

The Atomic Bomb

Should the United States Have Dropped the Atomic Bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

Directions: Below you will find four sources relating to the dropping of the atomic bomb. Read these sources and answer the questions that follow.

Source 1: President Truman's Private Diary (views of the Atomic Bomb)

We have discovered the most terrible bomb in the history of the world. It may be the fire destruction prophesied in the Euphrates Valley Era, after Noah and his fabulous Ark.

Anyway we "think" we have found the way to cause a disintegration of the atom. An experiment in the New Mexico desert was startling - to put it mildly. Thirteen pounds of the explosive caused the complete disintegration of a steel tower 60 feet high, created a crater 6 feet deep and 1,200 feet in diameter, knocked over a steel tower 1/2 mile away and knocked men down 10,000 yards away. The explosion was visible for more than 200 miles and audible for 40 miles and more.

This weapon is to be used against Japan between now and August 10th. I have told the Sec. of War, Mr. Stimson, to use it so that military objectives and soldiers and sailors are the target and not women and children. Even if the Japs are savages, ruthless, merciless and fanatic, we as the leader of the world for the common welfare cannot drop that terrible bomb on the old capital or the new.

He and I are in accord. The target will be a purely military one and we will issue a warning statement asking the Japs to surrender and save lives. I'm sure they will not do that, but we will have given them the chance. It is certainly a good thing for the world that Hitler's crowd or Stalin's did not discover this atomic bomb. It seems to be the most terrible thing ever discovered, but it can be made the most useful...

Question 1: List any two important details from Truman's Diary.

A.

B.

Source 2: Seattle Newspaper Article (1995) - Pros and Cons of Dropping the Bomb

Historians are still divided over whether it was necessary to drop the atomic bomb on Japan to end World War II. Here is a summary of arguments on both sides:

Why the bomb was not needed, or unjustified:

1. Japan was ready to call it quits anyway. More than 60 of its cities had been destroyed by conventional bombing, and the home islands were being blockaded by the American Navy.
2. A demonstration explosion over Tokyo harbor would have convinced Japan's leaders to quit without killing many people.
3. The bomb was used partly to justify the \$2 billion spent on its development.
4. The two cities were of limited military value. Civilians outnumbered troops in Hiroshima five or six to one.
5. Even if Hiroshima was necessary, the U.S. did not give enough time for word to filter out of its devastation before bombing Nagasaki.
6. Japanese lives were sacrificed simply for power politics between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

Why the bomb was needed or justified:

1. The Japanese had demonstrated near-fanatical resistance, fighting to almost the last man on Pacific islands, committing mass suicide on Saipan and unleashing kamikaze attacks at Okinawa. Fire bombing had killed 100,000 in Tokyo but did not lead to surrender. Only the atomic bomb could jolt Japan's leadership to surrender.
2. With only two bombs ready (and a third on the way by late August 1945) it was too risky to "waste" one in a demonstration over an unpopulated area.
3. An invasion of Japan would have caused casualties on both sides that could easily have exceeded the toll at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
4. The two targeted cities would have been firebombed anyway.
5. Immediate use of the bomb convinced the world of its horror and prevented future use when nuclear stockpiles were far larger.

Question 2: Which of the two sides above do you think has the stronger argument? Why?

Source 3: First Hand Account of Injuries and Suffering at a Hospital Soon After the Bombing

Mr. Akihiro Takahashi was 14 years old, when the bomb was dropped. He was standing in line with other students of his junior high school, waiting for the morning meeting 1.4 km away from the center. He was under medical treatment for about year and half. And even today black nail grows at his finger tip, where a piece of glass was stuck.

The heat was tremendous. And I felt like my body was burning all over. For my burning body the cold water of the river was as precious as the treasure. Then I left the river, and I walked along the railroad tracks in the direction of my home. On the way, I ran into another friend of mine, Tokujiro Hatta. I wondered why the soles of his feet were badly burnt. It was unthinkable to get burned there. But it was undeniable fact the soles were peeling and red muscle was exposed. Even I myself was terribly burnt, I could not go home ignoring him. I made him crawl using his arms and knees. Next, I made him stand on his heels and I supported him. We walked heading toward my home repeating the two methods. When we were resting because we were so exhausted, I found my grandfather's brother and his wife, in other words, great uncle and great aunt, coming toward us. That was quite coincidence. As you know, we have a proverb about meeting Buddha in Hell. My encounter with my relatives at that time was just like that. They seem to be the Buddha to me wandering in the living hell.

