

Canada shouldn't be smug about disaster response

The "experts" — and we have to assume that experts know what they are talking about, don't we? — had predicted for years that three great catastrophes would befall the United States.

One, they said, would be a terrorist attack on New York City. That happened on Sept. 11, 2001, despite the warnings of the intelligence community that terrorists were planning just such an attack. The warnings went unheeded because of lack of co-ordination among the intelligence services, and because the narcoleptic Bush administration didn't pay attention to the information that did make it past the agencies' infighting.

The second catastrophe, the experts predicted, would be a disastrous hurricane in New Orleans. Katrina fulfilled that prediction in spades, with parts of the city under seven metres of water and a death toll that could climb into the thousands. The hurricane could not have been prevented but the loss of life could have been, if anyone had cared to listen to the warnings.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had been asking for years for money to



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rebuild the city's sinking levees.

But President George W. Bush had other priorities — homeland security, the war in Iraq and tax cuts for all those comfortable Americans who were not poor, black, sick or too frightened to escape from the inundation of New Orleans.

In 2002, the chief of the corps of engineers abruptly "resigned" after he criticized the administration's proposal to cut spending on flood control. Work on the New Orleans levees was scaled back.

Last year, the corps asked for a relatively modest \$105 million (all figures U.S. dollars) for hurricane and flood programs in New Orleans. The White House chopped it to \$40 million, but

managed to find a whopping \$286.4 billion for highways nationwide, including — if you can believe it — \$231 million for a bridge to an uninhabited Alaskan island. (No, I'm not making this up. When it comes to pork-barrel politics, Washington makes Ottawa's patronage-driven Liberals look like penny-pinching defenders of the public purse.)

By the time Bush finally woke up and stirred himself from his ranch long enough to go to New Orleans — and to declare, inanelly, that no one could have predicted the levees would not hold — the devastation was complete and countless lives that might have been saved had been lost.

Oh yes, the third "ultra-catastrophe," as the experts call them, is an earthquake in California that would put to shame the famed 1906 San Francisco quake (official toll: 478 dead; unofficial toll: 3,000-plus). Given California's susceptibility to quakes, even Bush should be able to grasp the danger — and maybe this time he will read his briefing notes.

Sitting in Canada, it is easy, but bootless, to be smug about Washing-

ton's incompetence in the face of calamity.

What ultra-catastrophes would experts forecast for this country? We are as vulnerable as our neighbours to natural disasters.

Have we done everything possible, and allocated the needed funds, to put measures in place to protect lives? Do we have the organization to mount a massive, efficient relief effort on, literally, a moment's notice? Or will our local and provincial officials complain about national preparedness, as a spokesperson for Louisiana's governor did on the weekend about the Federal Emergency Management Agency? She said, tellingly: "We wanted soldiers, helicopters, food and water. They have to negotiate an organizational chart."

After the destruction of the World Trade Center and the suicide bombings on the London subway, there is no reason to think that Canada is immune from terrorist attack. Do CSIS and the RCMP have the capability to gather and analyse intelligence information so as to alert our political leaders in time? The track records of the two turf-

sensitive agencies do not inspire complete confidence.

Assuming CSIS and the RCMP can get their act together, does the cabinet have the ability to digest intelligence information quickly? Or will the assessment get bogged down in the bureaucracy, as happens on so many other matters?

But let's count our blessings. Canada has a government that is not driven by ideology, that does not believe it has a direct line to God, that does not bathe in self-righteousness, that does not think it is better to reduce taxes for the self-sufficient than to assist those who cannot help themselves.

On the other hand, narcolepsy may be catching. Some days, it is hard to tell whether Paul Martin's government, like the one in Washington, is awake or asleep.

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PEACE AND RECONCILIATION TOUR

China's history ignored but pain endures

BY NICK BRUNE
FOR THE RECORD

To many North Americans, the Chinese seem inscrutable, inhabiting a land that is distant both geographically and intellectually.

Yet, one out of every five people in the world is Chinese, inhabiting the third-largest nation in the world.

The Chinese themselves, for many centuries, were wary and disdainful of foreigners. However, this summer, my wife and I went to China with 24 other Canadian teachers, half from Ontario and half from B.C., on the second annual Peace and Reconciliation Tour.

