

【研究ノート】

NEWS vs. HISTORY :
Student Responses to Suicide Attacks
in the ‘Propaganda’ Class

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学生の歴史感覚と自爆テロに対する意識

ジェームズ・グラハム

Abstract: The following examines how a specific group of Bunkyo University English majors responded to a simple survey about the similarities and differences between the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Special Attack Group (特攻隊, Tokkohtai) and the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The purpose is to gauge the awareness of history and where students in this group derived most of their information about the Pacific War. Two contrastive museums are spotlighted as information sources, with photos included to convey a general picture of their appearance and their appeal as institutions designed to promote a specific viewpoint concerning the nature of war’s tragedy for the nation. Consideration is given to the general value of museums as places to learn about the war for citizens of college age.

Key words: War, News, History, Kamikaze, Terrorism

Eigo Enshuh II is a class I teach which consists of second-year English majors at Bunkyo University. Its purpose is to promote media literacy, particularly where it applies to propaganda, whether in commercial advertising, religion, politics or education. The method of teaching consists of defining and identifying certain propaganda techniques and offering actual historical and contemporary examples

from the print and the electronic media. Understanding these techniques helps students better understand the anatomy of deceptions and hopefully will foster greater critical thinking as ‘something they can take with them’ when they become full-fledged citizens (and in many cases forget their English). Student input in this course is generally positive given that the subject of propaganda is something experienced daily, whether when reading advertisements in trains or watching television. Techniques in these media tend to be colorful and clever, seeking to entertain as they inform with snappy catch phrases, youth-oriented music and fashionable celebrities expressing endorsement of ‘new’ products. This paper deals with more subtle attempts at ‘conversion’ covered in the course, where the ‘commodity’ is not something for sale, but something to be believed, or simply felt and not questioned.

Propaganda has many definitions. In the class, students are made aware of its presence in as many aspects of life as possible, including the natural world where evolution has equipped animals with certain attributes that make them look bigger and meaner than they truly are (hyperbole and scare tactics). Basically, the students are made to view the concept of propaganda as the opposite of science. Propaganda can promote desire (an improved self through cosmetics, for example) or denial (‘dangers’ of marijuana use, for example). Such promotions are frequently not subjected to rigorous scrutiny, whether out of fear, politeness, loyalty or some other deferential feeling. Science, on the other hand, thrives on constant questioning, even as it lacks propaganda’s mesmerizing emotional color.

Education would necessarily promote scientific analysis and questioning if it is genuinely dedicated to nurturing young minds to think for themselves. It does possess hazardous potentials, however, as a base for propaganda to flourish, especially when rote memory for passing examinations occupies a major percentage of class time.

The syllabus consists of diverse topics (see Appendix I), not the least of which

is the subject of war, decidedly not a feature of daily life in Japan today. Even so, the importance of recognizing propaganda is never so critical than when a population of youths (the same age as the students) are called upon to sacrifice their lives for their country. The case of the Special Attack Group is particularly poignant in this regard, and bears some superficial resemblance to the 9/11 hijackers in that theirs too was a suicide mission. This paper describes a single lesson in the "propaganda class" which deals in students' response to questions about the similarities and differences between the two, and the way students have acquired their knowledge of the Pacific War. The subject of the war is presented late in the course when most of the students have acquired an ability to recognize and describe operative techniques with a fair degree of confidence.

Survey Part One: The Map Quiz

I conducted a survey (see Appendix II) to assess a number of variables:

