suggest that a stronger case might be made against the victors themselves. The clearest example of direct orders to commit “indiscriminate murder” in the war in Asia, Pai argued in his lengthy dissent, may well have been the decision coming from the allied powers to use the atom bomb.”

Justice Pai’s controversial opinion not only challenged the fixation on Japanese or Axis atrocities in vacuo, but also called attention to the fact that, in the war in Asia, the portrait of the enemy as a perpetrator of atrocities really began and ended with the bombing of civilians—by the Japanese in China, starting in 1937, and by the United States in Japan in 1944 and 1945, culminating in the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Because air raids against civilian populations had become so commonplace by the end of World War Two, it is easy to forget how shocked the Western powers were when the Japanese began bombing Chinese cities in 1937, and how much Japan’s actions at that time served to convince most Europeans and Americans that this was a race and nation still beyond the pale of civilization. Condemnation of Japan by the League of Nations and the U.S. government was explicit on this. On September 28, 1937, one day after a resolution on the subject was unanimously adopted by an advisory committee to the League, the Department of State denounced Japan on the grounds that “any general bombing of an extensive area wherein there resides a large population engaged in peaceful pursuits is unwarranted and contrary to principles of law and of humanity.” President Franklin Roosevelt spoke movingly about the barbarity of bombing in his famous “quarantine speech” of October 5, 1937, and the Department of State made further formal condemnations of such activity on March 21 and June 3 of the following year. On the latter occasion, the government’s statement included the fighting in Spain as well as in China, but the charge was the same. When the methods used in the conduct of these hostilities take the form of ruthless bombing of unfortified localities with the resultant slaughter of civilian populations, and in particular of women and children, public opinion in the United States regards such methods as barbarous,” the statement read. “Such acts are in violation of the most elementary principles of those standards of humane conduct which have been developed as an essential part of modern civilization.” A resolution condemning the “inhuman bombing of civilian populations” also was introduced in the U.S. Senate in June 1938, and the ensuing discussion made it clear that the Japanese were seen as being the major practitioners of this “crime against humanity,” pursuing a course “reminiscent of the cruelties perpetrated by primitive and barbarous nations upon ‘innocent’ people.”

Although the outcry against the “yellow bastards” who attacked Pearl Harbor tapped an old strain of anti-Oriental sentiment in the United States, by the mid-1930s missionaries and popular writers such as Pearl Buck had helped create a countervailing tide of respect for the long-suffering common people of China. While this mitigated gross color prejudices in some circles, it at the same time heightened anti-Japanese sentiments among Americans as Japan began to step up the pace of its aggression against China in the 1930s. The emotional impact of photographs and newsreels depicting the Chinese victims of Japanese bombing after the Sino-Japanese conflict flared into open war in July 1937 was thus quite spectacular in the West, and helped to freeze two images in the minds of most observers of the Japanese as indiscriminate killers of women and children, and, more generally, of the horror of all-out war in an age when the technologies of death were developing so rapidly. (Picasso’s mural Guernica, based on the destruction of the Spanish town by bombing, was completed in June 1937.) When war erupted in Europe in 1939, President Roosevelt immediately followed up on his earlier condemnation of the bombing of civilians with an eloquent plea to all belligerents to refrain from this “inhuman barbarism.” “The ruthless bombing from the air of civilians in unfortified centers of population during the course of the hostilities which have raged in various quarters of the earth during the past few years, which has resulted in the wounding and in the death of thousands of defenseless men, women and children,” the president began, “has sickened the hearts of every civilized man and woman, and has profoundly shocked the conscience of humanity.”

The German bombing of Warsaw in 1939 and Rotterdam, London, and Coventry in 1940 was denounced as wanton terror. Thus, in 1939 the British Foreign Office condemned the “inhuman methods used by the Germans in other countries,” and declared that “His Majesty’s Government have made it clear that it is not part of their policy to bomb nonmilitary objectives, no matter what the policy of the German Government may be.” Early in 1940, Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, similarly denounced the bombing of cities as “a new and odious form of attack,” while in the same year Roosevelt again pleaded that all parties refrain from bombing civilians, and went on to “recall with pride that the