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Promoting Social Justice, Human Rights, and Peace

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## **With Our Own Eyes: AFSC Youth Delegation's Journey to Hiroshima and Nagasaki**

(1995: 23 minutes)

Transcribed by Darrell G. Moen

**Eric Barclay Williams** (17, Silver Spring, Maryland): **[Reading a survivor's account of the Nagasaki bombing]** ... with my family on top of a hill, just outside of Nagasaki. I saw a great explosion. There was a flash of light. There was a great mass of something, there was a great cloud that I saw in the sky. What I saw was amazing. The city was on fire. There were people crying out, screaming "Help me. Help me!" They were screaming for water. There was no water to be found.

**[reading continued]:** I saw children on the streets - some of them dead, some of them severely burned and wounded. I saw women and men in agony, their skin falling off their arms. I kept asking as I saw the people walk by, "What happened? What happened?" No one gave me an answer. They just screamed for help. I wondered what happened to this city. Such pain, such suffering, I'd never wish on anyone.

**Tara Tostanoski** (17, Monmouth Junction, New Jersey): I visited many museums and saw many pictures. Some pictures were incredible - you don't want to look at them [because they're so horrifying]. I want to go back to the United States and tell all my friends that 49 years ago something terrible happened and some of us are totally unaware. We need to educate now so that this type of thing never happens again!

**Narrator:** December 7, 1941 - the Japanese navy attacks Pearl Harbor in Hawai'i. The nation is shocked by the attack. Congress declares war. Japan had already been at war for years. Hundred of thousands had died as Japan expanded its empire across China, Korea, Southeast Asia, and the islands of the Pacific Ocean. By the time the United States enters the war, Japan's allies Nazi Germany and fascist Italy occupy most of Europe. At home, the nation gears up for war. Factories convert to military production. Millions of men and women are inducted into the armed forces.

In the midst of this war fever, the government orders the internment of Japanese-Americans on the West Coast. 110,000 men, women, and children, most of them U.S. citizens, are detained in prison camps as potential threats to national security.

In Europe, the Allies slowly advance against German and Italian forces. In the Pacific, the fighting is brutal as Allied forces edge closer to Japan, island by island. In July 1945, the Allies enter Berlin - Germany surrenders. The war in Europe is over. How long will Japan continue to fight? Some predict a few months at most. Others say that Japan will fight to the last man. Almost 300,000 U.S. troops have already died in the war and pressure builds to end the war quickly.

On August 6, 1945 the United States drops a new secret weapon, the atomic bomb, on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. On August 9th, another bomb is dropped on Nagasaki. Within a week, Japan surrenders - World War II is over.

*Within months of the bombings, 210,000 people die in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.*

Fifty years later, the world still faces the threat of nuclear war and the questions remain: Were the bombings necessary? Can they be morally justified? What do we do about the atomic bomb?

In the summer of 1994, the American Friends Service Committee, an international Quaker organization, assembled a group of teenaged students from the United States and Puerto Rico to travel to Japan. The delegation visited several cities, including Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to learn about the atomic bombings and the continuing threat of nuclear weapons.

**Emily Sanjo (18):** I come from Sacramento, California. My community is fairly diverse. It has a multitude of races. You can pretty much walk down the streets and see just about any race, any culture.

**Nathaniel Camp (19):** I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and raised outside of Philadelphia in Media, Pennsylvania. My neighborhood was built in the 1960s. It's probably about 98% White, middle to upper-middle class - I don't know where the distinctions lie. Everyone owns their house and yard.

**Earvin Travis, Jr. (17, Lexington, Mississippi):** I come from a community which is fairly rural - a rural-like area. Many of the people there are farmers. A lot of people are day workers. But then, there's a great amount of people who don't work.

**Neeltje Van Marissing-Mendez (19, San Juan, Puerto Rico):** When people see me and I say I'm Puerto Rican, they say, "Oh, really? But your hair is light [colored] and your

light [skinned]. You don't look Puerto Rican. You don't sound Puerto Rican." And I say, "What? You don't have to sound Puerto Rican, you just are."

**Nathaniel:** I think one of the most important things I learned on this trip, and I think the one fact that I would like to remember most, I actually learned before I actually came to Japan. That was at the orientation session in Oakland. And that was the fact that dropping the bomb on Hiroshima did not necessarily save any lives and it did not necessarily end the war quicker. I think that if there is one fact that I really want to take back, that might be it.

**Jack Dairiki:** On the day the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, I saw the explosion. All I saw was a bright flash, just like a million cameras going off all at once. Within a two-mile radius, everything was burned, on fire, all at once. I looked back at the city, and I saw this enormous column of smoke going up. Fire and flames coming up from the center of the column, the city completely engulfed in smoke, and you saw this huge mushroom cloud above you.

**Daniel Ellsberg:** The Hiroshima bomb, in one bomb, had the equivalent of 13,000 tons of TNT. The Nagasaki bomb was actually more powerful - 20,000 tons of TNT. We have used the weapons many times since Hiroshima, I discovered later. The way you use a gun is when you point it at somebody's head in a confrontation. You're using the weapon whether or not you pull the trigger. We made these threats [to use nuclear weapons] all over the world, in Korea, in Indochina, in the Middle East, in actual conflicts.

**[Daniel]:** We [the U.S. government] had made actual threats to initiate nuclear war, some of which may have been bluffs, some of which may have not. But even a bluff is a use of the weapons. That's not the only problem. Other countries have been working for years on programs for getting their own nuclear weapons. The chance that some of those will get used in little, regional wars is, I think, greater than it was ten years ago. The chances are that there will be more Hiroshimas.

