism floods us, charging American guilt. Historic revisionism becomes historic distortion when it leaves out or glides by reality."[14] Here, the need to defend the bombings' legitimacy highlights the divisive atmosphere surrounding the atomic bombings' fiftieth anniversary. Rather than advocating for collaborative dialogue on the bombings' morality, these journalists pit those who questioned the use of the bomb against those who supported it. This fight was bitter. Journalists who supported the bombs discounted the validity of those who opposed them. By establishing universal wartime support for the bombs, Yardley rejected the idea of later reflection. Similarly, Rosenthal closed the door on scholarship that

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[12] Rick Atkinson, "Dresden Remembers Its Destruction," *Washington Post,* February 14, 1995, sec. A.

[13] "Hiroshima, 50 Years Later."

[14] A. M. Rosenthal, "A Return to Hiroshima," *New York Times.* August 8, 1995, sec. A.

conflicted from his beliefs, decrying revisionism as more fiction than fact. Rather than seeking to draw people into a dialogue, journalists communicated ideological intolerance. Whereas press covering Dresden encouraged reflection of the tragedy, press covering the atomic bombings saw society as divided over the atomic bombings' merit.

These two fiftieth anniversaries provoked contrasting sentiments. Although journalists covering Dresden could absolve the United States by pointing to the United Kingdom's role in designing the firebombing, anger surrounding the atomic bombings did not emerge from an inability to do so when covering Japan. Mainstream British newspapers, the *Guardian* and the *Times*, owned up to British culpability in the firebombing. They expressed a need for reflection that reflected American articles on Dresden.

American articles covering Dresden underscored the United Kingdom's guilt in the firebombing. Specifically, they pointed to British Royal Air Force Commanding Officer in Chief Arthur Harris as its chief architect to temper American guilt. Ringle denounced Harris: "Gruff, blunt, and acid-tongued, he sneered in the wake of the Dresden bombing that those mourning the city's destruction were thinking only of 'German bands and shepherdesses' instead of the realities of war."[15] This article cast Harris as the bombings' masochistic villain. His inhumanity contrasted with American restraint. According to the *Wall Street Journal*'s Simon Jenkins, "the Americans had pleaded for bombers to be directed against specific military and economic targets, in particular oil

[15] Ringle.

supplies, to speed the Allied Advance across Europe."[16] This article originally appeared in the *Times* of London. However, due to the *Wall Street Journal*'s decision to run the article, one must consider it a part of the 1995 narrative on Dresden the mainstream American print media put forward. This narrative lessened American guilt. The Americans sought to wipe out military and key economic institution strategically. However, with the maniacal Harris in charge, the British led the Americans into starting a firestorm in a civilian center.

However, despite British leadership and American objections against the mission, many historians have stressed American culpability in Dresden. The British did not force the Americans to join in the firebombing. The Americans did so willingly. Their ultimate embrace of total war had led them to disregard the distinction between civilian and soldier. Regardless, the American military continued to hide behind its previous moralistic speech. As the *New York Times* columnist Nicholas D Kristof noted, the United States formalized its war ethics when Franklin D. Roosevelt made a call to ban the "inhuman bombing of civilian populations" in 1939.[17] According to Biddle, however, as the war dragged on, the Americans abandoned their moral standards for a quick end to the war.[18] Nevertheless, she adds, the American military continued to describe its bombing missions as "precision bombing of specific military targets[,] reflect[ing]

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[16] Simon Jenkins, "Dresden: Time to Say We're Sorry," *Wall Street Journal,* February 14, 1995, sec. A.

[17] Nicholas D. Kirstof, "The Bomb: An Act that Haunts Japan and America," *New York Times*, August 6, 1995, sec. A.

[18] Tammy Davis Biddle, "Wartime Reactions." in *Firestorm: The Bombing of Dresden, 1945,* ed. Paul Addison and Jeremy A Crang, (London: Pimlico, 2006), 97.

ongoing American sensitivities."[19] The military twisted its language to appease a worried public. Northwestern University professor Michael Sherry agrees with Biddle. Despite official language, the poor technology used in its stated "precision bombings" ensured that "terror became [an] inevitable consequence even when [the American military pinpointed] defined targets."[20] The military insisted that its practices fell in line with promises guaranteed in 1939. However, wartime demands and poor technology made this impossible.

Regardless, Exeter University professor Richard Overy argues that this misleading rhetoric served the American military's legacy: many "see the destruction of Dresden as a result of the British area bombing campaign, for which the American bomber force, with its stated commitment to bombing 'precision' targets could not be made responsible."[21] American press covering the fiftieth anniversary of the Dresden bombings accurately assessed British leadership. However, it failed to uncover the discrepancy between the American military's stated role in the bombing versus its actual role. Thus, the American press framed the bombing as a British crime.