Sponsored by ALPHA (the Canada Association for Learning and Preserving the History of WWII in Asia), it was an experience of a lifetime.

History is the sum total of the recorded stories that have been passed down from one generation to the next. But what happens when significant events are somehow airbrushed out of the pages of history? Quite simply, the story or event is forgotten and if something is forgotten over a long enough period, it is as if it never occurred.

That is precisely what some argue has happened in the case of the Japanese War of Aggression from 1937 to 1945 in China. Remembering is a powerful tool because when you remember, you provide legitimacy, credence and respect. Furthermore, remembering also is instructive because lessons can be derived and applied.

However, much of the world has forgotten or ignored the tragic suffering of millions of Chinese victims of Japanese atrocities. The Japanese themselves, whether government or corporate, have denied responsibility and have brushed aside all claims to compensation, redress and apology. The Japanese High Court has continually ruled against the Chinese plaintiffs in cases involving "comfort women" (sex slaves), forced labourers and victims of biological and chemical warfare.

North American mainstream media and education has been almost totally absent in covering the story. Some attention was cast on the reprehensible atrocities committed by the Japanese with Iris Chang's publication of *The Rape of Nanking* in 1997. (Nanking is now known as Nanjing.) But it has been an agonizingly slow process in making the world community aware of the extent of Japanese atrocities during the Pacific theatre of the Second World War.

Hearing the personal stories of a number of victims whose voices up to now have been silenced and ignored was a deeply



Nick Brune of Cambridge visits with a Chinese forced labourer and his twin grandchildren outside Beijing this summer. He and other Canadian teachers went to China on the second annual Peace and Reconciliation Tour.

moving experience for all study tour participants. Their demand for justice takes on a profoundly human aspect as you hear their horrendous stories of loss and suffering. And that demand takes on further urgency as you realize that the clock is ticking as the number of living survivors of such brutality is diminishing every day.

The teachers came to understand and empathize with the victims. They suffered not only an "Asian holocaust" but also, because they have been forgotten and ignored, they have, as Iris Chang and others contend, become part of a "second holocaust."

War is always brutal and savage, leaving behind countless victims in its wake, many of them innocent. However, when many think of war, they imagine it in its collective sense, of massive armies squaring off against one another, huge squadrons of planes and gigantic flotillas of ships.

War exists on that level, certainly, but the true reality is harrowingly individualistic. People are killed one at a time, sometimes in agonizing pain. Mankind has devised "rules of war" to make it more "civilized."

However, Japanese troops during the 14 years of warfare that began with their invasion of Manchuria in 1931, disregarded

those rules with impunity. They have never been held accountable, nor have their victims ever received redress, apology or compensation.

History came alive for every single teacher who heard the stories. We witnessed grace and courage as we listened to two forced labourers recount their harrowing experiences more than half a century ago. Similarly, we listened spellbound for more than two hours as two victims of the Nanjing massacre told their stories of watching as their entire families were massacred in front of their eyes.

We toured the Nanjing Memorial Museum, a testimony to the 300,000 victims slaughtered by the Japanese. We heard the agonizing stories of several victims of the notorious Unit 731's biological and chemical warfare. Some in the so-called "rotten leg village" of Yiwu, showed their brutally blackened and disfigured (from anthrax) legs, while one lady now in her 80s, her face horribly distorted, answered a question about children by simply saying, "No one would have me."

A man told us that he felt compelled to hold up an umbrella "so God could not see" the rape of his young sister by a Japanese

soldier in a field. We heard a tiny, frail, 85-year-old North Korean woman speak nervously for the first time in public about her experience as a "comfort woman."

Although we decry ethnocentrism as something pejorative, we are guilty of it. We practise a kind of "selective morality" as some lives are worth more than others. We do that countless times. Witness the difference if a natural disaster happens in Africa or in America, or a crop failure occurs in Asia or in Europe.

"More than 30 million people died in Asia during the Second World War, including more than 12 million Chinese."

A similar thing occurs within education. Students are taught about the Nazi Holocaust, but nothing of the Asian holocaust. They know about D-Day, but virtually nothing about Nanking.

Other than possibly Pearl Harbor and the dropping of the two atomic bombs, they know little of what took place in the Pacific theatre of the Second World War. This is despite the fact that more than 30 million people died in Asia during the war, including more than 12 million Chinese.

