

Pros and Cons of Dropping the Atomic Bomb

The following article was written by Mr. Saccullo and is available online at:

<http://yourhistorysite.com/PDFs%202009/WWII/Should%20truman%20have%20dropped%20the%20bomb.pdf>

MR. SACCULLO

8TH SOCIAL STUDIES

DEBATE ON THE PROS AND CONS OF DROPPING THE
ATOMIC BOMB ON JAPAN

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 needed or justified:

- 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.
- Firebombing had killed 100,000 in Tokyo with no discernible political effect. Only the atomic bomb could jolt Japan's leadership to surrender.
- 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.
- An invasion of Japan would have caused casualties on both sides that could easily have exceeded the toll at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- The two targeted cities would have been firebombed anyway.
- Immediate use of the bomb convinced the world of its horror and prevented future use when nuclear stockpiles were far larger.
- The bomb's use impressed the Soviet Union and halted the war quickly enough that the USSR did not demand joint occupation of Japan.

Why the bomb was not needed, or unjustified:

- Japan was ready to call it quits anyway. More than 60 of its cities had been destroyed by conventional bombing, the home islands were being blockaded by the American Navy, and the Soviet Union entered the war by attacking Japanese troops in Manchuria.
- American refusal to modify its "unconditional surrender" demand to allow the Japanese to keep their emperor needlessly prolonged Japan's resistance.
- A demonstration explosion over Tokyo harbor would have convinced Japan's leaders to quit without killing many people.
- Even if Hiroshima was necessary, the U.S. did not give enough time for word to filter out of its devastation before bombing Nagasaki.
- The bomb was used partly to justify the \$2 billion spent on its development.
- The two cities were of limited military value. Civilians outnumbered troops in Hiroshima five or six to one.
- Japanese lives were sacrificed simply for power politics between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.
- Conventional firebombing would have caused as much significant damage without making the U.S. the first nation to use nuclear weapons.

The following article was written by Bill Dietrich, staff reporter for the Seattle Times, and is available online at

<http://seattletimes.com/special/trinity/supplement/procon.html>

PRO AND CON ON DROPPING THE BOMB

BY BILL DIETRICH

Seattle Times staff reporter

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 needed or justified:

- 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 with no discernible political effect. Only the atomic bomb could jolt Japan's leadership to surrender.
- 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.
- An invasion of Japan would have caused casualties on both sides that could easily have exceeded the toll at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- The two targeted cities would have been firebombed anyway.
- Immediate use of the bomb convinced the world of its horror and prevented future use when nuclear stockpiles were far larger.
- The bomb's use impressed the Soviet Union and halted the war quickly enough that the USSR did not demand joint occupation of Japan.

Why the bomb was not needed, or unjustified:

- Japan was ready to call it quits anyway. More than 60 of its cities had been destroyed by conventional bombing, the home islands were being blockaded by the American Navy, and the Soviet Union entered the war by attacking Japanese troops in Manchuria.
- American refusal to modify its "unconditional surrender" demand to allow the Japanese to keep their emperor needlessly prolonged Japan's resistance.
- A demonstration explosion over Tokyo harbor would have convinced Japan's leaders to quit without killing many people.
- Even if Hiroshima was necessary, the U.S. did not give enough time for word to filter out of its devastation before bombing Nagasaki.
- The bomb was used partly to justify the \$2 billion spent on its development.
- The two cities were of limited military value. Civilians outnumbered troops in Hiroshima five or six to one.
- Japanese lives were sacrificed simply for power politics between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.
- Conventional firebombing would have caused as much significant damage without making the U.S. the first nation to use nuclear weapons.

The following article was written by Michael Barnes and is available online at <http://www.authentichistory.com/1939-1945/1-war/4-Pacific/4-abombdecision/2-support/index.html> & <http://www.authentichistory.com/1939-1945/1-war/4-Pacific/4-abombdecision/3-against/index.html>

Arguments Supporting the Bomb

Argument #1: The Bomb Saved American Lives

The main argument in support of the decision to use the atomic bomb is that it saved American lives which would otherwise have been lost in two D-Day-style land invasions of the main islands of the Japanese homeland. The first, against the Southern island of Kyushu, had been scheduled for November 1 (Operation Torch). The second, against the main island of Honshu would take place in the spring of 1946 (Operation Coronet). The two operations combined were codenamed Operation Downfall. There is no doubt that a land invasion would have incurred extremely high casualties, for a variety of reasons. For one, Field Marshall Hisaichi Terauchi had ordered that all 100,000 Allied prisoners of war be executed if the Americans invaded. Second, it was apparent to the Japanese as much as to the Americans that there were few good landing sites, and that Japanese forces would be concentrated there. Third, there was real concern in Washington that the Japanese had made a determination to fight literally to the death. The Japanese saw suicide as an honorable alternative to surrender. The term they used was *gyokusai*, or, "shattering of the jewel." It was the same rationale for their use of the so-called *banzai* charges employed early in the war. In his 1944 "emergency declaration," Prime Minister Hideki Tojo had called for "100 million *gyokusai*," and that the entire Japanese population be prepared to die.

For American military commanders, determining the strength of Japanese forces and anticipating the level of civilian resistance were the keys to preparing casualty projections. Numerous studies were conducted, with widely varying results. Some of the studies estimated American casualties for just the first 30 days of Operation Torch. Such a study done by General MacArthur's staff in June estimated 23,000 US casualties.

U.S. Army Chief of Staff George Marshall thought the Americans would suffer 31,000 casualties in the first 30 days, while Admiral Ernest King, Chief of Naval Operations, put them between 31,000 and 41,000. Pacific Fleet Commander Admiral Chester Nimitz, whose staff conducted their own study, estimated 49,000 U.S casualties in the first 30 days, including 5,000 at sea from Kamikaze attacks.