When analyzing the Dresden bombings, American sources could shift blame to the British. However, as the atomic bombings' sole perpetrators, American newspapers could not absolve the United States in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Regardless, an inability

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[19] Ibid., 102-103.

[20] Michael Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 261.

[21] Richard Overy, "The Post-War Debate," in *Firestorm: The Bombing of Dresden, 1945*, ed. Paul Addison and Jeremy A Crang, (London: Pimlico, 2006), 131.

to self-exonerate did not drive animosity in American press coverage of the atomic bombings' fiftieth anniversary. With their leading role in Dresden, the British could not free themselves from guilt at its fiftieth anniversary. However, unlike American coverage of the atomic bombings in 1995, the British press offered condolences and calm reflection at the Dresden bombings' fiftieth anniversary.

A *Guardian* op-ed written by Coventry Cathedral international ministry director Paul Oestreicher reflected the prevailing apologetic British tone. Although Oestreicher condemned Nazi wartime crimes, he argued, "the unspeakable horror of the real Holocaust does not relieve the Allies of facing up to the clearly enunciated policy of deliberately killing as many Germans as possible in the mistaken hope of breaking their morale."[22] The Nazis committed genocide. However, this fact, he argued, should not excuse the British from atoning for the innocent lives their military took when it firebombed Dresden. Despite representing the Coventry Cathedral, a cathedral wantonly destroyed in Nazi air raids over the United Kingdom, Oestreicher analyzed the bombing as an individual tragedy. He removed it from a narrative that painted the Germans as universally evil. Instead, he casted Dresdeners as civilians, albeit whose complicity in Nazi rule resulted in the Second World War and the Holocaust. Nevertheless, these Dresdeners suffered warfare as civilians. This status made them victims of the war, worthy of commemoration.

Consequently, as a terrible act, the British press turned Dresden into a warning cry against such indiscriminate warfare. A *Times* of London op-ed written by the previously mentioned Simon Jenkins attested, "Dresden showed that bombing from the

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[22] Paul Oestreicher, "The Better for Saying Sorry," *Guardian,* February 12, 1995, sec. A.

air is inhuman." He assessed, the "one good thing that might come out of the Dresden commemoration is the abolition of the bomb that destroyed it." He added that aerial bombardment had more recently led to wrongful Iraqi civilian deaths in the Gulf War.[23] The British press unified and saw the Dresden bombing as a tragedy. Reporters separated it from the broader British war narrative and argued that such an act should never occur again. Their ability to do so, despite the British military's leading role in the aerial assault, implies that culpability alone did not provoke the indignant articles American journalists wrote in defense of the atomic bombs. If the mainstream British press could author a unified apology for Dresden, the mainstream American press should have been able to author a unified apology for Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Culpability did not provoke outrage from the atomic bombs' defenders in the US press. The need to incorporate the atomic bombings into the American "good war" narrative did. According to Boyer, the American public has had difficulty reconciling the atomic bombings' indiscriminate destruction with the American historical construction of the Second World War. This construction, called, the "good war," retells the war as "a noble struggle against forces that threatened not only Western values but the survival of civilization itself."[24] Prevailing popular American historiography does not portray World War II as a war between equal nations but as a war between the essentially good United States and the essentially evil Axis forces. Consequently, all American wartime actions were good, as they sought to save the world from fascist tyranny. Northern Kentucky University professor Michael C. C. Adams references that this memory of the Second

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[23] Jenkins, Simon. "Ban Airborne Terrorism." *Times*. February 15, 1995, sec. A.

[24] Boyer, 118.

World War emerged shortly after its conclusion, with midcentury American films, such as *Bataan* and *Sands of Iwo Jima*.[25] Additionally, George Washington University professor James I. Deutsch argues that this narrative only became more popular as the War neared its fiftieth anniversary. He cites American author Studs Terkel's *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War Two* as a key to its revived acceptance.[26] The "good war" prevailed throughout mainstream American discourse during the atomic bombings' fiftieth anniversary. Consequently, many in the American press needed to reframe the attacks, which killed hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians, as acts of good.

Thus, this need to include the bombings in the overall "good war" resulted in outrage when revisionist historians and journalists, who criticize the bombings, questioned their morality. For example, the McDonough attacked revisionists in a report on a reunion of the 509th Composite Group, the Army Air Force group responsible for the atomic bombings. He sneered, "the most obscene word anyone could utter at this affair was… an 11-letter one: 'revisionist…. One got the feeling that if the 509th had the bomb today, it would like to drop it on the revisionists."[27] McDonough's evaluation of the reunion supported the Composite Group's sentiments, and his tacit endorsement of "drop[ping an atomic bomb] on the revisionists" drew a firm line in the sand.