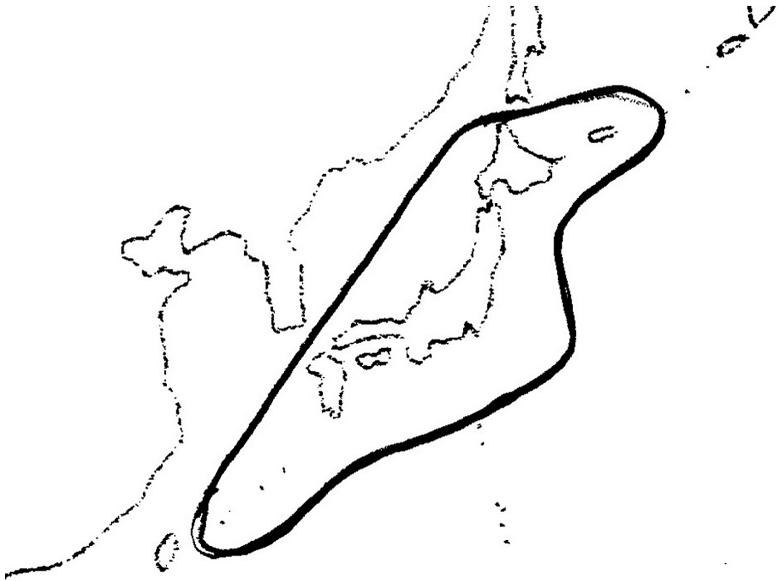
(1) how much knowledge students had of the extent of the Japanese Empire; (2) what their major source of knowledge on that subject was; (3) what they thought of the common and dissimilar features of the Special Attack Group and the 9/11 hijackers; and (4) how they viewed the English language brochures of two domestic museums that devote themselves to educating the general public about the war. The museums in question were the Peace Museum for "Kamikaze" Pilots located in Chiran City, Kagoshima, and the Peace Museum of Saitama in Higashimatsuyama.

The brochures, of course, are a poor substitute for an actual visit to the museums, but the purpose of the survey is to examine whether students are inclined to visit such venues on their own. Furthermore, it cannot be ascertained with any accuracy how each respondent was taught about the war in school, as that would require interviewing both the respondent and the respondents'

instructors in some detail, and even then a full and accurate picture would be questionable. The survey, therefore, seeks to gauge in broad brushstrokes the general source of war information among an admittedly small group of Bunkyo students.

First, a blank map of Asia and the Pacific was distributed in which twenty-seven students were requested to indicate the extent of the Japanese Empire at its zenith. The explanation of what to do was given in Japanese as well, so it is baffling how two students simply circled Japan itself and nothing more. Apparently some do not have a grasp of what ‘teikoku’ means, much less the English word ‘empire.’ Five omitted mainland China completely, although they included Korea. Yet another curiously included only South Korea and a significant area of northern China proper. All but six of the maps submitted revealed no knowledge of the western reaches of the empire into the Pacific. Even with inaccuracies, these six maps at least demonstrated a feeling for the range of empire. Students are invariably surprised when they see that the peak of expansion was far broader than they could have imagined, especially where it goes as far as Attu and Kiska in the Aleutian Islands - actual territory of the United States - then to Indonesia in the south, and to Burma in the southeast.

The rest of the survey was assigned as homework, with twenty of them returned. The results are shown as Survey Parts Two to Four.



How far did the Japanese empire extend at its zenith? Two examples of student answers.



Survey Part Two: Interpreting Parallels and Identification of Techniques

The question of greatest interest was where they got most of their knowledge about the war. As expected, over half of them ranked school as first. Older relatives came in a distant second with nine people marking it either first or second in significance. The rest of the results were mixed and inconclusive, including the rating for museums as a source of information about the history of the war.

Unfortunately, despite the prominent place given formal education as a source as revealed in the survey, few if any students of the twenty were able to delineate the range of Japan's empire which, by definition, encompassed Asian lands which are now tourist destinations, trading partners and sources of foreign students. Apparently, emphasis in history instruction prior to entering university was placed on passing an examination, or on Japan itself and the hardships it endured. A basic knowledge of the international context of the war did not come through in this tiny group.

Where students were asked to list five similarities between the attack on Pearl Harbor on the 9/11 terrorist strikes, the similarity receiving the greatest number of mentions was the surprise element, followed by the fact both attacks started wars, killed "many victims" and involved aircraft respectively. Four mentioned the obvious, that the United States was the target, while four more mentioned the attacks came in the morning. (No one recognized the significant fact that both Japan and the Al Qaeda group were 'exotic' enemies to Americans in that they were non-European and generally non-Christian.) Another four students seemed to be under the mistaken impression that the attack on Pearl Harbor was a suicide mission. Other ideas, either debatable or outright erroneous, were voiced as well,

but each time by only one student, whether about the supposed prior knowledge (or even involvement) the U.S. government is said to have had of both attacks by conspiracy theorists, or that both groups “loved their country.”