Studies estimating total U.S. casualties were equally varied and no less grim. One by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in April 1945 resulted in an estimate of 1,200,000 casualties, with 267,000 fatalities. Admiral Leahy, Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief, estimated 268,000 casualties (35%). Former President Herbert Hoover sent a memorandum to President Truman and Secretary of War Stimson, with "conservative" estimates of 500,000 to 1,000,000 fatalities. A study done for Secretary of War Henry Stimson's staff by William Shockley estimated the costs at 1.7 to 4 million American casualties, including 400,000-800,000 fatalities.

General Douglas MacArthur had been chosen to command US invasion forces for Operation Downfall, and his staff conducted their own study. In June their prediction was American casualties of 105,000 after 120 days of combat. Mid-July intelligence estimates placed the number of Japanese soldiers in the main islands at under 2,000,000, but that number increased sharply in the weeks that followed as more units were repatriated from Asia for the final homeland defense. By late July, MacArthur's Chief of Intelligence, General Charles Willoughby, revised the estimate and predicted American casualties on Kyushu alone (Operation Torch) would be 500,000, or ten times what they had been on Okinawa.

All of the military planners based their casualty estimates on the ongoing conduct of the war and the evolving tactics employed by the Japanese. In the first major land combat at Guadalcanal, the Japanese had employed night-time *banzai* charges—direct frontal assaults against entrenched machine gun positions. This tactic had worked well against enemy forces in their Asian campaigns, but against the Marines, the Japanese lost about 2,500 troops and killed only 80 Marines.

At Tarawa in May 1943, The Japanese modified their tactics and put up a fierce resistance to the Marine amphibious landings. Once the battered Marines made it ashore, the 4,500 well-supplied and well-prepared Japanese defenders fought almost to the last man. Only 17 Japanese soldiers were alive at the end of the battle.

On Saipan in July 1944, the Japanese again put up fanatical resistance, even though a decisive U.S. Navy victory over the Japanese fleet had ended any hope of their resupply. U.S. forces had to burn then out of holes, caves, and bunkers with flamethrowers. Japanese forces staged multiple *banzai* attacks. At the end of the battle the Japanese staged a final *banzai* that included wounded men, some of them on crutches. Marines were forced to mow them down. Meanwhile, on the north end of the island a thousand civilians threw committed suicide by jumping from the cliff to the rocks below after being promised an honorable afterlife by Emperor Hirohito, and after being threatened with death by the Japanese army.

In the fall of 1944, Marines landed on the small island of Peleliu, just east of the Philippines, for what was supposed to be a four-day mission. The battle lasted two months. At Peleliu, the Japanese unveiled a new defense strategy. Colonel Kunio Nakagawa, the Japanese commander, constructed a system of heavily fortified bunkers, caves, and underground positions, and waited for the Marines to attack them, and they replaced the fruitless *banzai* attacks with coordinated counterattacks. Much of the island was solid volcanic rock, making the digging of foxholes with the standard-issue entrenching tool impossible. When the Marines sought cover and concealment, the terrain's jagged, sharp edges cut up their uniforms, bodies, and equipment. The plan was to make Peleliu a bloody war of attrition, and it worked well. The fight for Umurbrogol Mountain is considered by many to be the most difficult fight that the U.S. military encountered in the entire Second World War. At Peleliu, U.S. forces suffered 50% casualties, including 1,794 killed. Japanese losses were 10,695 killed and only 202 captured.

After securing the Philippines and delivering yet another shattering blow to the Japanese navy, the Americans landed next on Iwo Jima in February 1945, where the main mission was to secure three Japanese airfields. U.S. Marines again faced an enemy well entrenched in a vast network of bunkers, hidden artillery, and miles of underground tunnels. American casualties on Iwo Jima were 6,822 killed or missing and 19,217 wounded. Japanese casualties were about 18,000 killed or missing, and only 216 captured. Meanwhile, another method of Japanese resistance was emerging. With the Japanese navy neutralized, the Japanese resorted to suicide missions designed to turn piloted aircraft into guided bombs. A *kamikaze* air attack on ships anchored at sea on February 21 sunk an escort carrier and did severe damage to the fleet carrier *Saratoga*. It was a harbinger of things to come.

After Iwo Jima, only the island of Okinawa stood between U.S. forces and Japan. Once secured, Okinawa would be used as a staging area for Operation Torch. Situated less than 400 miles from Kyushu, the island had been Japanese territory since 1868, and it was home to several hundred thousand Japanese civilians. The Battle of Okinawa was fought from April 1 – June 22, 1945. Five U.S. Army divisions, three Marine divisions, and dozens of Navy vessels participated in the 82-day battle. The Japanese stepped up their use of kamikaze attacks, this time sending them at U.S. ships in waves. Seven major kamikaze attacks took place involving 1,500 planes. They took a devastating toll—both physically and psychologically. The U.S. Navy's dead, at 4,907, exceeded its wounded, primarily because of the *kamikaze*.

On land, U.S. forces again faced heavily fortified and well-constructed defenses. The Japanese extracted heavy American casualties at one line of defense, and then as the Americans began to gain the upper hand, fell back to another series of fortifications. Japanese defenders and civilians fought to the death (even women with spears) or committed suicide rather than be captured. The civilians had been told the Americans would go on a rampage of killing and raping. About 95,000 Japanese soldiers were killed, and possibly as many as 150,000 civilians died, or 25% of the civilian population. And the fierce resistance took a heavy toll on the Americans; 12,513 were killed on Okinawa, and another 38,916 were wounded.

The increased level of Japanese resistance on Okinawa was of particular significance to military planners, especially the resistance of civilians. This was a concern for the American troops as well. In the Ken Burns documentary *The War* (2007), a veteran Marine pilot of the Okinawa campaign relates his thoughts at the time about invading the home islands:

By then, our sense of the strangeness of the Japanese opposition had become stronger. And I could imagine every farmer with his pitchfork coming at my guts; every pretty girl with a hand grenade strapped to her bottom, or something; that everyone would be an enemy.

