

mechanism that encourages federal courts to segregate voters into racially designated districts to ensure minority electoral success."

Thomas proceeded to draw an explicit roadmap of the "destructive assumptions" underlying Voting Rights Act cases. The Court, he argued, has "converted the Act into a device for regulating, rationing, and apportioning political power among racial and ethnic groups." Such a mandate requires courts to choose among competing political theories "to determine which electoral systems provide the 'fairest' levels of representation or the most 'effective' or 'undiluted' votes to minorities," judgments that "courts are inherently ill-equipped to make."

Thomas cited the 1969 decision *Allen v. State Board of Elections*, which set the Court on its current course. As Justice John Harlan noted in his dissent in that case, the Court's expanded inquiry forced it to choose between two outcomes: "Under one system, Negroes have some influence in the election of all officers; under the other, minority groups have more influence in the selection of fewer officers." Nudged by the civil-rights advocacy groups, the Court chose the latter outcome. Thereafter, proportional political power rather than equal access to the political process was the touchstone for voting-rights cases.

### *Voting by Skin Color*

**E**VEN more alarming to Thomas than injecting the Court into political decisions is the premise, assumed by the vote-dilution cases, that "race defines political interest." As Thomas explained, "We have acted on the implicit assumption that members of racial and ethnic groups must all think alike on matters of public policy and must have their own 'minority preferred' representatives holding seats in elected bodies if they are to be considered represented at all." These assumptions, Thomas argued, "should be repugnant to any nation that strives for the ideal of a color-blind Constitution"; indeed, they are similar to the reasoning that led to registering voters by race during the days of Jim Crow.

Ultimately, Thomas concluded, the system leads to greater racial polarization. In a segregated voting system, "Neither group needs to draw on sup-

port from the other's constituency to win on election day." Moreover, the task of reapportioning political power inevitably expands. In a rueful reference to Lani Guinier, Thomas remarked, "We should not be surprised if voting rights advocates encourage us to 'revive our political imagination' . . . and to consider 'innovative and nontraditional remedies' for vote dilution."

The only solution, Thomas urged, is for the Court to abandon the enterprise of political redistribution and return to the Voting Rights Act's original purposes. "We would be mighty Platonic guardians indeed if Congress had granted us authority to determine the best form of local government for every county, city, village, and town in America," Thomas declared. "But under our constitutional system, this Court is not a centralized politburo appointed for life to dictate to the provinces. . . . We should be cautious in interpreting any Act of Congress to grant us power to make such determinations."

In calling upon the Court to overturn its precedents in the voting-rights area, Justice Thomas made a reality of his ideological critics' worst nightmares, and they reacted with predictable outrage. For he not only voted the "wrong" way in a major case but also called into question the shaky foundation upon which the regime of racial gerrymandering is built. But as Edwin M. Yoder Jr. observed, none of the critics "went beyond *ad hominem* comments to meet his arguments. . . . Is

that because they are contemptible or because they might be hard to rebut?"

Whatever course the Supreme Court means to follow in future cases will have to be chosen fast. Already, the Court has granted review in cases from Louisiana and Georgia in which lower courts struck down racially gerrymandered congressional districts. These cases pose the stark question: Will America's future be one of permanently warring racial camps? For if our polity is formally divided along racial lines, we will have abandoned the principal mechanism—the political process—that traditionally has forced Americans of all ethnicities to deal with one another.

To date, conservatives have largely relegated themselves to the sidelines while, in the words of Justice Thomas, federal courts have been "redrawing the political landscape." Fortunately, a growing cadre of scholars, whose trails were blazed by Abigail Thernstrom at Boston University and Donald Horowitz at Duke, are urging a more faithful adherence to the Voting Rights Act's original aims. But in the legal trenches, the Right is silent.

That is unfortunate. For better or worse, in this area only the courts can deliver us to the promised land. If somehow that happens, it will be a sweet irony that the man who will have helped fulfill Thurgood Marshall's original vision of a color-blind Constitution is the man who replaced him, Clarence Thomas. □

## *Why America Was Right to Drop the Bomb*

# SHOCK TREATMENT

Horrible as the destruction at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was, a continuing war would have been far worse.