President John F. Kennedy, speaking at the American University in June 1963, summed up our common humanity very succinctly: "For, in the final analysis, our most common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal."

Although his comments were directed during the height of the Cold War to the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States, they are timeless and universal.

The Chinese are no more inscrutable than are Zambians or Indians or Canadians. It is only when one listens to their stories and remembers their histories that we are all raised to a higher human plane.

It is well beyond time that we all hear and take to heart the tragic stories of the Chinese victims of Japanese atrocities during the Second World War and join them, their lawyers and their advocates in belatedly winning for them the justice they rightfully seek.

• Nick Brune of Cambridge is an award-winning history teacher and the author of several history textbooks.

New immigrants eager to be part of Canadian politics

BY VALERIE HILL
RECORD STAFF

Many new immigrants to Canada are eager to participate in their adopted country's political system, motivated by tumult in their homelands and gratitude to the government of the day that took them in.

It all starts in Canada's citizenship courts, says Myrta Rivera, executive director of the K-W Multicultural Centre and an immigrant herself. "The citizenship judge encourages civic participation. There is (also) a sense of obligation."

It's not a hard sell for people from countries where disagreeing with the government or showing an interest in change could result in arrest, or worse. Canada gives them their first opportunity to speak up and be heard, to make a difference.

At the same time, understanding our political system is like learning a new language.

"Many don't even know what a prime minister is," said Chinh Hoang, a settlement worker at the multicultural centre.

Hoang has taught citizenship class-



Chinh Hoang is a settlement worker at the K-W Multicultural Centre.

es Saturday mornings for a decade. As part of the six-week program, delivered to about 20 immigrants at a time, he explains Canada's political system.

Immigrants must live in Canada a minimum of three years, speak one of the two official languages and be free of a criminal record before applying for Canadian citizenship. They have the

right to vote only after being sworn in by a citizenship judge, an event Hoang describes as "very emotional."

"Many people come from countries where they were forced to go out and vote, but didn't have the right to choose a candidate," said Hoang, who came from Vietnam in 1983, after living nearly a year in a Malaysian refugee camp. "Here in Canada, they have freedom to choose and that makes them eager," he said.

Hoang said new Canadians are swayed by any party whose platform includes promises to support immigration. "If they come from a country that gives high value to the family unit, they'll support that candidate."

Ailsa Henderson, a political science professor at Wilfrid Laurier University, said new Canadians overwhelmingly support the Liberal party.

"We are starting to see a growing number backing both the NDP and the Conservative party, but the proportion is still small and the extent to which this holds true varies across the country."

As a political scientist, Henderson speculates that immigrants prefer the centre-left politics of the Liberals, that they like supporting winners and pre-

fer casting their vote for an incumbent.

Rivera has her own theories. "The person who comes here, who takes the risk, sees themselves as more progressive. They don't see themselves as conservative."

MANY VOTE FOR LIBERALS

She said there is another compelling reason for immigrants to support the Liberals. "People join the political party that was in power when they came here, that 'opened the door to me.' There is a loyalty."

And during the last 52 years, Liberals have been in power for 37 years.

Henderson and Hoang agree that new immigrants pay considerable attention to elections: They watch debates, scan Internet sites, read news stories about the issues and discuss politics more often than Canadian-born citizens.

"For this reason you could say that they're ideal citizens," Henderson said. "They're more likely to seek political information, more likely to participate and, from the purely craven perspective of the governing party, are more likely to back the Liberals."

David Docherty, dean of Laurier's

faculty of arts, points out that "new immigrants are increasingly being targeted by parties."

"The traditional view was that new citizens were more likely to vote Liberal. This view has certainly been challenged — the Conservative party is arguably more ethnically diverse than the other parties, at least in terms of elected officials."

Docherty said politicians' wooing of new Canadians is not really new. Immigrants, particularly Europeans, have long been courted by political parties.

The only thing that has changed is that "we simply have many more different types of Canadians in terms of country of origin."

Ethnic groups which settle in one geographic area are particularly courted because a party that wins their support is more likely to win the riding.

As for immigrants themselves, Hoang said having a voice in Canadian politics is seen as an opportunity to smooth their and their families' integration into Canadian society. "They want to be treated equally . . . to exercise their democratic right to vote and to run for office."

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