Although the estimates of American casualties in Operation Downfall vary widely, no one doubts that they would have been significant. A sobering indicator of the government's expectations is that 500,000 Purple Heart medals (awarded for combat-related wounds) were manufactured in preparation for Operation Downfall.

Argument #1.1: The Bomb Saved Japanese Lives

A concurrent, though ironic argument supporting the use of the bomb is that because of the expected Japanese resistance to an invasion of the home island, its use actually saved *Japanese* lives. Military planners included Japanese casualties in their estimates. The study done for Secretary of War Stimson predicted five to ten million Japanese fatalities. There is support for the bomb even among some Japanese. In 1983, at the annual observance of Hiroshima's destruction, an aging Japanese professor recalled that at war's end, due to the extreme food rationing, he had weighed less than 90 pounds and could scarcely climb a flight of stairs. "I couldn't have survived another month," he said. "If the military had its way, we would have fought until all 80 million Japanese were dead. Only the atomic bomb saved me. Not me alone, but many Japanese, ironically speaking, were saved by the atomic bomb."

Argument #1.2: It Was Necessary to Shorten the War

Another concurrent argument supporting the use of the bomb is that it achieved its primary objective of shortening the war. The bombs were dropped on August 6 and 9. The next day, the Japanese requested a halting of the war. On August 14 Emperor Hirohito announced to the Japanese people that they would surrender, and the United States celebrated V-J Day (Victory over Japan). Military planners had wanted the Pacific war finished no later than a year after the fall of Nazi Germany. The rationale was the belief that in a democracy, there is only so much that can reasonably be asked of its citizen soldiers (and of the voting public). As Army Chief of Staff George Marshall later put it, "a democracy cannot fight a Seven Years' war." By the summer of 1945 the American military was exhausted, and the sheer number of

troops needed for Operation Downfall meant that not only would the troops in the Pacific have to make one more landing, but even many of those troops whose valor and sacrifice had brought an end to the Nazi Third Reich were to be sent Pacific. In his 2006 memoir, former 101st Airborne battalion commander Richard Winters reflected on the state of his men as they played baseball in the summer of 1945 in occupied Austria (Winters became something of a celebrity after his portrayal in the extremely popular 2001 HBO series *Band of Brothers*):

During the baseball games when the men were stripped to their waists, or wearing only shorts, the sight of all those battle scars made me conscious of the fact that other than a handful of men in the battalion who had survived all four campaigns, only a few were lucky enough to be without at least one scar.

Some men had two, three, even four scars on their chests, backs, arms, or legs. Keep in mind that...I was looking only at the men who were not seriously wounded.

Supporters of the bomb wonder if it was reasonable to ask even more sacrifice of these men. Since these veterans are the men whose lives (or wholeness) were, by this argument, saved by the bomb, it is relevant to survey their thoughts on the matter, as written in various war memoirs going back to the 1950s. The record is mixed. For example, despite Winters' observation above, he seemed to have reservations about the bomb: "Three days later, on August 14, Japan surrendered. Apparently the atomic bomb carried as much punch as a regiment of paratroopers. It seemed inhumane for our national leaders to employ either weapon on the human race."

His opinion is not shared by other members of Easy Company, some of whom published their own memoirs after the interest generated by *Band of Brothers*. William "Wild Bill" Guarnere expressed a very blunt opinion about the bomb in 2007:

We were on garrison duty in France for about a month, and in August, we got great news: we weren't going to the Pacific. The U.S. dropped a bomb on Hiroshima, the Japanese surrendered, and the war was over. We were so relieved. It was the greatest thing that could have happened. Somebody once said to me that the bomb was the worst thing that ever happened, that the U.S. could have found other ways. I said, "Yeah, like what? Me and all my buddies jumping in Tokyo, and the Allied forces going in, and all of us getting killed? Millions more Allied soldiers getting killed?" When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor were they concerned about how many lives they took? We should have dropped eighteen bombs as far as I'm concerned. The Japanese should have stayed out of it if they didn't want bombs dropped. The end of the war was good news to us. We knew we were going home soon.

Those soldiers with extensive combat experience in the Pacific theater and with first-hand knowledge of Japanese resistance also express conflicting thoughts about the bomb. All of them write of the relief and joy they felt upon first hearing the news. William Manchester, in *Goodbye, Darkness: a Memoir of the Pacific War*, wrote, "You think of the lives which would have been lost in an invasion of Japan's home islands—a staggering number of American lives but millions more of Japanese—and you thank God for the atomic bomb."

But in preparation for writing his 1980 memoir, when Manchester visited Tinian, the small Pacific island from which the Hiroshima mission was launched, he reflected on the "global angst" that Tinian represents. He writes that while the battle to take Tinian itself was relatively easy, "the aftermath was ominous." It was also from Tinian that napalm was dropped on Japanese cities, which Manchester describes as "one of the

cruellest instruments of war." Manchester continues:

This is where the nuclear shadow first appeared. I feel forlorn, alienated, wholly without empathy for the men who did what they did. This was not my war...Standing there, notebook in hand; you are shrouded in absolute, inexpressible loneliness.

Two other Pacific memoirs, both published decades ago, resurged in popularity in 2010, owing to their authors' portrayal in another HBO mini-series, *The Pacific* (2010). Eugene Sledge published his combat memoir in 1981. He describes the moment when they first heard about the atom bomb, having just survived the Okinawa campaign:

We received the news with quiet disbelief coupled with an indescribable sense of relief. We thought the Japanese would never surrender. Many refused to believe it. Sitting around in stunned silence, we remembered our dead. So many dead. So many maimed. So many bright futures consigned to the ashes of the past. So many dreams lost in the madness that had engulfed us. Except for a few widely scattered shouts of joy, the survivors sat hollow-eyed and silent, trying to comprehend a world without war.