Eiko Taoka, then 21, was one of nearly 100 passengers said to have been on board a streetcar that had left Hiroshima Station at a little after 8:00 a.m. and was in a Hatchobori area, 750 m from ground zero, when the bomb fell. Taoka was heading for Funairi with her one year old son to secure wagon in preparation for her move out of the building which was to be evacuated. At 8:15, as the streetcar approached Hatchobori Station, an intense flash and blast engulfed the car, instantly setting it on fire. Taoka's son died of radiation sickness on August 28. The survival of only ten people on the streetcar have been confirmed to date.

When we were near in Hatchobori and since I had been holding my son in my arms, the young woman in front of me said, 'I will be getting off here. Please take this seat.' We were just changing places when there was a strange smell and sound. It suddenly became dark and before I knew it, I had jumped outside.... I held [my son] firmly and looked down on him. He had been standing by the window and I think fragments of glass had pierced his head. His face was a mess because of the blood flowing from his head. But he looked at my face and smiled. His smile has remained glued in my memory. He did not comprehend what had happened. And so he looked at me and smiled at my face which was all bloody. I had plenty of milk which he drank all throughout that day. I think my child sucked the poison right out of my body. And soon after that he died. Yes, I think that he died for me.

Question 3: Does the first-hand account of the injuries and deaths caused by the dropping of the atomic bombs influence your view of the decision to drop the bombs? Why or why not?

Source 4: 1995 essay arguing that the dropping of the atomic bombs were justified

The 50th anniversary of the end of World War II led to a wide variety of commentaries about the war itself, but most especially about the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Those two bombs killed and maimed a horrific number of people. It is not unreasonable to suppose that more than 125,000 people were killed and perhaps another 125,000 severely injured.

It has been common and appropriate to emphasize the human suffering caused by the bombs. What was always most moving were the hospital scenes of burned children who, one easily imagined, died miserable deaths a few months after the camera recorded their suffering.

However, we must also consider the casualties that would have borne on both sides had the bombs not been dropped. So what might it have been like not to drop the bombs? Very likely the war would have continued for some time. The bombing campaign of the mainland would have continued, perhaps for two or more months. The number of Japanese killed from these bombings alone would likely have equalled those killed by the two nuclear bombs.

But then there is the invasion of Kyushu (one of the 4 main islands of Japan) to consider. It was scheduled for early November 1945. In size and scope, that campaign was to be much larger than the costly fight for Okinawa. Okinawa cost the Japanese well over 100,000 lives, in effect their whole fighting force on the island. On the U.S. side more than 12,000 soldiers and sailors died, and more than 40,000 were wounded.

But the Kyushu invasion would have involved a U.S. fighting force at least twice the size of the Okinawa force. The Japanese defenders on the mainland were likely five or six times more numerous compared to those on Okinawa. Further, the suicide attackers in the form of several thousand airplanes, hundreds of mini submarines and small boats were likely to be far more effective defending the homeland than Okinawa, simply because the American and other Allied ships would be right off shore rather than several hundred miles away.

U.S. casualties very likely would have reached more than 200,000 and, if things had not gone well, even 300,000. Japanese casualties no doubt would have been much higher both because of overwhelming U.S. and Allied fire power and the desperate way the Japanese were fighting.

But now, beyond these figures, one needs to imagine all those dead soldiers and civilians, and the lives they would have led had they not been cut short by a bomb or a bullet. One needs also to imagine the suffering of all their relatives and friends, and imagine, as well, the suffering of those who survived the battle minus appendages, sight and sanity. Only after one has done this and then compared all that suffering to all the suffering caused by the dropping of the nuclear bombs is one in a position to begin making a rational judgment about whether nuclear bombs should have been dropped.

Question 4: Why does the author think the dropping of the atomic bombs may have been justified? Do you agree? Why or why not?

Two Historical Narratives

Name _____

Source: Excerpts from "Three Narratives of our Humanity" by John W. Dower, 1996. The following is from a book written by a historian about how people remember wars. John W. Dower explains the two different ways that the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is remembered.

