

# MEMORIES of

# WAR

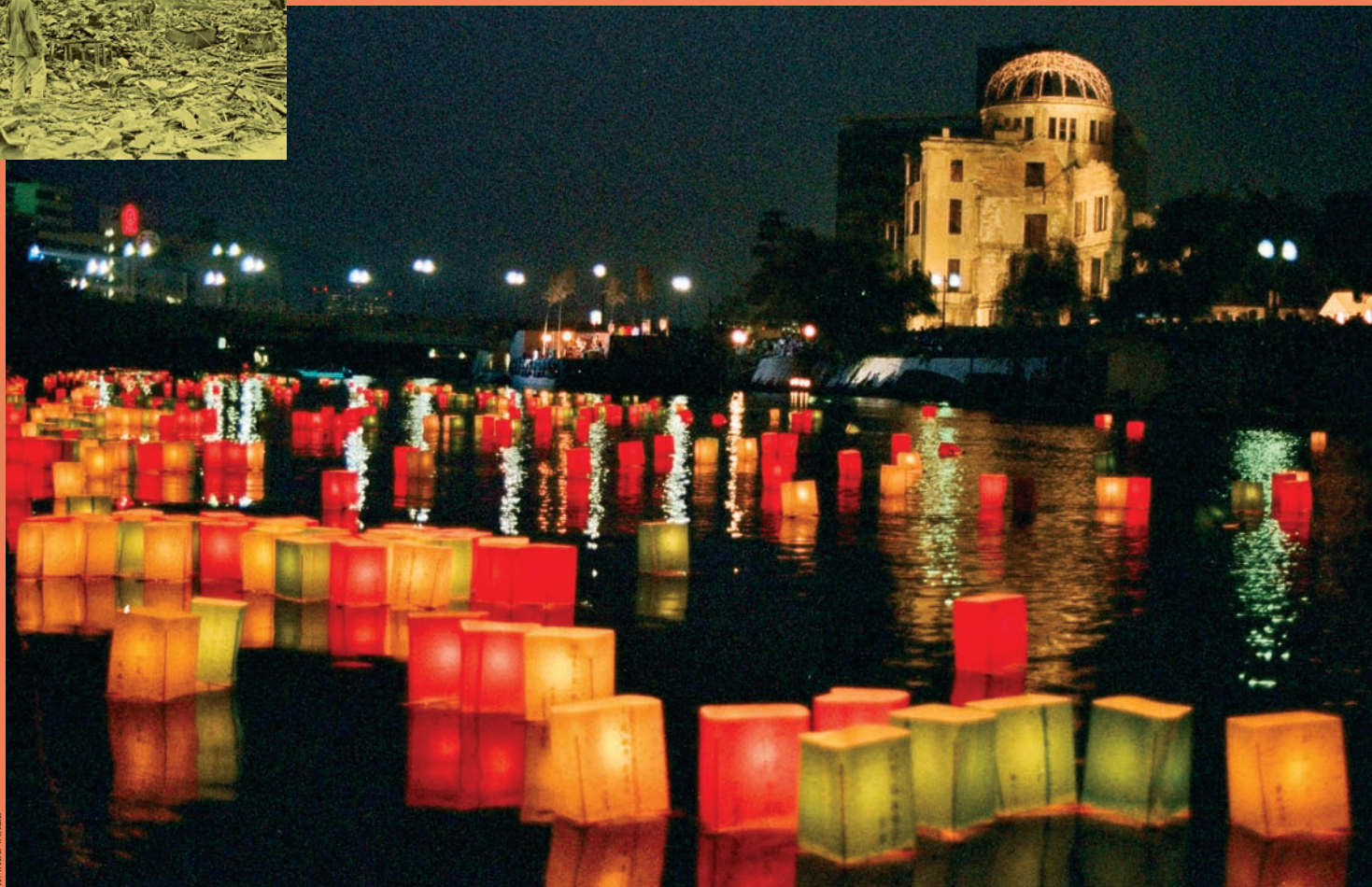
By **Scott Rappaport**



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Top: Hiroshima, after the first atomic bomb was dropped. Above: the Atomic Bomb Dome, one of the few buildings that survived the blast, now part of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. Facing page, top: the A-bombing of Nagasaki.