Robert Leckie, like Manchester, seems to have had conflicting feelings about the bomb in his 1957 memoir *Helmet for my Pillow*. When the bomb was dropped, Leckie was recovering from wounds suffered on Peleliu:

Suddenly, secretly, covertly—I rejoiced. For as I lay there in that hospital, I had faced the bleak prospect of returning to the Pacific and the war and the law of averages. But now, I knew the Japanese would have to lay down their arms. The war was over. I had survived. Like a man wielding a submachine gun to defend himself against an unarmed boy, I had survived. So I rejoiced.

But just a paragraph later, Leckie reflects writes:

The suffering of those who lived, the immolation [death by burning] of those who died—that must now be placed in the scales of God's justice that began to tip so awkwardly against us when the mushroom rose over the world...Dear Father, forgive us for that awful cloud.

Argument #1.3: Only the Bomb Convinced the Emperor to Intervene

A third concurrent argument defending the bomb is the observation that even after the first two bombs were dropped, and the Russians had declared war, the Japanese still almost did not surrender. The Japanese cabinet convened in emergency session on August 7. Military authorities refused to concede that the Hiroshima bomb was atomic in nature and refused to consider surrender. The following day, Emperor Hirohito privately expressed to Prime Minister Togo his determination that the war should end and the cabinet was convened again on August 9. At this point Prime Minister Suzuki was in agreement, but a

unanimous decision was required and three of the military chiefs still refused to admit defeat. Some in the leadership argued that there was no way the Americans could have refined enough fissionable material to produce more than one bomb. But then the bombing of Nagasaki had demonstrated otherwise, and a lie told by a downed American pilot convinced War Minister Korechika Anami that the Americans had as many as a hundred bombs. (The official scientific report confirming the bomb was atomic arrived at Imperial Headquarters on the 10th). Even so, hours of meetings and debates lasting well into the early morning hours of the 10th still resulted in a 3-3 deadlock. Prime Minister Suzuki then took the unprecedented step of asking Emperor Hirohito, who never spoke at cabinet meetings, to break the deadlock. Hirohito responded:

I have given serious thought to the situation prevailing at home and abroad and have concluded that continuing the war can only mean destruction for the nation and prolongation of bloodshed and cruelty in the world. I cannot bear to see my innocent people suffer any longer.

In his 1947 article published in *Harper's*, former Secretary of War Stimson expressed his opinion that only the atomic bomb convinced the emperor to step in: "All the evidence I have seen indicates that the controlling factor in the final Japanese decision to accept our terms of surrender was the atomic bomb."

Emperor Hirohito agreed that Japan should accept the Potsdam Declaration (the terms of surrender proposed by the Americans, discussed below), and then recorded a message on phonograph to the Japanese people.

Japanese hard-liners attempted to suppress this recording, and late on the evening of the 14th, attempted a coup against the Emperor, presumably to save him from himself. The coup failed, but the fanaticism required to make such an attempt is further evidence to bomb supporters that, without the bomb, Japan would never have surrendered. In the end, the military leaders accepted surrender partly because of the Emperor's intervention, and partly because the atomic bomb helped them "save face" by rationalizing that they had not been defeated because of a lack of spiritual power or strategic decisions, but by science. In other words, the Japanese military hadn't lost the war, Japanese science did.

Argument 2: The Decision was made by a Committee of Shared Responsibility

Supporters of President Truman's decision to use atomic weapons point out that the President did not act unilaterally, but rather was supported by a committee of shared responsibility. The Interim Committee, created in May 1945, was primarily tasked with providing advice to the President on all matters pertaining to nuclear energy. Most of its work focused on the role of the bomb after the war. But the committee did consider the question of its use against Japan.

Secretary of War Henry Stimson chaired the committee. Truman's personal representative was James F. Byrnes, former U.S. Senator and Truman's pick to be Secretary of State. The committee sought the advice of four physicists from the Manhattan Project, including Enrico Fermi and J. Robert Oppenheimer. The

The scientific panel wrote, "We see no acceptable alternative to direct military use." The final recommendation to the President was arrived at on June 1 and is described in the committee meeting log:

Mr. Byrnes recommended, and the Committee agreed, that the Secretary of War should be advised that, while recognizing that the final selection of the target was essentially a military decision, the present view of the Committee was that the bomb should be used against Japan as soon as possible; that it be used on a war plant surrounded by workers' homes; and that it be used without prior warning.

On June 21, the committee reaffirmed its recommendation with the following wording:

...that the weapon be used against Japan at the earliest opportunity, that it be used without warning, and that it be used on a dual target, namely, a military installation or war plant surrounded by or adjacent to homes or other buildings most susceptible to damage.

Supporters of Truman's decision thus argue that the President, in dropping the bomb, was simply following the recommendation of the most experienced military, political, and scientific minds in the nation, and to do otherwise would have been grossly negligent.

Argument #3: The Japanese Were Given Fair Warning (Potsdam Declaration & Leaflets)

Supporters of Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb point out that Japan had been given ample opportunity to surrender. On July 26, with the knowledge that the Los Alamos test had been successful, President Truman and the Allies issued a final ultimatum to Japan, known as the Potsdam Declaration (Truman was in Potsdam, Germany at the time). Although it had been decided by Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt back at the Casablanca Conference that the Allies would accept only unconditional surrender from the Axis, the Potsdam Declaration does lay out some terms of surrender. The government responsible for the war would be dismantled, there would be a military occupation of Japan, and the nation would be reduced in

size to pre-war borders. The military, after being disarmed, would be permitted to return home to lead peaceful lives. Assurance was given that the allies had no desire to enslave or destroy the Japanese people, but there would be war crimes trials. Peaceful industries would be allowed to produce goods, and basic freedoms of speech, religion, and thought would be introduced. The document concluded with an ultimatum: *"We call upon the Government of Japan to proclaim now the unconditional surrender of all the Japanese armed forces...the alternative for Japan is prompt and utter destruction."* To bomb supporters, the Potsdam Declaration was more than fair in its surrender terms and in its warning of what would happen should those terms be rejected. The Japanese did not respond to the declaration.