Ideas about the differences were surprisingly diverse. Nine said that the key difference was that Japan, obviously a country, attacked the United States, whereas the terrorists were attacking in the name of a different group entity altogether. Eight recognized that the target in the Pearl Harbor attack was a naval base, rather than a civilian facility. Six made the important distinction that all the 9/11 hijackers were taking part in a suicide attack and therefore did not live to tell the tale of their deed. Four stated that Islam was the motivating factor behind the terrorism – and three mentioned that the aircraft used were completely different. More than ten answers were unique to single individuals, which explains the diversity. One mentioned how the 9/11 attacks received attention in the media as they happened. Another noted that World Trade Towers in New York were not the only places the hijackers struck that day, and yet another noted that the Americans were at least able to shoot back at Pearl Harbor.

Selected passages from the suicide manuals for the Special Attack Group pilots and the hijackers were also read and analyzed by the students for finding similarities and differences. Both manuals were English translations. The original Japanese language manual was eighty-eight pages long and prepared in the final months of the war by Shomoshizu Air Unit in Chiba. Highlights of the manual comprise the sixth chapter, passed out to students in its entirety, of *Kamikaze: Japan's Suicide Gods* by Albert Axell and Hideaki Kase. Students were also given a copy of an Associated Press newspaper article entitled “Translation of letter left behind by hijackers” which contained portions of the final instructions. Described as “a rough translation” from the Arabic, it appeared in newspapers just days after the attacks.

Unfortunately, only slightly over half of the twenty survey responses were useful in this regard due to an apparent lack of will in giving the subject any serious or original thought, a typical problem in any class where critical thinking based on reading material is required and there are no comprehension questions to guide them.

Those respondents who read each set of suicide instructions with care cited such commonalities as the use of religion for motivation and consolation, the respective emphases on smiling, the purity of mind and body, and the promise of happiness in the next world. Differences listed included the obvious point of Shinto and Islam not being the same faith, with virtually every response noting that the spiritual element (i.e. mention of ‘God’) was far more prevalent in the instructions for the hijackers. One student erroneously distanced Japan from religion itself by stating the Japanese had no god, just an emperor, not taking into account the Emperor was held to be a very god at the time. Another student noted that the Special Attack Group pilots must have had a stronger will as the suicide manual acknowledged them as individuals. Sentimentality was also perceived to be an ingredient of the Japanese suicide manual where pilots were encouraged to look fondly back on their short lives, and to even feel affection for their aircraft. (The poetic linkage with cherry blossoms, fireflies and *tokkohbana* was missed. These were points I had raised in class previous to the survey.)

Those who gave the images in the museum brochures a close look first noted a vague commonality of purpose – to teach about the war – with the assumption that only Japanese points of view are taken into account. Many noted as well that both the museums had the word ‘peace’ in their name.

Response to the brochure about the ‘Kamikaze’ museum was mixed, with many seeing a greater emphasis on human warmth, although this emphasis was interpreted by some to be a deliberate attempt at obscuring war’s. A widely

publicized photograph appearing in the brochure is that of the young pilot playing with a puppy. (A puppy also was featured in the last scene of the 1995 movie "Kimi wo Wasurenai" starring SMAP idol Takuya Kimura, perhaps a nod to the photo.) While efforts are made in the brochure to characterize these young men as ordinary ('plain folks appeal') – and in fact they were quite plain – the museum is also dedicated to the worshipful commemorating of their bravery even as it teaches what happened. The transfer technique (which ties an idea or product to something unrelated to it) is cited by some students where the image of 'Mt. Fuji' (actually Kaimon Dake) appears on the front of the brochure as a symbolic connection between nature, completely irrelevant to the war, and the story of the pilots. Appeals to pity and guilt were also techniques mentioned, particularly in contrast to that of the Peace Museum of Saitama's brochure which was described as being much too objective and sterile, merely showing what was on display with a subdued mission statement.

Survey Part Three: Various Responses to Mass Media

Eight respondents, not quite half, marked the television media as ranking either first, second or third for information about the war. Immediately after the 9/11 attacks it was commonly mentioned in print and in the electronic media how use of the airliner-as-weapon-of-mass-destruction by Islamic fundamentalists resembled the "kamikaze" attacks of the Pacific War. Having no possession of conventional weapons, the hijackers' motives for suicide were born of desperation in fighting the United States that a war torn Japan shared in the spring of 1945. Elderly former pilots who had trained for special attack missions and yet through sheer luck – or at the time 'disgrace' – were unable to die for their country and 'survived,' expressed resentment that there could be any suggestion of common ground with the hijackers, stressing that the Special Attack Group were not

aiming at all at innocent civilians, but rather naval vessels. Tokyo's flamboyant and ever popular nationalist governor Ishihara Shintaro even remarked that if there was ever an attack on innocent civilians in the Pacific War, it was the dropping of the atomic bombs by the Americans on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Axell and Kase xiii).