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[25] Michael C. C. Adams. "The 'Good War' Myth and the Cult of Nostalgia," *Midwestern Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1998): 64.

[26] James I Deutsch, "Memorializing 'the Good War' and 'the Great Generation,'" in *Tales of the Great American Victory: World War II in Politics and Poetics,* ed. Diedrik Oostdijk and Markha G. Valenta (Amsterdam: VU University, 2006), 157.

[27] McDonough

Revisionists deviated from the prevailing "good war" narrative popular in 1995. Subsequently, the bombs' supporters did not wish to include them in a discussion on the bombings at their fiftieth anniversary.

Rather than engage with revisionists, supporters excluded them from any dialogue on the bombs. Supporters largely accomplished this by defaming revisionist accounts as unpatriotic. According to Sherry, the increasingly orthodox nature of patriotism in the 1990s allowed pro-bomb journalists to do so. Sherry argues that prior to the Vietnam War, American patriotism was fluid, allowing disparate groups in the United States to invoke patriotism to achieve their goals. For example, he cites a 1944 anti-segregation protest in Washington D. C. There, marchers carried banners reading, "Are you for Hitler's Way of the American Way?"[28] In this instance, a minority group defined racial tolerance as an American value, contrasting it with Nazi xenophobia. Sherry underscores that American patriotism was formerly fluid. All Americans held claim to an American identity and thus could tap into patriotic conceptions to advance particularly causes.

However, Sherry continues, in the wake of anti-Vietnam War sentiment, American patriotism became "a rigid patriotic orthodoxy tightly linked with political and cultural conservatism."[29] Now, only conservative, "military veterans [and their supporters] could judge" American history.[30] Consequently, anyone who diverged from the conservative status quo now found his/her opinions invalidated. Such sentiments

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[28] Michael S Sherry. "Patriotic Orthodoxy and American Decline," in *History Wars*, ed. Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996), 98.

[29] Ibid., 99.

[30] Ibid., 110.

arose in 1995 journalistic defense of the atomic bombings. For example, an op-ed for the *New York Times*, Russell Baker decried revisionists who questioned whether a 1945-6 invasion of Japan, seen as an alternative to the atomic bombings, would actually result in the sometimes supposed 500,000 casualties. He charged, "that estimate has been challenged by revisionist historians as far too pessimistic – but not by anyone who had been in combat against the Japanese."[31] Baker did not turn to logic or evidence to back up his argument. Instead, he maintained that revisionist historical research had no place in debates on the bombs because the revisionists had not experienced the war. By deeming certain lines of thought invalid, the bombs' supporters excluded revisionist accounts from fiftieth anniversary dialogue on the bomb. This, they hoped, would leave them to write the history on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

With revisionists excluded from fiftieth anniversary commemorations, the bombs' supporters still needed to illustrate how killing civilians reflected the moral nature of the American forces. They accomplished this through two methods. First, as previously noted, the culpability of the enemy and total war logic allowed for civilian deaths. The Showa government started the war in the Pacific, and, thus, the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki deserved their atomic bombs.

Second, supporters transformed the bombs from weapons of death and destruction into opportunities for rebirth. While the bombs killed hundreds of thousands, they saved many more. Boyer argues that because historiography often argues that the bombs prevented an imminent American invasion of Japan, supporters insist the bomb "ensured

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[31] Stephen E. Ambrose, "The Bomb: It Was Death or More Death," *New York Times,* August 5, 1995, sec. A.

the survival of multiple thousands of Japanese who would otherwise have been killed."[32] Because, as historiography continues, the bombs pushed Emperor Hirohito to capitulate, the saved could create a new democratic Japanese society. In an op-ed for the *Washington Post*, Stephen S. Rosenfeld celebrated that the atomic bombs "ushered in a demilitarized, democratic Japan."[33] According to the bombs' supporters in the press, the bombs not only ended Imperial Japanese tyranny, but they created an Asian democracy. Consequently, not only should Americans be thankful for the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but Japanese should be too. With this, supporters in the press incorporated the atomic bombs into the "good war" narrative. Those killed deserved to die due to their supposed connection to Showa policy, and those who lived should express gratitude. Two atomic bombs created one of the United States' most prosperous democratic allies. According to the patriotic orthodoxy, the bombs were forces of good.

The American patriotic orthodoxy hoped to create one official narrative of the atomic bombings. This narrative would fit into a broader "good war" narrative and thus construct the bombings as forces of good. Ironically, this desire for a single authoritative account of American history ran counter to the democratic ideals for which the United States fought in the Second World War. In a democracy, all members of a society should be able to evaluate all historical perspectives based their evidence and logic. Discounting historical perspectives based on their ideological bents is censorship. Consequently, the

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[32] Boyer, 120.