Additionally, bomb supporters argue that Japanese civilians were warned in advance through millions of leaflets dropped on Japanese cities by U.S. warplanes. In the months preceding the atomic bombings, some 63 million leaflets were dropped on 35 cities target for destruction by U.S. air forces. The Japanese people generally regarded the information on these leaflets as truthful, but anyone caught in possession of one was subject to arrest by the government. Some of the leaflets mentioned the terms of surrender offered in the Potsdam Declaration and urged the civilians to convince Japanese government to accept them—an unrealistic expectation to say the least. Generally the

leaflets warned that the city was considered a target and urged the civilian populations to evacuate. However, no leaflets specifically warning about a new destructive weapon were dropped until *after* Hiroshima, and it's also not clear where U.S. officials thought the entire urban population of 35 Japanese cities could viably relocate to even if they did read and heed the warnings.

Argument 4: The atom bomb was in retaliation for Japanese barbarism

Although it is perhaps not the most civilized of arguments, Americans with an "eye for an eye" philosophy of justice argue that the atomic bomb was payback for the undeniably brutal, barbaric, criminal conduct of the Japanese Army. Pumped up with their own version of master race theories, the Japanese military committed atrocities throughout Asia and the Pacific. They raped women, forced others to become sexual slaves, murdered civilians, and tortured and executed prisoners. Most famously, in a six-week period following the Japanese capture of the Chinese city of Nanjing, Japanese soldiers (and some civilians) went on a rampage. They murdered several hundred thousand unarmed civilians, and raped between 20,000-80,000 men, women and children.

With regards to Japanese conduct specific to Americans, there is the obvious "back-stabbing" aspect of the "surprise" attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. That the Japanese government was still engaged in good faith diplomatic negotiations with the State Department at the very moment the attack was underway is a singular instance of barbaric behavior that bomb supporters point to as just cause for using the atom bomb. President Truman said as much when he made his August 6 radio broadcast to the nation about Hiroshima: "The Japanese began the war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid many fold."

The infamous "Bataan Death March" provides further rationale for supporters of this argument. Despite having a presence in the Philippines since 1898 and a long-standing

strategic plan for a theoretical war with Japan, the Americans were caught unprepared for the Japanese invasion of the main island of Luzon. After retreating to the rugged Bataan peninsula and holding out for months, it became evident that America had no recourse but to abandon them to their fate. After General MacArthur removed his command to Australia under the cover of darkness, 78,000 American and Filipino troops surrendered to the Japanese, the largest surrender in American history.

Despite promises from Japanese commanders, the American prisoners were treated inhumanely. They were force-marched back up the peninsula toward trains and a POW camp beyond. Along the way they were beaten, deprived of food & water, tortured, buried alive, and executed. The episode became known as The Bataan Death March. Thousands perished along the way. And when the survivors reached their destination, Camp O'Donnell, many thousands more died from disease, starvation, and forced labor. Perhaps fueled by humiliation and a sense of helplessness, few events of WWII aroused such fury in Americans as did the Bataan Death March. To what extent it may have been a factor in President Truman's decision is unknown, but it is frequently cited, along with Pearl Harbor, as justification for the payback given out at Hiroshima and Nagasaki to those who started the war.

The remaining two arguments in support of the bomb are based on consideration of the unfortunate predicament facing President Truman as the man who inherited both the White House and years of war policy from the late President Roosevelt.

Argument 5: The Manhattan Project Expense Required Use of the Bomb

The Manhattan Project had been initiated by Roosevelt back in 1939, five years before Truman was asked to be on the Democratic ticket. By the time Roosevelt died in April 1945, almost 2 billion dollars of taxpayer money had been spent on the project. The Manhattan Project was the most expensive government project in history at that time. The President's Chief of Staff, Admiral Leahy, said, "I know FDR would have used it in a minute to prove that he had not wasted \$2 billion." Bomb supporters argue that the pressure to honor the legacy of FDR, who had been in office for so long that many Americans could hardly remember anyone else ever being president, was surely enormous. The political consequences of such a waste of expenditures, once the public found out, would have been disastrous for the Democrats for decades to come. (The counter-argument, of course, is that fear of losing an election is no justification for using such a weapon).

Argument 6: Truman Inherited the War Policy of Bombing Cities

Likewise, the decision to intentionally target civilians, however morally questionable and distasteful, had begun under President Roosevelt, and it was not something that President Truman could realistically be expected to roll back. Precedents for bombing civilians began as early as 1932, when Japanese planes bombed Chapei, the Chinese sector of Shanghai. Italian forces bombed civilians as part of their conquest of Ethiopia in 1935-1936. Germany had first bombed civilians as part of an incursion into the Spanish Civil War. At the outbreak of WWII in September 1939, President Roosevelt was troubled by the prospect of what seemed likely to be Axis strategy, and on the day of the German invasion of Poland, he wrote to the governments of France, Germany, Italy, Poland and Great Britain. Roosevelt said that these precedents for attacking civilians from the air, "has sickened the hearts of every civilized man and woman, and has profoundly shocked the conscience of humanity." He went on to describe such actions as "inhuman barbarism," and appealed to the war-makers not to target civilian populations. But Germany bombed cities in Poland in 1939, destroyed the Dutch city of Rotterdam in 1940, and infamously "blitzed" London, Coventry, and other British cities in the summer and fall of the 1940. The British retaliated by bombing German cities. Allied war leaders rationalized that to win the war, it was necessary to cripple the enemy's capacity to make war. Since cities contained factories that produced war materials, and since civilians worked in factories, the population of cities (including the "workers' dwellings" surrounding those factories) were legitimate military targets.