**I**N 1993, the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum prepared to launch an exhibit commemorating the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. When the plans for the exhibit became public, a fierce controversy arose over the exhibit's perceived sympathetic portrayal of the Japanese people. Veterans groups staged protests, and media coverage was extensive. Congress passed a Senate resolution condemning the exhibit. Eventually, the museum's director was forced to resign, and the exhibit was canceled.

The impassioned response prompted UC Santa Cruz history professor Alice Yang Murray to consider how memories of World War II vary

## A UCSC class explores how history can change with time

from country to country, and how much they have changed in the U.S. and Japan since that earth-shattering war ended more than a half century ago. She approached faculty colleague Alan Christy, a specialist in the history of Japan, about helping her create a new course that would explore how the war's history is perceived in both countries—and how that chapter in world history has been shaped and rewritten over time.

"We wanted to challenge students' notions that there is just one single memory of the war," says Yang Murray, author of a book in 2000 about Japanese American internment. "We thought it was important to explore how people in the two countries had very different wartime experiences and very different memories of the causes and consequences of the war."

After extensive planning, the course—*Memories of World War II in the U.S. and Japan*—debuted in the fall of 1999 with 80 students. But as enrollment grew to more than 200 students by 2004, the two history professors decided to redesign the class, incorporating innovative technology to enliven the classroom experience. Collaborating with Assistant Professor Warren Sack—recently hired to help

lead UCSC's graduate program in digital arts and new media—Yang Murray and Christy began to work with students to develop DVD and web virtual tours of the many Pacific memorial sites that are an essential focus of the class.

The instructors also formed partnerships with colleagues at universities in Japan, as well as in Australia, New Zealand, Korea, and the Philippines, and plan to teach the class simultaneously in Santa Cruz and Tokyo in the spring of 2006. The ultimate goal is to make the course—now titled *Comparative Memories of World War II in the Pacific*—more vivid and relevant for today's students.

"We imagine professors at many different sites around the world teaching from a relatively similar syllabus with everyone communicating electronically," Christy explains. "And the thread binding the classes in all these locations is the students themselves. They will collaborate and produce group research projects—such as designing a new war memorial or a virtual museum exhibit, or providing translations of historical source documents—with input from students in all of the countries."

Christy adds that the course's international connec-

tions not only enable students to conduct more intensive real-world research, but also teach them how to collaborate effectively across the globe. "At the same time, they learn to create history themselves by interviewing the rapidly declining number of atomic bomb survivors," he says.

The instructors can even envision an exchange program where a student who has taken the class might work as a course facilitator in another country. "A UCSC student could end up in Okinawa or Sydney and get out in the field in combination with a research project—that's a pretty exciting prospect," notes Christy.

The course's new direction has already produced some impressive results. Undergraduate Kaley Clements was so inspired that he started his own independent project—applying the same multicultural approach he had learned in class to another 20th-century war. Traveling to Vietnam, he shot footage at historical memorial sites such as the

renowned Cu Chi Tunnels, where thousands of Vietnamese once lived underground in order to fight American soldiers. Clements has since presented his work as a guest instructor in a UCSC class on the history of the Vietnam War—often called the "American War" in Southeast Asia.

The course also struck a particularly resonant chord with students after 9/11 when the memory of Pearl Harbor was invoked as a symbol of the attacks on the Twin Towers, and images of the flag-raising soldiers at Iwo Jima were constantly linked to the firefighters at Ground Zero. The use of such imagery is a prime example of why the professors were originally motivated to create the class.

"It's not so much a course about World War II, but rather how the war has come to be viewed in the years and decades that followed," says Yang Murray. "It's about why history often gets interpreted the way it does."

### Course instructors Alice Yang Murray and Alan Christy



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