Hiroshima as Victimization

Japanese still recall the war experience primarily in terms of their own victimization. For them, World War II calls to mind the deaths of family and acquaintances on distant battlefields, and, more vividly, the prolonged, systematic bombings of their cities.

If it is argued that the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima was necessary to shock the Japanese to surrender, how does one justify the hasty bombing of Nagasaki only three days later, before the Japanese had time to investigate Hiroshima and formulate a response?

Hiroshima as Triumph

To most Americans, Hiroshima—the shattered, atomized, irradiated city – remains largely a symbol of triumph – marking the end of a horrendous global conflict and the effective demonstration of a weapon that has prevented another world war.

It is hard to imagine that the Japanese would have surrendered without the atomic bomb. Japanese battle plans that were in place when the bombs were dropped called for a massive, suicidal defense of the home islands, in which the imperial government would mobilize not only several million fighting men but also millions of ordinary citizens who had been trained and indoctrinated to resist to the end with primitive makeshift weapons. For Japanese to even discuss capitulation (surrender) was seditious (against the law).

Guiding Questions

1. In 1-2 sentences each, explain the two narratives (stories) about Hiroshima.

2. Which narrative do you agree with more? Why?

Name: _____

To Drop or Not to Drop the Atomic Bomb

PART A - SHORT ANSWER

The documents below relate to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Examine each document carefully and then answer the question or questions that follow.

Documents 1-3: Drop the Bomb

Document 1

"Having found the bomb we have used it. We have used it against those who attacked us without warning at Pearl Harbor, against those who have starved and beaten and executed American prisoners of war, against those who have abandoned the pretense of obeying international laws of warfare. We have used it in order to shorten the agony of war, in order to save the lives of thousands and thousands of young Americans.

- *President Truman defends his decision to drop the atomic bombs, August, 1945*

How did Truman justify the use of the atomic bomb? _____

Document 2

Back in August 1944, the government had issued a decree, officially classifying all Japanese citizens (what's left of them, mostly women, children, and the elderly, as all young men had already been mobilized) as military combatants and armed them all with bamboo spears. Yes, bamboo spears.

The women and children were told to fight the invading American ground forces with their bamboo spears until death. They were told that to surrender and be captured by the enemy was the ultimate shame and that they should die fighting instead. They were absolutely prepared to die fighting the American soldiers with their bamboo spears.

- *Published on August 21, 2008 by Satoshi Kanazawa in The Scientific Fundamentalist*

Why did the Japanese refuse to surrender? _____

Document 3

"The day was August 6, 1945. I was a G.I. who had weathered the war in Europe and now awaited my place in the storming of Japan's home islands. On Truman's orders, the first atomic bomb ever wielded in war exploded over Hiroshima. For Americans in uniform and those who waited for them to come home, outrageous as this might appear from the moral heights of hindsight, it was a sunburst of deliverance."

—Lester Bernstein, *New York Times*, 10/24/65

Why did Bernstein feel "a sunburst of deliverance" when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima? _____

Documents 4-6: Don't drop the bomb

Document 4:

"The use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender...

"In being the first to use it, we . . . adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages. I was not taught to make war in that fashion, and wars cannot be won by destroying women and children."

— *Admiral William E. Leahy, President Truman's Chief of Staff, in his memoirs "I Was There"*

Why did Admiral Leahy feel the use of the atomic bomb on Japan was

unnecessary and unethical? _____

Document 5:

"The view where a moment before all had been so bright and sunny was now dark and hazy... What had happened? All over the right side of my body I was bleeding... My private nurse set about examining my wounds without speaking a word. No one spoke... Why was everyone so quiet? The heat finally became too intense to endure... Those who could fled; those who could not perished..."

Hiroshima was no longer a city but a burned-over prairie. To the east and to the west everything was flattened. The distant mountains seemed nearer than I could ever remember... How small Hiroshima was with its houses gone."

- Michihiko Hachiya, Hiroshima Diary: The Journal of a Japanese Physician August 6 - September 30, 1945

What observations did the doctor make about the effects of the bombing on his city? _____

Document 7

Images of Nagasaki, 1945

Source: *Yamahata photographs* © Shogo Yamahata, *The Day After the Nagasaki Bombing*. The Japan Peace Museum (www.peace-museum.org)



Describe the effects of the bombing, as seen in these photographs. _____