Despite Roosevelt's "appeal" in 1939, he and the nation had long crossed that moral line by war's end. This fact perhaps reveals the psychological effects of killing on all of the war's participants, and says something about the moral atmosphere in which President Truman found himself upon the President's death. On February 13, 1945, 1,300 U.S. and British heavy bombers firebombed the German city of Dresden, the center of German art and culture, creating a firestorm that destroyed 15 square miles and killed 25,000 civilians. Meanwhile, still five weeks before Truman took office; American bombers dropped 2,000 tons of napalm on Tokyo, creating a firestorm with hurricane-force winds. Flight crews flying high over the 16 square miles of devastation reported smelling burning flesh

below. Approximately 125,000 Japanese civilians died in that raid. By the time the atomic bomb was ready, similar attacks had been launched on the Japanese cities of Nagoya, Osaka, and Kobe. Quickly

running out of targets, the B-29 bombers went back over Tokyo and killed another 80,000 civilians. Bomb supporters argue that, although this destruction is distasteful by post-war sensibilities, it had become the norm long before President Truman took office, and the atomic bomb was just one more weapon in the arsenal to be employed under this policy. To expect the new president, who had to make decisions under enormous pressure, to roll back this policy—to roll back the social norm—was simply not realistic.

Arguments against the Bomb

Argument 1: The Bomb Was Made For Defense Only

The origins of the Manhattan Project go back to 1939, when Hungarian-born physicist Leo Szilard, who had moved to the U.S. in 1938 to conduct research at Columbia University, became convinced of the feasibility of using nuclear chain reactions to create new, powerful bombs. German scientists had just conducted a successful nuclear fission experiment, and based on those results, Szilard was able to demonstrate that uranium was capable of producing a nuclear chain reaction. Szilard noted that Germany

had stopped the exportation of uranium from Czechoslovakian mines which they had taken over in 1938. He feared that Germany was trying to build an atomic bomb, while the United States was sitting idle. Although WWII had not yet started, Germany was clearly a threat, and if the Germans had a monopoly on the atomic bomb, it could be deployed against anyone, including the United States, without warning. Szilard worked with Albert Einstein, whose celebrity gave him access to the president, to produce a letter informing Roosevelt of the situation. Their warning eventually resulted in the Manhattan Project. Bomb opponents argue that the atomic bomb was built as a defensive weapon, not an offensive one. It was intended to be a deterrent, to make Germany or any other enemy think twice before using such a weapon against the United States. To bolster their argument, these

critics point out that ever since WWII, the weapon has been used *only* as a deterrent. From 1949-1991 the Cold War was waged under the shadow of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), and even though the United States fought major wars in Korea (while Truman was still in office), Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, nuclear weapons were never again deployed. In other words, not using them in those wars has been an admission that they should never have been used offensively in the first place.

Argument 2: Use of the Bomb was Illegal

On September 30, 1938, the League of Nations, "under the recognized principles of international law," issued a unanimous resolution outlawing the intentional bombing of civilian populations, with special emphasis against bombing military objectives from the air. The League warned, "*Any attack on legitimate military objectives must be carried out in such a way that civilian populations in the neighborhood are not bombed through negligence.*" Significantly, the resolution also reaffirmed that "*the use of chemical or bacterial methods in the conduct of war is contrary to international law.*" In other words, a special category of illegal weapons had been recognized, a category today called Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).

However, bomb supporters point out that since the United States was not a member of the League of Nations; its laws did not apply. And anyway, the League had been disbanded in 1939, long before the atomic bomb was used. Additionally, the law did not specifically outlaw nuclear weapons. To that counter-argument, bomb opponents reply that since America presents itself to the world as a model for human rights, the U.S. should aspire to at least meet the basic code of conduct agreed to by the rest of the civilized world. They also point out that nuclear weapons were not specifically outlawed because they did not exist, but as a weapon of mass destruction, they most certainly would have been.

Argument 3: Use of the Atomic Bombs Was Racially Motivated

Opponents of President Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb argue that racism played an important role in the decision; that had the bomb been ready in time it never would have been used against Germany. All of America's enemies were

magazine advertisements, and in a wide array of novelty items ranging from ash trays to "Jap Hunting License" buttons. Even Tarzan, in one of the last novels written by his creator Edgar Rice Burroughs, spent time in the Pacific hunting and killing Japs. Numerous songs advocated killing all Japanese. The

popular novelty hit, “Remember Pearl Harbor” by Carson Robison, for example, urges Americans to “wipe the Jap from the map.” It continues:

*Remember how we used to call them our "little brown brothers?"
What a laugh that turned out to be
Well, we can all thank God that we're not related
To that yellow scum of the sea
They talked of peace, and of friendship
We found out just what all that talk was worth
All right, they've asked for it, and now they're going to get it
We'll blow every one of them right off of the face of the Earth*

stereotyped and caricatured in home front propaganda, but there was a clear difference in the nature of that propaganda. Although there were crude references to Germans as “krauts,” and Italians as “Tonies” or “spaghetitis,” the vast majority of ridicule was directed at their political leadership. Hitler, Nazis, and Italy’s Mussolini were routinely caricatured, but the German and Italian people weren’t. By contrast, anti-Japanese racism in American society targeted the Japanese as a race of people, and demonstrated a level of hatred comparable with Nazi anti-Jewish propaganda. The Japanese were universally caricatured as having huge buck teeth, massive fangs dripping with saliva, and monstrous thick glasses through which they leered with squinty eyes. They were further dehumanized as being snakes, cockroaches, and rats, and their entire culture was mocked, including language, customs, and religious beliefs. Anti-Japanese imagery was everywhere—in Bugs Bunny cartoons, popular music, post cards, children’s toys,

