

White Light/Black Rain

Bottom Line: A sobering and startling look at the "survivors" of the atomic bomb.

By Duane Byrge

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PARK CITY -- Filmmaker Steven Okazaki asks several contemporary Japanese teenagers in a Hiroshima mall if the date Aug. 6, 1945, means anything special to them. Beneath their baseball caps, Western-style teen wear, they seem puzzled. That date, and its horrific Nagasaki partner of Aug. 9, should never be forgotten, and this thoughtful HBO Documentary Films Presentation offers firsthand accounts from survivors, people who were lucky enough not to be vaporized like 200,000 of their fellow citizens.

Of those "lucky" enough to have survived, many have endured physical disfigurement and long-lasting psychological trauma. In this compelling and compassionate document, filmmaker Steven Okazaki interviews 14 survivors, intercutting their reflections and obvious physical burdens with film footage and photos from the days following the bombings.

With his focus entirely on the survivors, Okazaki has delivered a compelling account of the ferocity of those two days of mass destruction. Not diffused by any political statement or argument regarding the bombings, "White Light/Black Rain: The Destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki" is a stirring and heart-wrenching statement of the horrible powers that mankind holds in its fist.

Credit to Okazaki, who is able to overcome the talking-heads nature of such an interview film: He masterfully blends in historical footage with survivors' art to distill the horror of those days. There's also a startling "This Is Your Life" segment, featuring the pilot of the Enola Gay and a Japanese survivor embracing each other with respectful trepidation.