**MICHAEL B. KING**

**I**N NOVEMBER 1944, the Turkish ambassador to the United States died in Washington, D.C. Returning his remains to Turkey proved impracticable in the midst of war; not

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until March 1946 did the ambassador begin his journey home. But what a journey that proved to be! The end of World War II meant the U.S. could use virtually any ship among the Navy's vast array to effect the ambassador's return. Meanwhile, the Soviets had



been pressing the Turks hard, demanding concessions over the Dardanelles and insisting on a Turkish "neutrality" that actually meant alignment with Moscow against the Western democracies. Seizing on the need to return the ambassador's remains as an opportunity to show solidarity with Ankara, U.S. officials selected the battleship *Missouri*—scene of Japan's surrender in Tokyo Bay the previous September—as the ship that would best make the point.

On March 22, the *Missouri* left New York harbor, arriving at Istanbul on April 5 (with a stop at Gibraltar, where the British governor laid a wreath). The *Missouri*'s visit was gratefully received by the Turkish government, and the Soviet failure to respond helped shore up at a key moment what would ultimately prove the victorious Free World alliance in the Cold War. But, if Japan had not surrendered in August 1945, the *Missouri* would not have been available for that task. It would most probably have been cruising off the island of Honshu in March 1946, its 16-inch guns blasting away at Japanese fortifications in the opening phase of Operation Coronet, the allied invasion of Japan's political center. As late as August 14, 1945, that is exactly what was expected to be the situation seven months thence. Only Japan's sudden surrender assured the *Missouri*'s availability for other, quieter missions.

The arguments over the Smithson-

ian's (now shelved) plans for the *Enola Gay* display were the opening salvo in what will be a prolonged debate over the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a debate that will cut across the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the Japanese surrender, which brought World War II to a victorious close. And if the media treatment of the *Enola Gay* flap is any indication, we will probably suffer through hundreds of hours of coverage depicting the controversy as one of historians versus veterans' groups—reasoned analysis versus defensive emotionalism. As any student of World War II knows, this dichotomy is baloney; historians for the most part believe that the atomic bomb (in Harry Truman's words) "shorten[ed] the agony of war" and "saved thousands and thousands of American lives"—not to mention millions of Japanese lives. So it's tempting to brush off the latest cacophony as the product of ignorance.

That would be wrong. Granting that much of the criticism heard since August 1945 has been discreditable (e.g., anti-anti-Communists' citing the bombings to prove the "moral equivalence" of the U.S. and the USSR), the horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki does not allow us to dismiss all criticism just because the motives of some critics are suspect. At Hiroshima and Nagasaki the U.S. killed tens of thousands of civilians by acts we would, at the war's outset, have declared barbarous. Since then we have all too often

been satisfied to defend our actions by invoking Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and subsequent battlefield horrors such as the Bataan Death March—as if the basest mistreatment of combatants could, standing alone, justify the deliberate taking of civilian lives. Let us therefore acknowledge our duty as Americans to re-examine our country's actions of fifty years ago, and ask whether we can still say—as was overwhelmingly said at the time—that the atomic bombings were just and proper under the circumstances.

## The Appropriate Criteria

AT THE outset, let me state what I consider the *relevant* circumstances. First, I am not going to replot the ground of the unconditional-surrender debate; while a different policy might have permitted a peace without resort to atomic bombs, that alternative isn't relevant for most bombing critics, who argue that Truman was wrong to employ the bomb but right to pursue unconditional surrender (i.e., on terms essentially the same as those offered under the Potsdam Declaration, which gave the Japanese reason to believe they could keep the emperor in some capacity but would have to leave everything else to the mercies of the victorious Allies). Second, I am not going to discuss the morality of strategic bombing, since most atomic-bombing critics accept the propriety of the conventional bombing campaign against urban Japan (although it's hard to see how one can sanction the incineration of hundreds of thousands of civilians by "conventional" means while condemning atomic bombing as inhumane). The relevant circumstances, therefore, are those faced by President Truman and his advisors in mid 1945 as they sought the unconditional surrender of Japan; the issue is whether atomic bombing to achieve that surrender was ethically responsible.

To answer this question, we need to consider three related points: 1) What means were available to compel Japan's surrender? 2) When would each of these have achieved that end, and at what cost? 3) What information was available to Truman and his advisors in mid 1945?