Americans didn’t like Mussolini, Hitler, and Nazis, but many hated the Japanese race. The official magazine of the US Marine Corps, *The Leatherneck*, in May 1945 called the Japanese a “pestilence,” and called for “a giant task of extermination.” The American historian Steven Ambrose, a child during the war, has said that because of the propaganda, he grew up thinking that the only good Jap was a dead Jap. That hatred began with Pearl Harbor and increased when news broke of the Bataan Death March, and with each act of defiance against America’s “island hopping” campaign. Killing became too easy, and the dehumanizing of the enemy commonplace. Some American soldiers in the Pacific sent home to their girlfriends the skulls of Japanese soldiers, to be displayed on their desks at work. American soldiers did not send home Nazi skulls as trophies or sweetheart gifts. In 1944 a US Congressman presented President Roosevelt with a letter-opener purportedly made from the arm bone of a Japanese soldier.

American racism led to a failure to distinguish between the Japanese government, dominated by hard-line militarists, and the Japanese civilian who was caught up in their government’s war. Racists viewed all

Japanese as threats not because of their political education, but because of their genetics. As further evidence, bomb opponents point to US policy toward the Japanese-Americans living in California at the time. They were rounded up, denied their basic liberties under the Constitution (even though many of them were American citizens), and sent to isolated camps in the deserts, surrounded by barbed wire, until the war’s end. Nothing on this scale was done to the Germans during WWII, or even during the First World War, when there were millions of German and Austrian immigrants and their children living in the United States. In May 1944 *Life* magazine reported on the hardships of George Yamamoto, a Japanese-American who had immigrated to the US in 1920 at the age of 17 to work on

his family’s farm. In 1942 Mr. Yamamoto worked at a fish market, ran a sporting goods store, and was a solid member of his community, along with his wife and children. They were interned, but Mr. Yamamoto applied for a relocation program, was cleared by the US government as loyal and trustworthy, and was packed off to Delaware to find work. He was run out of town before he could even start, and was relocated to New Jersey, where he was to work on a farm owned by Eddie Kowalick. But the citizens of New Jersey were no more accommodating. They feared an influx of Jap workers and didn’t want their kids sitting next to “yellow” children in school. A petition to evict Yamamoto was circulated, there were multiple threats of violence against him, and one of Mr. Kowalick’s barns was burned to the ground. After threats were made against the life of Mr. Kowalick’s baby, he felt he had no choice but to ask Mr. Yamamoto to move on. Three weeks after *Life* printed this story, they printed letters written in response.

Most of those selected by the editorial staff for publication were supportive of Mr. Yamamoto and expressed embarrassment at the ignorance of some Americans. But the magazine also published this letter, written by William M. Hinds of Birmingham, Alabama:

Sirs, there are many of us who believe that the deceit, treachery and bestiality inherent in the Japanese we are fighting in the Pacific are traits not automatically removed from members of the race merely by accident of birth in the US. There are many of us who believe, quite sincerely and simply, that Japanese immigrants to the US and their American-born children will deliberately live an impeccable American life while awaiting an opportunity to perpetrate a Pearl Harbor of their own dimensions. Cheers for the public-spirited citizens of New Jersey who ran Mr. Yamamoto away.

While it's easy to see that extreme racism toward the Japanese existed, it's much more difficult to assess the role racism may have played in President Truman's decision. However, there are a few instances in the historical record where the President does refer to the Japanese in questionable terms. In his July 25, 1945 diary entry, as Truman is writing about the bomb, he refers to the "Japs" as "savages, ruthless, merciless and fanatic." On August 11, after both Hiroshima and Nagasaki had been devastated, an American clergyman named Samuel McCrea Cavert wrote the President urging him to give the Japanese time to surrender before using any more atomic bombs. Truman replied, "When you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him as a beast." Whether these comments are racist about the Japanese people, or only express the President's opinion about the Japanese military is a matter of interpretation.

Argument 4: There Were Alternatives

Supporters of President Truman's decision to use atomic weapons against Japan tend to paint the decision as a difficult choice between two stark options—it was either American boys, or the bomb. Opponents of the bomb are adamant that there were other options available to the President, which at the very least should have been tried before resorting to the bomb.

Alternative 1: A Demonstration of the bomb One alternative might have been to arrange a demonstration of the bomb. Although the U.S. and Japan had no diplomatic relations after Pearl Harbor, a demonstration might have been arranged discretely through some back channel, perhaps through the Russians. It was already known in Washington that the Japanese had reached out to the Russians earlier to try to arrange some form of mediation with the U.S. After the war, the United States *did* conduct numerous atomic bomb tests on small volcanic atolls in the Pacific. Such a site could have been prepared in 1945. If representatives of the Japanese government, military, and scientific community could have seen the bomb, it might have been enough to convince them of the foolishness of continued resistance. If not, at least the U.S. could say that they had tried, thereby maintaining the moral high ground.

Bomb supporters make several counter-points. Although the test in the New Mexican desert had been successful, the technology was still new. What if the demonstration bomb didn't work? The United States would have looked weak and foolish. A failed demonstration might even serve to increase Japanese resolve. Additionally, the U.S. only had two bombs left after Los Alamos. If the demonstration failed to convince the Japanese to surrender, only one bomb would remain. Others would presumably be produced later, but there was no guarantee of that. One bomb, as it turned out, was not enough to force surrender. A third counter-point is that a demonstration would eliminate the element of surprise, and the Japanese might use American POWs as human shields. The four cities on the target list had not been bombed with

conventional weapons so that they might serve as accurate test subjects for the destructive powers of the atomic bomb. The Japanese would surely deduce American strategy, and might move Americans to those target cities. Finally, bomb supporters counter-argue that it was the opinion of Robert Oppenheimer and other scientists on the Interim Committee that a demonstration wouldn't convince the Japanese to surrender. "We can propose no technical demonstration likely to bring an end to the war," they wrote. "We see no acceptable alternative to direct military use."

