



6-12-2007

Ray Wilson Discusses the Cold War

Jim Browne

WGLT, Illinois State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/wgl_t_interviews



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Browne, Jim, "Ray Wilson Discusses the Cold War" (2007). *Interviews for WGLT*. 118.
https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/wgl_t_interviews/118

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Ames Library, the Andrew W. Mellon Center for Curricular and Faculty Development, the Office of the Provost and the Office of the President. It has been accepted for inclusion in Interviews for WGLT by The Ames Library faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University with thanks to WGLT. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

NR32_SCRIPT1
FILESLUG:RayWilsonQ_A
FILECATG:Q&A
FILEWHOM:jpb
FILEWRIT:jpb ATC
FILEDATE:06/12/2007
FILESHOW:ATC
FILETIME:00:00:23
FILENEXT:

Even though the cold war is over, the threat of nuclear devastation continues to haunt humanity. Iran is widely believed to be developing nuclear weapons, North Korea says it already has them, and relations with Russia, which has thousands of nuclear weapons, are icy at best.

It is in that context an Illinois Wesleyan professor emeritus of physics will conduct the fifth annual workshop on the legacy of using nuclear weapons in war.

WGLT's Jim Browne has the story:

[N:\news\DATESAVE\06-13Wilson.wav]
ATC ...SOQ
:04:20

Jim Browne: Ray Wilson wants to teach the teachers about what he sees as a cavalier attitude some decision-makers have concerning the use of the devastating weapons. Wilson says with world stability so precarious, it's a good time to hold a rational discussion about nuclear weapons.

Raymond Wilson: It's especially timely. This is a workshop intended to educate the American public and turns out, public elsewhere, about the dangers of the use of nuclear weapons. Too often they're considered as simply just another weapon, another weapon—a big one—but another weapon. After the war in 1945, all the photographs and motion picture film that had been taken by Japanese photographers showing what happened to the people in Hiroshima—all the photographs were confiscated and held as confidential information in the American Archives for at least 22 years and some as many as 30 years and so in that period, from 1945 into the middle 60s, nobody in the United States had any access to this. They didn't realize what had happened to the people. Yes, we saw it in words but the visual image was just lacking, it was not there, so it was, you know, 22 to 30 years afterwards and mainly to the efforts of the Japanese that the truth about this was revealed.

Jim Browne: Where do we stand today when it comes to minimizing the possibility of another Hiroshima or Nagasaki?

Raymond Wilson: I think it's very difficult to put together a nuclear weapon and make it deliverable somehow or other. What's possibly more likely would be a conventional

explosion containing radioactive materials like cobalt and plutonium—plutonium’s hard to get—but any kind of radioactive material—strontium, cobalt-60, strontium-90—and then just spread this all over a city. It would—it’d be a kind of catastrophic event but people wouldn’t feel anything. Radioactivity is a strange sort of—it’s like getting x-rays. You don’t know that you’ve had too much until it’s too late.

Jim Browne: It would seem that would be even more devastating if that were detonated over farmland than over a city.

Raymond Wilson: Yes, that’s a possibility. That kind of relates to what happened at Chernobyl, all that radioactivity spread throughout several countries in Europe.

Jim Browne: You spent a great deal of your personal and professional life talking and dealing with nuclear war and nuclear weapons, what got you interested in that in the first place?

Raymond Wilson: Back in 1959—and I was in training at the University of Illinois to become a high school physics teacher—my assignment was to teach the students how to protect themselves in the event of a nuclear exchange, okay, the old duck and cover sort of experience. When I found out that that was what I was going to have to teach about to the high school students, I had to ask myself the question, “Well, okay, what happens to people in a nuclear war?” and the United States government really didn’t say. They, you know, in words, they would say there’s radioactivity, you have to duck and you have to cover from the blast, and they’ll be a radioactive danger, but I browsed through the University of Illinois library and I did find a book by Dr. Kusano from Hiroshima. He has a collection of photographs of victims of Hiroshima and the results, medical results, of his autopsy and he presented this paper in a medical conference in Vienna after the occupation ended in ’52. It’s called “Atomic Bomb Injuries,” and it just sort of grabbed me from that point on. I has always been on my mind.

Jim Browne: Ray Wilson says he’s also very concerned about what he calls the “genetic burden” humans carry as a result of the increasing world-wide levels of background radiation. Wilson says above-ground nuclear testing and the common use of radioactive materials in things like glow-in-the-dark watches and salt shakers in the 50s and 60s help give rise to higher background radiation. Wilson says we may not know the price humans are paying as a result of that exposure for years or perhaps generations to come. His one week workshop at Illinois Wesleyan University begins Monday June 25th. I’m Jim Browne, WGLT News.