At exactly fifteen minutes past eight in the morning, on August 6th, 1945, Japanese time, at the moment when the atomic bomb flashed above Hiroshima, Miss Toshiko Sasaki, a clerk in the personnel department at the East Asia Tin Works, had just sat down at her place in the plant office and was turning her head to speak to the girl at the next desk. At that same moment, Dr. Masakazu Fujii was settling down cross-legged to read the Osaka Asahi on the porch of his private hospital, overhanging one of the seven deltaic rivers which divide Hiroshima; Mrs. Hatsuyo Nakamura, a tailor’s widow, stood by the window of her kitchen watching a neighbor tearing down his house because it lay in the path of an air-raid-defense fire lane; Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge, a German priest of the Society of Jesus, reclined in his underwear on a cot on the top floor of his order’s three-story mission house, reading a Jesuit magazine, Stimmen der Zeit; Dr. Terufumi Sasaki, a young member of the surgical staff of the city’s large, modern Red Cross Hospital, walked along one of the hospital corridors with a blood specimen for a Wassennann test in his hand; and the Reverend Mr. Kiyoshi Tammoto, pastor of the Hiroshima Methodist Church, paused at the door of a rich man’s house in Koi, the city’s western suburb, and prepared to unload a handcart full of things he had evacuated from town in fear of the massive B-29 raid which everyone expected Hiroshima to suffer. A hundred thousand people were killed by the atomic bomb, and these six were among the survivors. They still wonder why they lived when so many others died. Each of them counts many small items of chance or volition—a step taken in time, a decision to go indoors, catching one street-car instead of the next that spared him. And now each knows that in the act of survival he lived a dozen lives and saw more death than he ever thought he would see. At the time none of them knew anything.
Exigence:

(Exigence means: the reason for the writing, or the circumstances that motivated the writer to write the piece, or, the situation in which the piece was written.)

Given that this piece was published in 1946, and that the bomb—alluded to in the first sentence—was dropped in 1945, it can be safely inferred that Hersey wrote this piece as a kind of investigative journalism examining the aftermath of the Hiroshima bombing and the end of WW2. Probably in 1946 there was a great deal of patriotic, we got those sneaky Japanese sentiment in America, and Hersey was possibly trying to counter that by exploring the impacts of the bombing on individual human beings—real, relatable people.

Purpose(s):

to humanize the people killed in the bombing of Hiroshima

to unbiased-ly examine the aftermath of the USA’s dropping the bomb(s)

to argue for nuclear arms limitations, at the potential start of the “Arms Race” or at the potential start of the Cold War with the Soviet Union

to combat Anti-Asian racist stereotypes that emerged in the aftermath of WW2

Audience:

American or Allies-affiliated general readership; intelligent, well-informed internationally curious people; possible audience: politicians debating US policy in the aftermath of WW2

Main Rhetorical Strategies:

Hersey wants first and foremost to individualize people affected by the bomb

Hersey contrasts the huge impacts of the bomb—on politics, on the war, on 100,000 people—with the minute details of six individual people

Rhetorical Devices: specific details of setting, specific details that characterize individuals, metaphor (the last word is a metaphor), sentence lengths, an unbiased journalistic tone; use of full specific a-little-difficult-to-pronounce names