The online *United States Department of Defense Dictionary of Military Terms* defines terrorism as “the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.” There is a wide range of definitions that hinge on any number of political agendas, but it is telling that there is no specific mention of non-combatants here, only the phrase “unlawful violence” which is yet another category of difference if declared wars are ‘lawful.’ More specifically, the Geneva Conventions prohibit indiscriminate killing of civilians, but the United States has been reluctant to recognize ‘terrorists’ as legally entitled to protection as prisoners-of-war (Moran). Yet regardless of how the concept is interpreted in an official context, the fact remains that American sailors were made to feel terror at the sight of Japanese warplanes being piloted deliberately into their navy’s ships by young men who clearly did not value their own lives, much less those of the enemy.

The lack of information or consideration for the lives of enemy sailors and soldiers is commonly absent when public forums such as media or museums deal with the many tales of the Special Attack Group pilots. Students are encouraged to think and ask questions about all examples of propaganda they are presented. Motion pictures are a rich source of material, and “Kimi wo Wasurenai” is an excellent example of how movies can sanitize history. Students are shown the final scene where the pilots fly away on their mission, inexplicably to the tune of “Nobody Loves Me Like My Baby”

sung in impeccable English by Iwata Masayuki. We do not see the planes bursting into flames as they crash down onto the decks of American warships, burning alive and maiming enemy sailors as the handsome heroes themselves are incinerated in the conflagration. Nor is there portrayal of failed missions given 80 to 90 percent of pilots who missed their targets and plunged into the Pacific (Richardson and Hattori).

There have been many movies geared in large part toward young people on the subject of the Special Attack Group. Bill Gordon lists the major ones on his website dedicated to the subject: "Gekkou no Natsu" (1993), "Kimi wo Wasurenai" (1995), "Winds of God" (1995), "Ningen no Tsubasa" (1995), "Nijuu roku ya Mairi" (1998, made for TV), "Hotaru" (2001) "Otokotachi no Yamato" (2005), "Lorelei: The Witch of the Pacific Ocean" (2005) and most recently Ishihara Shintaro's very own "I Go to Die for You" (2007).

While there is no outright glorification of the pilots in these in a way we would expect in totalitarian countries, the emphasis on tragedy as a thing of beauty plays to the heart in a sometimes heavy-handed and cloyingly sentimental manner. The purpose of the propaganda class is to work on those emotions that radiate from the indignation of reason betrayed, as opposed to pity, or at least to test whether such a thing is possible given the degree of conditioning to which the average student may be subjected by the popular culture of hero worship. Of those students who responded to the survey, seven ranked movies as first, second or third in importance as a source of information about the war. Unfortunately, no mention was made of what specific movies were 'informative' as I failed to ask this specific question.

Survey Part Four: Two Museums, Two Viewpoints

Not wanting to rely strictly on television, the Internet or brochures, I personally

journeyed to each museum to examine their respective layouts and approaches with my own eyes. My first and foremost intent was to consider the museums as museums, not memorials, and to weigh their usefulness as objective sources of information and instruction, particularly where college age citizens are concerned.

I first learned of the Peace Museum for “Kamikaze” Pilots through the book entitled *The Wages of Guilt* by Ian Buruma, a comparative analysis of how Germany and Japan deal with the heavy emotional fallout from their respective war pasts. He devotes four pages to his visit to Chiran in Kagoshima prefecture, and throughout his discussion he expresses bewilderment at how every effort is made to tie the sacrifices of the young pilots to Japan’s current peace. He notes the obsession with ‘beautiful laughter’ in the photos that are the centerpiece of the museum exhibit. Understandably, the photos and letters of parting to family members on display elicit tearful responses from visitors, but no real anger. Buruma is deeply disturbed at how the Peace Museum ‘misses the point’ that “[I]t was the exploitation of their youthful idealism that made (the Special Attack Group) such a wicked enterprise.” Buruma bemoans the lack of critical thinking and a wholesale acceptance of “sacrifice, sincerity, the sacred cause” as virtues even when exerted to perpetrate a grotesque folly.