As for the first point, I will begin by evaluating the claim that the Allies didn't need to do anything but accept



"And with her, my career began."



Japan's surrender, because Japan had already, through diplomatic channels, signaled her willingness to surrender. While there *were* signals (emanating from Japanese officials based in Switzerland), they neither offered unconditional surrender nor were authorized by Japan's cabinet. The cabinet was sharply divided between "war" and "peace" factions, and the signals out of Switzerland—ambiguous as they were—reflected the efforts of junior officials aligned with the peace faction, which included the Foreign Ministry. In other words, in midsummer 1945, Japan was not prepared to give up the fight, because its rulers could not all agree to do so. The Japanese cabinet tradition demanded consensus in order to change national policy, and the split between the war and peace factions meant a default in favor of continuing the war. Only the emperor could break this logjam, and his power to do so was strictly theoretical, as the same tradition made imperial intervention practically unthinkable.

A variant of the "they had already surrendered" claim acknowledges Japan's political paralysis but asserts that the atomic bombings were not needed to break the logjam. As we now know, it was Emperor Hirohito's transformation of the theoretical into the actual, with his intervention in favor of accepting the Potsdam surrender terms, that ended the cabinet deadlock and produced Japan's capitulation on August 14. A number of critics, including several reputable historians, believe the Soviet declaration of war against Japan on August 8 would have been sufficient to trigger Emperor Hirohito's intervention. Ergo, America should have waited until after August 8, to see if the Soviet attack would do the trick.

The evidence, however, indicates that the Soviet attack alone would not have sufficed. Certainly the attack didn't change the minds of the war faction, who clung to the idea of a final battle for the Home Islands as the only honorable, and therefore acceptable, course of action. As for the emperor, postwar interviews with leading Japanese (most notably, the Marquis Kido, Emperor Hirohito's trusted counselor) suggest that the likelihood of Soviet intervention on the Allied side was already a reluctantly accepted given, and that the emperor's decision to break the deadlock was made upon

hearing the dreadful news from Hiroshima—almost 24 hours before Soviet armies poured into Manchuria. While Hirohito went to his grave without disclosing his reasons for choosing peace in August 1945, it is telling that his surrender statement singled out America's employment of a "most cruel . . . new bomb" to explain to his "good and loyal subjects" the decision to surrender.

The case for waiting also ignores the psychological problem that American decision-makers faced: how to force the capitulation of an enemy whose resistance was growing more ferocious in inverse proportion to its objective chance of avoiding defeat. Precisely this problem caused Secretary of War Henry Stimson to devise the policy of administering a closely spaced series of "shocks" to bring Japan to its collective senses. While the Soviet attack *might* have proved enough, waiting to see if it would before unleashing the bomb risked losing the effect of a series of reverses experienced in close succession. Nothing we have learned since the war's end conclusively invalidates Stimson's diagnosis; if anything, the postwar research has confirmed his view that "shock treatment" was necessary to awaken Japan from her denial of reality.

### A Demonstration Drop?

**C**RITICS of the bombing also cite the alternative of a demonstration drop. This was rejected principally for technical reasons—fear that the bomb would "fizzle." In fact, had the Little Boy uranium bomb been employed, there would have been no technical failure; only the Fat Man plutonium design posed any real risk of an in-the-field flop. But Truman and his advisors couldn't be sure of that in mid 1945, nor could they afford to risk the virtual certainty that a fizzle would only strengthen the diehards in the Japanese leadership. Moreover, there was another problem with a demonstration drop: the risk that, even if the bomb didn't fizzle, it would fail to impress Japan's warlords. The target would presumably have been a thinly populated, heavily forested district on Honshu within a few hours of Tokyo (to assure ease of access for Japan's top brass). The resulting conflagration, however, would probably have persuaded the Japanese military only that

we could now burn Japanese cities with one bomb. Since we had already burned down Japan's urban heartland, there is little reason to think her generals, admirals, or emperor would have seen in atomic warfare a new threat materially different from that already posed by the ongoing conventional bombing campaign.