**Adult group advisor:** You know, we don't want to be tourists. We're not going to, you know, stay in resorts and be tourists. We're going in order to begin to understand another people and their culture. You've got to be respectful of each other in the group and of the culture.

**Neeltje:** I had this urge to go up one of the mountains in Nagasaki. It was a real good opportunity because I had the chance to feel like I was in my own country, Puerto Rico. There were a lot of elements, the hot sun, the wind, the view of the mountains, and the sea, [that made me think of home].

**Nathaniel:** Before the trip, we read books about Hiroshima. And, you know, all my life I've heard it was a horrible thing. We'd been to two or three museums, and we'd heard various speakers, and I know some people on our delegation are still moved very deeply by the things they see. But in all honesty, it generally hasn't moved me a lot. I knew that it was horrible. I was expecting it to be horrible. And I saw it, and there it was. Until yesterday, there was nothing that showed me that this was any different from any other horrible experience that you see on the news. It was just a lot more of it, you know? The thing that I saw was video footage from the U.S. government of a building that was near a test explosion. That's nothing that I had been exposed to before. I could not possibly imagine being in that building.

**Brandon Emerson County** (16, Oberlin, Ohio): If you take the energy you need to run a city, and you harness it and turn it against someone, you can't imagine that. But this is what the bomb was. It was just unimaginable what the effect of it would be on people.

**Sandra Shin-Young Park** (18, Wheaton, Illinois): I'm interested in science too, but I'm also interested in the ethical implication of it, and that's where rainforests and nuclear bombs and all those things come in. If we think about, you know, that this new thing is being discovered, we don't really realise the long-term effects of what's going to happen.

**Maia Carter** (18, Greensboro, North Carolina): The other day in the *Peace Museum*, I was really upset. It moved me to tears looking, especially, at the picture of Mr. Taniguchi's back.

**Tomoko Maekawa:** This is the picture of Mr. Taniguchi. He was riding the bicycle and the heat came from behind and his back was severely burned. Mr. Taniguchi survived miraculously. Now, he's working as one of the leaders of the Japanese peace movement. This afternoon, we will meet him.

**Sumiteru Taniguchi:** The next morning [after the bomb], there wasn't anyone I knew around me. People came toward the evening, but they must have thought I was dead as I could not even ask to be helped. I spent two nights lying where I was. On the third morning, I was finally rescued and carried over to a place about 27 kilometers away from where I was found. Some received treatment at another school, but the only treatment they received was the dressing of their wounds with the ashes of burnt newspaper mixed with oil. Many people perished, constantly begging for water, barely able to tell their names and addresses to be conveyed to their immediate family and relatives.

**[Taniguchi]:** I heard many hibakusha died due to radiation illness. We feel it is important to record this now, before another year passes, as we don't know how many of us will continue to be living. Within the coming year, many atomic bomb survivors,

the hibakusha, will die. So, before then, we have to make plans for the 50th Anniversary of the Bombings.

**Ian McConnell** (16, North Andover, Massachusetts): [**presenting a citation to Mr. Taniguchi**] ...presented and granted to you by the members of the AFSC Youth Delegation to Japan 1994, establishing global bonds of friendship and commitment to peace.

**Amy Cora Simmons** (17, North Dartmouth, Massachusetts): [at the *World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs*] . . . Hi. Thank you very much for having us. It's great to be here and to be a part of all of this. We are a 16 member delegation from the United States sponsored by the *American Friends Service Committee*. We've been in Japan for almost three weeks, and we're here to learn about disarmament and about the effects of the nuclear bomb. When we go back to our separate communities, we're going to share what we've learned and raise peoples' awareness about nuclear disaster and help to plan the 50th Anniversary in each of our communities. Thank you very much.

**Alena Ann Hairston (19, Logan, West Virginia)**: Being in Japan has given me a heightened sense of being different, I think. I don't look Japanese and never will. It's been painful and it's been refreshing at the same time. Being on the subway here, people don't know what I am. When I got off the plane, they thought I was a singer. On the subway, they think I'm from Africa. I have hair on my legs, they don't know where I'm from. When I'm in the group with other delegates, and I happen to be the only person of color in that group, I don't get talked to as much as the rest do. Maybe I'm being paranoid, but I think I'm just being consciencious. And it's okay, you know, that's what I came here to learn about.

**Maia**: I think there was a whole lot of racism behind the decision to drop the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki just as there was racism behind the Japanese internment during World War II in our country. We didn't inter German-Americans. We didn't inter Italian-Americans. But we interred Japanese-Americans.

**Unidentified delegate**: And all of a sudden, destruction comes. And it causes the dome to become like this. Everything has changed, but the dome has remained and helps people to remember what happened.

**Unidentified delegate**: I'm thinking, well, I have relative who are that old who were U.S. citizens when the bomb was dropped. So, how did they feel? And I realised that I have absolutely no idea about how they felt about it because I haven't talked to them about it. So I made a mental note; I'm just going to go home and ask my grandparents. If they tell me, yes, the bomb ended the war, a lot of my friends came home, I'm just a

teenager who happens to have a different perspective. How can I possibly tell them that what they believe and what they know is wrong?

**Unidentified delegate:** There are people back home who are really glad that this happened. And during the time of war, they really did think that this was the best thing. And they have never seen what we have seen, like at the peace museums. I think that that's something we really need to share back home with everyone.