As propaganda, the museum promotes a ‘hurts-so-good’ presentation of certain truths, while omitting others. In the introduction to the English language brochure, it states that the museum “was founded to preserve the true facts of World War II on record and to contribute to eternal peace on earth by collecting, preserving and exhibiting the photographs, relics and correspondence which belonged to the Special Attack Group members, who are known as Kamikaze pilots.” It then explains the religious significance of the Buddhist goddess Kannon of Heiwa-Kannon Temple which is adjacent to the modern newly built museum (constructed with government funds). While Japan is not the only country by any means to have museums inspired through less-than-objective motives, there is



Pilot and plane at the entrance to the Peace Museum for ‘Kamikaze’ Pilots in Chiran, Kagoshima. (Unfortunately, photography was not permitted inside the museum.)



Buddhist statuary on the museum grounds at Chiran makes the venue as much a memorial to the pilots as a means of ‘educating’ the public about history.

always something suspect about claiming to possess “the true facts.” What other kind of facts are there?

The wallow in pathos pervades throughout not only the museum, but the entire town. Stone lanterns line the streets, one for each of the 1,036 Army pilots who took off from Chiran during the Battle of Okinawa in the spring of 1945. Those locals with whom I spoke listened politely as I wondered aloud if these heroes might have actually helped to prolong the war and even scare the Americans into using the atomic bomb out of fear that should there be an invasion of Japan proper, the entire population would fight to the death while ‘smiling beautifully.’ (One hotel owner readily admitted the city needed something from the ‘present’ – a jazz coffee shop or something - as there was too much dwelling on Chiran’s tragic role in the last century.) Open discussion and debate within the museum itself may take place in the lecture hall as far as I know, but the heavy accent on the visceral reigns supreme with the exhibits in an unambiguous lionizing of Special Attack Group members.

I made no statistical note of the average age of those I saw inside the museum. There were old as well as young, though most impressive was a group of Self-Defense servicemen in neatly pressed uniforms, caps tucked under arms, solemnly reading the letters and looking at the photos. What might they have been thinking and feeling? How might their reaction compare with that of my students?

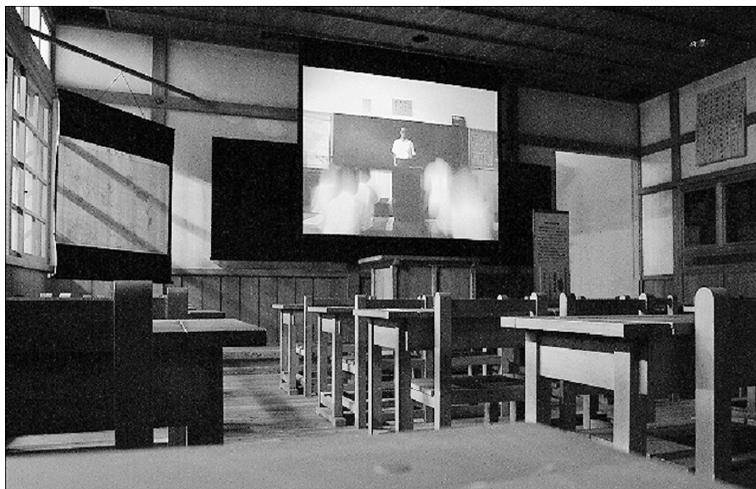
The Peace Museum of Saitama in Higashimatsuyama mentions the word ‘peace’ nine times in its visitor’s guide mission statement within four sparse paragraphs. It makes no claim to somehow possessing the ‘truth,’ letting the visitor reach his or her own conclusions: “With the passage of time, reminders of the war, such as personal items and records, continue to be lost. In order to preserve these memories for future generations, the Peace Museum of Saitama collects and exhibits these materials.” The purpose is to keep the memory of the

war alive so that there will be no war again. The brochure avoids sentimentality, lending much of its space to floor plan and simple explanation of the exhibits.

As the name indicates, the museum is about Saitama specifically, although the vast majority of items on display could be understood and appreciated by anyone from anywhere in the country. Most impressive is the simulated experience where an actual school classroom of the time is replicated with desks and chairs. A large TV screen above the blackboard depicts a typical lesson where students are called on to regurgitate patriotic slogans. (One poor girl forgets the pat answer to one of the teacher's political questions, and receives a strong reprimand.) In the midst of all this there is an air raid, and visitors are encouraged to enter a simulated air raid shelter.