These points (especially the technical concerns, which proved most persuasive to decision-makers in 1945) arguably evade the postwar charge of a failure of moral imagination regarding the need to preserve the psychological barrier against first use of nuclear weapons. I submit, however, that the critics' after-the-fact moral critique is flawed by a failure of *historical* imagination. They do not give sufficient weight to the need to achieve Japan's surrender as quickly as possible.

Which brings me to my second criterion for evaluating the propriety of the atomic bombings: When would any alternative have achieved a Japanese surrender, and at what cost? The critics rarely address this subject, and any discussion is invariably confined to arguing about how many casualties would have been suffered during an invasion of the Home Islands (the *Enola Gay* display debate over whether the Allies would have suffered 229,000 casualties or 63,000 is typical). Ignored is that Japanese armies still held vast chunks of territory outside of Japan (in China, Southeast Asia, and the Indonesian archipelago), and that these forces—already cut off from the Home Islands—were prepared to resist to the end. Thus, as planning for the invasion of the Home Islands proceeded, so did planning for several other operations, including an Anglo-Indian assault on Thailand (from Burma); a British-Australian return to Malaya (aiming to recapture Singapore); a series of British-led assaults on key points throughout the Indonesian archipelago (then the Netherlands East Indies); American-Chinese operations against Japanese forces in southeastern and south-central China (e.g., the recapture of Nanking); and continued pounding of isolated Japanese forces left behind during the "leapfrog" island campaigns through the south and central Pacific (e.g., the tens of thousands of Japanese cut off at Rabaul).

If the war had not ended on August 14, these plans would have been put into effect, starting with the British re-



turn to Malaya on September 9 by amphibious landings that would have equaled the size and scope of the invasion of Normandy. Nor would the Allies have been the only ones forging ahead. In our world, Japan's surrender on August 14 gave America the chance to rush troops to southern Korea; in a world where the war continued, Soviet armies would have annihilated the last Japanese near Pusan before the end of September. In our world, Japan's post-atomic collapse allowed us to ferry Chiang Kai-shek's troops to key points all along China's coast with no resistance from defeated Japanese forces; without a Japanese surrender in August, the Nationalist armies (with significant American support) would have had to fight their way up the coast, and Mao Tse-tung would have been in Peking by October (proclaiming, as Marshal Zhukov and Kim Il Sung looked on, the second "People's Republic" to be established in East Asia within a fortnight).

Only after the bloodshed entailed in all these efforts would we have come to the invasion of the Home Islands, to be kicked off on November 1 in Operation Olympic (the seizure of southern Kyushu, to be prepared as a giant staging area for Operation Coronet the following March). As it happens, Olympic would not have gone off on November 1 as planned because of a massive typhoon that blasted through the Ryukyus in October and that would undoubtedly have caused thousands of casualties and disrupted the invasion fleet gathering at Okinawa and elsewhere. However, "X Day" would probably have been delayed only a few weeks, as American and British engineers, working around the clock, would

have managed another of those wartime logistical miracles. Once the invasion got under way, there is no doubt the Allies would eventually have carried the day. There is also no doubt that this success would have been purchased at a fearful price, much higher than the lower estimates. (The lower figure in the *Enola Gay* display debate is apparently based on estimates worked up in mid 1945, which did not account for Japanese plans to shift kamikaze targeting from warships to troop transports.)

The human consequences of continued war in East Asia would have been appalling. Hundreds of thousands of members of the Japanese imperial administrative apparatus would have perished (in our world, they were repatriated). Hundreds of thousands of Allied prisoners of war and civilian internees would have died (orders had been issued for the massacre of Allied POWs throughout Southeast Asia, and both POWs and civilian internees were on the verge of starvation when the war ended). Hundreds of thousands of American, British, Australian, Dutch, French, Chinese, Soviet, and Japanese forces would have died in battles raging from the Indonesian archipelago to Japan (for the Americans, British, and Soviets, the dead would have included tens of thousands recently transferred from Europe).