[33] Stephen S Rosenfeld, "The Revisionists' Agenda," *Washington Post,* August 4, 1995, sec. A.

patriotic orthodoxy's 1995 objective belonged more at home in an authoritarian state than the democratic United States.

Undemocratically, then, the American patriotic orthodoxy clung to the idea of the "good war." This fierce attachment resulted in indignation when revisionists questioned the atomic bombings. The American patriotic orthodoxy's hostility manifested in the mainstream press, where it stood in stark contrast to the calm reflection that characterized articles covering the Dresden bombings. These conflicting tones emerged despite the two events' similarities. As consequences of total war, both events wrought indiscriminant destruction upon civilian populations. During the atomic bombings' fiftieth anniversary, the mainstream American press often valued national pride over genuine historical discourse.

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Bibliographic Essay

Several scholarly texts guided my research. How the American patriotic orthodoxy and "the good war" influenced American press coverage of the atomic bombings in 1995 formed the backbone of my argument. Essays by University of Wisconsin professor Paul Boyer, Northern Kentucky University professor Michael C. C. Adams, Northwestern University professor Michael Sherry, and George Washington University professor James I Deutsch led me to construct an argument. Adams and Deutsch's essays helped me define and pinpoint the origin of the "good war."

On the other hand, Boyer and Sherry's essays, which both appeared in *History Wars*, a collection of essays on the 1995 Smithsonian controversy, illustrated how the "good war" and the American patriotic orthodoxy influenced the 1995 anniversary. Boyer's essay argues that Americans have had difficulty reconciling the indiscriminate destruction of the atomic bombs with the concept of the "good war." Consequently, the American historiography has transformed the bombs into forces of good. Sherry's essay, on the other hand, argues that the patriotism had transformed from an open, fluid concept earlier in the twentieth century, to a conservative and isolationist concept by the 1990s. According to Sherry, this patriotic orthodoxy allowed veterans groups to claim sole ownership over the atomic bombs' history. Sherry's essay not only highlights how the patriotic orthodoxy hijacked public memory of the Second World War and the atomic bombings. It also provides an informative investigation of how patriotism and concepts of what it means to be an American had changed over the centuries.

In addition to secondary literature on "the good war" and the American patriotic orthodoxy, I consulted secondary texts on the Dresden bombings, as I had not read much on the topic. United States Army War College professor Tami Davis Biddle provided two great essays. These essays neither support nor condemn the bombings. Rather, they clarify several misperceptions surrounding the bombings, such as American moral superiority over the British and the actual casualties the bombings caused, which some report as much higher due to the work of dishonored historian David Irving. Furthermore, Sherry's book length text, *The Rise of American Air Power* underscored the American Army Air Force's complicity in the Dresden raid. His text goes beyond Dresden to map the rise of air technologies of indiscriminate destruction. He offers a persuasive argument of how technical fanaticism and total war logic led to changing morals that allowed for such high civilian casualties.

However, the bulk of the sources consulted in the paper were American newspaper articles on fiftieth anniversary commemorations of Dresden and Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I selected articles from three newspapers: the *New York Times,* the *Washington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal.* All three newspapers are mainstream American newspapers and, thus, represent mainstream American opinion. Although many see the *New York Times* as more left leaning than the *Wall Street Journal*, several articles in the *New York Times* defended the atomic bombs. Nevertheless, the most impassioned defense of the bombs, the article written by John McDonough, appeared in the *Wall Street Journal.* For the most part, however, support for the bombs found home at all three publications. More interesting than ideological divide between the newspapers was the amount of coverage allotted to Dresden versus the amount of coverage allotted to

Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Falling in line with my thesis, all three newspapers covered the atomic bombings much more heavily than the Dresden bombings.

Finally, to see whether there was mass defense of the Dresden bombings in British society, as there was mass defense of the atomic bombings in American society, I consulted two British newspapers: the *Times* of London and the *Guardian*. These are two mainstream British newspapers. Like the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*, the *Times* often falls right of center, whereas the *Guardian* falls left of center. The British newspapers did not support the Dresden bombings regardless of ideological stance. This guided me to the conclusion that attributing guilt alone did not account for the impassioned defense of the atomic bombs seen in the American press.

If I had more time for research, I would have consulted more American newspapers. Although the *Wall Street Journal, Washington Post*, and *New York Times*, represent the mainstream, many other viewpoints, to the left and right, exist in American society. Furthermore, I wish I had analyzed coverage of the Dresden and atomic bombings alongside international and national events covered in newspapers. Perhaps press reactions to other events guided their interpretations of the bombings' anniversaries.