The lack of sentimentality, at least of the cloying kind, does not suggest there is complete objectivity, however. The 'Epilogue' section of the museum introduces current conflicts around the globe, subtly hinting that there may be a lesson to learn from the 'peaceful' Japanese. The boost Japan's economy has received from other nation's wars, Korea's especially, calls such assertions into doubt, and the visitor is left to conclude that this museum too is in many ways an exercise in historical narcissism rather than a bald indictment of past injustice and crimes against humanity.

The irony of using the word 'peace' in naming museums that showcase the horrors of war is not limited to Japan. One of the newest is in Teheran, opened in June of 2008, to show the horrible consequences of war from a pragmatic, rather than committed pacifist perspective. The Peace Museum in Bradford, U.K. devotes itself to issues of nuclear disarmament and ethics. Another one in Chicago, also named The Peace Museum, promotes pacifism through the arts. And there are others, from Dayton, Ohio, to Guernica in Spain. There is even a so-called Peace Museum in North Korea which commemorates the end of the Korean War,



Among the exhibits inside the Peace Museum of Saitama in Higashimatsuyama is an actual war era 'classroom' where a typical brainwashing lesson is re-enacted on a large video screen. (Photographed with permission from museum staff.)



Inside the Peace Museum of Saitama are exhibits which seek to inform the public about the war experience for ordinary people.

fittingly enough located on the edge of the infamous "Propaganda Village" in the Demilitarized Zone.

As expected, war museums that use the word 'war' in their name abound around the globe, most notably The Imperial War Museum in London. Having been the victor, the British approach emphasizes the cruelties of the former enemies (e.g. the horrors of the Holocaust) as it displays regalia and legendary military hardware that reveal war history as a kind of pageant. The mission statement on its home page is simple and direct: "Discover how war shapes lives." In a sense, it combines features of both the 'Kamikaze' Peace Museum and the Peace Museum of Saitama by applying the celebration of national virtues seen in the former with educational elements of the latter. War, therefore, is something to interpret in an historical context, and conceivably leaves visitors grateful for the sacrifices made - and mindful that there are times when war has been unavoidable.

Conclusion

The evidence is too anecdotal within the tiny scope of the survey to connect meaningfully with a sweeping recommendation or summary pertaining to the way Bunkyo students learn about the war. As the map question revealed, the collective degree of knowledge in my Eigo Enshuh II class was bare, suggesting that rote memory education fails to deliver where history joins the present. Is there any benefit to students developing an historical literacy from which to examine and analyze the behavior of radical Islamic suicide bombers so frequently reported in the nightly news? Would it have naturally occurred to any of them without my suggesting that there were similarities, however superficial, between the Special Attack Group and Al Qaeda? What difference would it have made if they did make such connections in their minds?

The lesson, as with all lessons in the ‘propaganda class,’ is designed simply to make the students think, in this case about the universal character of sacrificing one’s life for one’s country or cause. Making anyone think is also, one would hope, a task for movie-makers and museums. From observing the manner in which these two institutions in Japan approach the subject of this nation’s part in the Second World War, the politicizing of history, whether blatant or subtle, at the expense of stark realism will guarantee that the greatest influence on what students know or don’t know about war history will be from individual teachers in the classroom.

Appendix I

英語演習 (2005/秋) Propaganda Techniques

September	27	Introduction: The Techniques of Propaganda
	30	Success Story No.1: Coca Cola
October	4	Success Story No.2: McDonald's
	7	Success Story No.3: Disney
	11	'The Good Old Days'
	14	Print Advertising
	18	The Nazis
	21	The Cold War
	25	The Electoral Process
	28	The Selling Machine
November	1	Stereotypes
	8	MIDTERM (Assignment #1 due.)
	11	Tobacco
	15	Alcohol and Illegal Drugs
	18	Sex
	22	Sports
	25	Religion
	29	Death
December	2	Royalty
	6	Fame
	9	Neighbors
	13	Principles of War Propaganda (1)
	16	Principles of War Propaganda (2)
January	10	Principles of War Propaganda (3)
	13	The Age of Globalization
	17	FINAL (Assignment #2 due.)

Appendix II

"9/11 and War Memory": A Survey

1.) The terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, are described as a "second Pearl Harbor." In the spaces below, list five ways the attack on Pearl Harbor by Japan resembled what took place in New York and Washington.

Also list five ways the attacks did not resemble each other.

Similar

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

Different

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

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