REVIEW AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Significant controversy exists among historians as to the U.S. motivation for using atomic weapons. How does Truman characterize Hiroshima and Japan in order to defend the use of the atomic bomb?

2. What points about the nuclear strike on Hiroshima does Truman emphasize? What details does he leave out?

3. Despite early competition and mutual suspicions between the United States and Great Britain, Truman emphasizes the collaboration and cooperation of the two countries in the effort to develop nuclear weapons. Why? What is the effect of this emphasis?

4. How do you evaluate Truman’s statement that he would consider how atomic power could influence world peace?

DOCUMENT 30-6

TOSHIKO SAEKI

Interview with a Survivor of Hiroshima

1986

On August 6, 1945, the U.S. military attacked the Japanese city of Hiroshima with a nuclear weapon. Casualty estimates range from slightly below to well over 100,000 deaths caused by the immediate attack, with many more deaths linked to radiation and other long-term injuries. Although the firebombing of Tokyo, Dresden, and other cities had produced similarly high death tolls, the shocking destructive power of the atomic weapon was unprecedented. The experiences of survivors — known by the Japanese term Hibakusha — have been chronicled in many media and for a variety of reasons, including U.S. government studies on the effects of nuclear weapons on human populations. Here, a 1986 interview with a survivor by representatives of the Hiroshima Peace Cultural Center presents a firsthand account of the attack.

Ms. Toshiko Saeki was 26 at the time of the bombing. She was at her parents’ home in Yasu-fumi-Chi with her children. Returning to Hiroshima on the afternoon of August 6th, she searched for her other relatives for many days, but wasn’t able to find them. Ms. Saeki lost thirteen members of her family in the A-bomb attack.

SAEKI: I remember an airplane appeared from behind the mountains on my left. I thought it was strange to see an airplane flying that time at all by itself. I looked at it and it was a B-29. It seemed strange since there were no anti-aircraft guns firing at it. I watched it for a while, then it disappeared. As soon as it disappeared, another airplane appeared from the same direction. It seemed very, very strange. I was still wondering what would happen. Then, suddenly there came a flash of light. I can’t describe what it was like. And then, I felt some hot heat attacking me all of a sudden. I felt hot. I lay flat on the ground, trying to escape from the heat. I forgot all about my children for a moment. Then, there came a big sound, sliding wooden doors and windows were blown off into the air. I turned around to see what had happened to the house, and at one part of the ceiling, it was hanging in the air. At some parts, the ceiling was caved in, burying my sister’s child and my child as well. When I saw what the blast had done to my house which was far away from Hiroshima, I thought that Hiroshima too must have been hit very hard. I begged my sister to let me go back to Hiroshima to rescue my family. But by that time, things and flames were falling from the sky. I was scared because I thought that the debris might start fires in the mountains. By the time I managed to prepare lunch to take along, it had started to rain, but I was glad to have some rain. I went out to the main road, about five or six people were coming [from] the direction of Hiroshima. And they were in a horrible condition. They looked much worse than the actual exhibit today at the Peace Memorial Museum. They were helping each other. But they were barely making their way. I cried, “Which part of

\footnote{Peace Memorial Museum: A museum in Hiroshima, Japan, established in 1955 to preserve artifacts and testimony from the U.S. nuclear attack, its aftermath, and related issues.}
Hiroshima [was] attacked? Everyone of them was only muttering, "Hiroshima was attacked. Hiroshima was badly hit." I began to run towards Hiroshima at full speed. As I was running, I saw a mad naked man running from the opposite direction. This man held a piece of iron over his head as if to hide his face since he had nothing on his body, I felt embarrassed. And I turned my back to him. The man was passing by me, then, I don't know why, but I ran after him and I asked him to stop for a moment. I asked him, "Which part of Hiroshima was attacked?" Then the man put down the piece of iron and he stared at me. He said, "You're Toshiko, aren't you?" He said, "Toshiko!"

INTERVIEWER: Who was this man?

SAEKI: Oh, I couldn't tell who he was right away. His face was so swollen I couldn't even tell whether his eyes were open. He called me, he said, "It's me! It's me, Toshiko! You can't tell?" Then I recognized him. He was my second eldest brother. He was heavily wounded.

INTERVIEWER: His body was covered with burns?

SAEKI: Yes, and he looked awful. He told me he'd been engulfed by flames and barely made his way out. He said that mother had woken him up... that morning, and that he was washing up when it happened. He told me that mother was on the third floor, and might have been blown away with the blast. He told me he thought that she must have died. I finally reached Hiroshima, well, afternoon I supposed.

INTERVIEWER: What was it like then in Hiroshima?

SAEKI: The whole town of Hiroshima was just in a mess. People were trying to find shelter, shelter elementary school building, anywhere. When I reached the local elementary school, people were even jammed in the hallways. Everywhere was filled with [mourns] and groans and sobs and cries. Those of us who could move around were not treating the injured, but we were carrying dead bodies out of the building. I couldn't identify people by their faces. Trying to find my family, I had to take a look at their clothing, the clothes of the people who were still in the building. I couldn't find any of my family, so I went out to the playground. There were four piles of bodies and I stood in front of them. I just didn't know what to do. How could I find the bodies of my beloved ones? When I was going through the classrooms, I could take a look at each person, but these were mounds. If I tried to find my beloved ones, I would have to remove the bodies one by one. It just wasn't possible. I really felt sad. There were all kinds of bodies in the mounds. Not only human bodies but bodies of birds, cats and dogs and even that of a cow. It looked horrible. I can't find words to describe it. They were burned, just like human bodies, and some of them were half burnt. There was even a swollen horse. Just everything was there, everything.