### Civilian Deaths

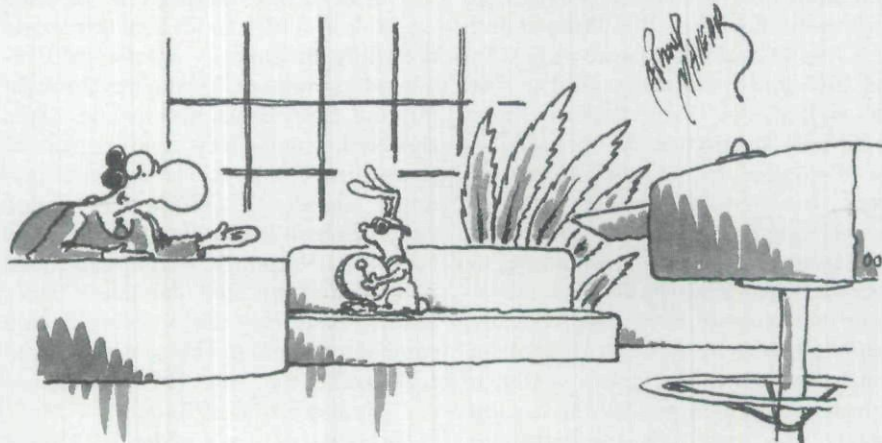
**C**AUGHT in the crossfire would have been tens of millions of civilians, as the accumulating pressures of years of war would have caused a breakdown in basic fuel and food systems. Famines like the one

that struck Tonkin in 1945-46 would have been the likely fate of most of East Asia; the desperately needed diversion of resources and energies to civilian needs would not have happened. Millions of Japanese would have died, especially children and the elderly. Even had we opted for a "no invasion, no nukes" alternative, the continuing blockade and bombing campaigns would have meant virtually the same number of Japanese civilian deaths in what would have been the Great Famine Winter of 1945-46, dwarfing the misery suffered by the populations of the Central Powers of World War I during the Armistice Blockade between November 1918 and June 1919.

Continuing war in East Asia would also have complicated European reconstruction efforts and exacerbated the problem of Soviet aggressiveness. On the Left, Henry Wallace and like-minded anti-anti-Communists would undoubtedly have opposed any measures that might have strained a continued Grand Alliance against the surviving Axis power. On the Right, Robert Taft and fellow isolationists, watching as a Chinese civil war emerged from the piecemeal defeat of Japanese forces—with Communists and Nationalists clashing along lines established by the depth of Red Army penetrations—undoubtedly would have preferred that America put its resources into the fight for a "Free China" rather than waste any effort on further European "distractions." Casting about for a solution, Western leaders might have considered easing peace terms, but that would have been blocked by Soviet insistence on "unconditional surrender"; Stalin's interests would have been served by perpetuating the war in East Asia until he had extracted the maximum benefit (including exploiting his continuing position as an ally to inhibit Anglo-American actions at the other end of Eurasia).

In short, January 1946 would have looked a lot like August 1945: East Asia is torn by war; military casualties mount; civilian suffering escalates; Japan is objectively defeated but fights on. Perhaps the crisis of the occupation of southern Kyushu would have triggered an imperial intervention, as happened in our world in August 1945. But it also is possible that the emperor

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"I wish you could stick around, but I know you must be going and going and..."



would have remained silent, fearing a fanatical refusal to obey in the wake of a landing in the Home Islands. If the Allies had thus faced the prospect of having to go through with Operation Coronet, one suspects President Truman would have reconsidered the decision not to employ the bomb. (Targets in January 1946 would probably still have included Hiroshima, but not Nagasaki. Now isolated in northern Kyushu, Nagasaki could not have served as a visible lesson to the Japanese warlords holding out on Honshu.) With luck, the effect would have been as it was in our August 1945, and the *Missouri* would still, but only barely, have been able to make its trip to Istanbul.

I say "with luck" because a post-Operation Olympic atomic bombardment might not have had the same effect as the bombardment that actually took place. In our world, the emperor's cabinet intervention triggered a junior-officer rebellion that came dangerously close to success; at one point rebel forces actually controlled the palace grounds. The same could all too easily have happened under the even more psychologically trying conditions of a post-Olympic world, and this time the fanatics might have succeeded, as they had done only ten years before, in the "February 26 incident" of 1936, which saw several elder statesmen murdered for being too "soft" toward China. As in 1936, the rebels would undoubtedly have acted in the belief they were saving the emperor from the treachery of his counselors. In that event, the *Missouri* and many other warships besides would still have been off Honshu in March 1946.

Even if Japan had surrendered in January 1946 and Operation Coronet had been avoided in the nick of time, the aftermath might still have included losing the Cold War in Europe. America would have been deeply enmeshed in China's civil war. As our experience with Vietnam shows, major involvement in an Asian war can strain our ability to maintain even the most established commitments to European defense. In an alternative world of Japanese surrender in January 1946, America would have been engaged in supporting the Chinese Nationalists before any commitment to containing Communism in Europe had

even been made. In those circumstances, it is probable that not even Truman would have taken the now much greater political risk required to pick up Britain's baton in Turkey and Greece in 1947, and then pursue more radical ventures such as the Marshall Plan in 1948 and the formation of NATO in 1949.

Without these American initiatives, continental Europe would undoubtedly have been lost to "Finlandization," or worse, by 1950. The ensuing Cold War would have been fought on far more disadvantageous terms, as France, Italy, and, most crucially, all of Germany would have lain on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain. Bretton Woods would have disintegrated before 1950; there never would have been a GATT or an EEC; and it is difficult to imagine how America and Britain alone could have sustained the sort of concerted effort that proved necessary in our world to bring on the Soviets' final *crise de régime*.

Undoubtedly, my defense of the ethical correctness of the atomic bombings will be dismissed by some as an exercise in pointless speculation about "might-have-beens." This charge is silly, because making judgments about the rights and wrongs of past actions necessarily requires speculation about might-have-beens and might-have-dones. Unless we embrace a determinist view of history, or an ethic based on the most naïve reading of the Sermon on the Mount, we must speculate, on an informed basis, about the likely consequences of choosing an alternative instead of the course actually taken. The difficult task is determining *how* likely are the consequences of choosing an alternative, an especially troublesome point in the case of Hiroshima and Nagasaki because Emperor Hirohito took the secret of his cabinet intervention with him to the grave.

But if uncertainty complicates our task, it should also remind us that the decision-makers of 1945 confronted uncertainty as well. All President Truman and his advisors knew for sure was that Japanese resistance had grown more ferocious precisely as the prospects of success faded, and that continuing the war even for a few months would have meant a human catastrophe throughout East Asia. These facts (*not*, as some critics assert, the desire to intimidate Stalin) convinced Secretary of War Stimson, who

in turn convinced President Truman, that only "shock treatment" had a chance of bringing Japan to her senses and avoiding the calamity of continued war, and that the atomic bomb represented an opportunity to administer such a shock that could not responsibly be forgone. It is a measure of the horror of World War II that President Truman's decision to condemn two cities with hundreds of thousands of inhabitants to the awful fate of nuclear destruction was, nonetheless, the right choice. □

## LETTERS

(Continued from page 6)

increasing perversities and ironies in our culture. In "MIS.MIS" [Dec. 31] Miss King's random thoughts took several "kill shots" at today's issues and even added a new wrinkle to my brain. Anyone who agrees with Miss King's observations (and I do) about permissiveness and liberalism and the example she marshals can't be surprised by Mr. Giuliani's treason to the Republican Party during last year's election. As for the wrinkle, I have to thank Miss King for the learning opportunity; her literary reference to Van Diemen's Land sent me on a short research effort from which I am still chuckling to myself. (If our educators could be half as interesting and fun, American youngsters would be considerably more literate.)

These two essays contain some of the most uncommon common sense I've seen in a long time. Miss King has an uncanny ability to turn a phrase which shocks or amuses, yet utterly distills "the truth" to its essence.

Michael F. Hall  
Irving, Tex.

*Don't Be Mean to Carter*

Such as they are, the poems in *Always a Reckoning* are vastly superior to John Simon's vicious review ["Plains Talk, in Verse," Feb. 20]. No matter what his flaws, Jimmy Carter does not deserve the flippant mockery. If his poems "testify to the niceness of a guy talking about people," Mr. Simon proves his own meanness in writing about Carter as he does—and about Sarah Choldenko, Carter's granddaughter, the "award-winning . . . high-school artist" who illustrated the book. Mr. Simon's remark, that "it is good to know that not only talent but also its opposite can be inherited," directed at a teenager and her "proud grandfather," is beneath contempt.

Louis J. Elteto  
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