INTERVIEWER: Ms. Saeki, how long did you search for your kin?

SAEKI: I went to Hiroshima to search on the 6th and the 7th, but on the 8th, they told me that there would be a big air-raid, so I didn't go on the 8th. And I didn't go on the 15th, but I went out almost everyday. I searched for mother for a long time. But I couldn't find her. I just couldn't find her. And finally on September 6th, my elder brother told us together in a living room. He called all the family members there together. He put something wrapped in a cloth. And he put it on the table which we used to take meals. My brother said, "Toshiko, unwrap Mother yourself. You've been out there looking for her everyday." So, I did as he told me and undid the wrapping expecting to find pieces of her bones. But it was the half of the burnt head of my mother. No eyes, no teeth, only a small portion of flesh was left on the back with some hair. And there were also her glasses. The glasses are exhibited near the exit of the Peace Memorial Museum as if to tell something to the people now.

INTERVIEWER: Your older brother, he also passed away?

SAEKI: Yes, after seeing the half burnt head of our mother, my brother started to say funny things. He told us to bandage him well to cover the pores of his skin with white clothes. I asked what for and he said he was going to try to do some experiment to extract the radioactivity built up in his body. He told us to bandage him well, except for his eyes and his mouth. So even his nose was covered. Before he started the experiment, he drank a lot of water. He drank more than he could actually take, so water was dripping from his nose and from his mouth. Then he said he was ready. He told us just to leave him alone and not to enter the room unless he cried out for help. He told us to go away and to keep away from him. And after a while, I peeked in the room. My brother was completely naked. He had stripped all the bandage cloths away. He was just lying still in the corner. I didn't know what was wrong with him. I thought he was dead. I banged at the door and I cried, "Brother! Brother, don't die!" He woke up and sat on the floor. He told me that the experiment had failed. He cried that it was a pity. He looked all right, but he was going crazy. He said, "I've grown bigger. Make an opening in the ceiling. This room is too small and I can't even stand up." After the horrible bomb hit Hiroshima, my brother's mind was shattered into pieces. War does not only destroy things, killing people, but shatters the
hearts of people as well. This is war. And during the course of my life, I learned this on many various occasions. I know this now.

INTERVIEWER: Ms. Saeki, have you experienced any trouble concerning your health?

SAEKI: Yes, I have. By the end of August, maybe around, oh, the 28th or so, my hair started to fall out, I vomited blood. My teeth were coming out. And I had a fever of about 40 degrees. Nuclear war has nothing good. Whether you win or lose, it leaves you feeling futile with only your rage and with fear about the aftereffects of radiation. The survivors have to live with this fear. At times I have thought I should have died then, it would have been better. But I must live for the sake of the people, all the people who lost their lives then. So I relate my experiences hoping that my talk would discourage people from making war. Our experience must not be forgotten. What we believed in during the war turned out to be worth nothing. We don't know to whom we should turn our rage. I went through hell on earth... Hiroshima should not be repeated again. That is why I keep telling the same old story over and over again. And I'll keep repeating it.

**READING AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Toshiko Saeki gives a disturbingly personal account of the nuclear attack on Hiroshima. What is the value of her testimony, if any, in evaluating the history of atomic warfare?

2. Conventional weapons killed millions of people in the Second World War. What aspect of Saeki's testimony, if any, makes the atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki unique in the war's long history of carnage?

3. Saeki repeatedly refers to the Peace Memorial Museum. What is the effect of bringing up the museum in her narrative? How does she compare or contrast the presentation of history with her own experiences? What does this suggest for your understanding of Saeki's experience and of the event?

**COMPARATIVE QUESTIONS**

1. The documents in this chapter present various individual lives and government policies during and the Second World War. What common themes draw among the documents based on the primary source? Which documents present an "official" version of events versus a personal version, and how does the author's perspective add to our understanding of the documents?

2. Woody Guthrie presented the plight of migrant workers in song. What difference does the medium of song make in our understanding of these experiences? How does the medium of the written word contribute to our understanding of the experiences in the other documents?

3. Both the Nuremberg Laws and Truman's press release are examples of very different governments to explain the roles of different countries. Compare and contrast differences in how the laws protect their respective interests. Compare and contrast differences in how they explain the incident and the aftermath.

4. Both the Scholl-Klink and Izvestya documents are written in English by women and society. Compare and contrast how both documents present the intersection of female identities and the war. How are the descriptions different, and how are they similar? What do you think is the significance of the differences?

5. The press release on Hiroshima and the interview present two very different accounts of the motivation for the bomb. How is the atomic bomb described? How are the descriptions different, and how do you think the different views shed light on the motivations behind the decision? How do they compare and contrast?

6. In what ways does each document in this chapter contribute to our understanding of the war? When they cite numbers, what effect do they have? Are numbers more or less powerful than other forms of evidence?