Alternative 2: Wait For the Russians

Military analysts working for the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) in 1945 believed that two things

must happen for the Japanese leadership to surrender. There had to be acceptance of the inevitability of defeat; and a clarification from the Americans that "unconditional surrender" did not mean national annihilation. The JIC believed as early as April 11, 1945, that a Soviet declaration of war on Japan would satisfy the first necessity:

By the autumn of 1945, we believe that the vast majority of Japanese will realize the inevitability of absolute defeat regardless of whether the U.S.S.R. has actually entered the war against Japan. If at any time the U.S.S.R. should enter the war, all Japanese will realize that absolute defeat is inevitable.

A Strategy and Policy Group within the War Department arrived at the same conclusion in June, and their work was discussed between General Marshall and Secretary Stimson. The Americans also knew what the Japanese were thinking on this subject. Having long-broken the Japanese diplomatic code, the United States eavesdropped on conversations between the Japanese Foreign Minister in Tokyo, and the Japanese ambassador to the Soviet Union in Moscow. In a cable sent on June 4, the Foreign Minister wrote:

It is a matter of utmost urgency that we should not only prevent Russia from entering the war but should also induce her to adopt a favorable attitude toward Japan. I would therefore like you to miss no favorable opportunity to talk to the Soviet leaders.

The ambassador cabled back that there wasn't much reason to hope, and that he had received reports of substantial Soviet troop and supply movements heading the east. He continued:

If Russia by some chance should suddenly decide to take advantage of our weakness and intervene against us with force of arms, we would be in a completely hopeless situation. It is clear as day that the Imperial Army in Manchukuo would be completely unable to oppose the Red Army which has just won a great victory and is superior to us on all points.

The Japanese had reason to fear. In the Second World War, the United States and the Soviet Union put aside their ideological differences to form an alliance against Nazi Germany. It was an uneasy alliance; Joseph Stalin believed that the Americans and British had purposely delayed opening a second front in Europe (D-Day—June 6, 1944) so that the Russians would bear the brunt of defeating the Nazis.

Nevertheless, in a secret meeting between President Roosevelt and Stalin at Yalta, the Soviet leader had promised that three months after the end of the European campaign he would declare war on Japan and move against Japanese forces in China. In July, when President Truman

traveled to Germany to meet his Allied leaders for the first time, pinning down Stalin on the exact date was at the top of his agenda. When Truman and Stalin met on the 17th, the Soviet leader confirmed they would declare war on Japan on August 15. Later that night, Truman wrote in the diary, "*Most of the big points are settled. He'll be in the Jap War on August 15th. Fini Japs when that comes about*" (meaning, they'll be finished). Some bomb supporters point out that according to post-war interviews of Japanese leaders, none of the high-ranking officials were of a mind that a Soviet attack alone would have convinced them to surrender. However, this is irrelevant if Truman believed it would, and if intelligence information at the time suggested it would.

To summarize, by July 17 the American military, the President, and at least some Japanese all were of a mind that a Soviet intervention in the war would prove decisive. And, a date for this intervention had been set. Bomb opponents thus question why the United States used atomic bombs on August 6 and 9, when they knew the Russians were coming a week later, and when Operation Torch wasn't scheduled for months. Why not wait? Opponents believe they know the answer to that question, discussed below as argument #5.

Alternative 3: Let the Japanese Keep Their Emperor

The third and perhaps most important alternative to both the bomb and the land invasion was to modify the demand for unconditional surrender and allow the Japanese to keep their emperor. Of course, he would have to be demoted to a powerless figurehead (much like the Royal Family in Great Britain), but it was possible that this one condition alone might have been enough to satisfy the American War Department's conclusion that it was necessary to convince the Japanese that they would not be "annihilated" if they surrendered. The American government clearly understood that if they harmed the emperor, whom the Japanese revered as a god, the Japanese would resist forever. And the key to this argument lies in the fact that the American government already planned on letting the emperor stay. All they had to do was find a way to hint their intentions loud enough for the Japanese to hear. On June 13, in a memorandum to President Truman from Acting Secretary of State Joseph Grew (former American ambassador to Japan), Grew wrote:

Every evidence, without exception, that we are able to obtain of the views of the Japanese with regard to the institution of the throne, indicates that the non-molestation of the person of the present emperor and the preservation of the institution of the throne comprise irreducible Japanese terms...They are prepared for prolonged resistance if it be the intention of the United Nations to try the present emperor as a war criminal or to abolish the imperial institution...Failure on our part to clarify our intentions in this regard..will insure prolongation of the war and cost a large number of human lives.

Secretary of War Stimson also argued that American intentions regarding the emperor should be made clearer. General Marshall referred to this as “giving definition to unconditional surrender” (ultimately resulting in the Potsdam Declaration). On the Interim Committee, he was joined in this point by Undersecretary of the Navy Ralph A. Bard. In a June 27 memo to Stimson, Bard wrote:

During recent weeks I have also had the feeling very definitely that the Japanese government may be searching for some opportunity which they could use as a medium of surrender. Following the three-power conference emissaries from this country could contact representatives from Japan somewhere on the China Coast and make representations with regard to Russia's position and at the same time give them some information regarding the proposed use of atomic power, together with whatever assurances the President might care to make with regard to the Emperor of Japan and the treatment of the Japanese nation following unconditional surrender. It seems quite possible to me that this presents the opportunity which the Japanese are looking for.

But by the time Stimson pushed on this issue, the President was very much under the influence of former Senator James Byrnes, who had become Truman's personal advisor and was soon to be named the new Secretary of State. Byrnes argued that the President would be crucified politically by the Republicans for “making a deal” with the Japanese. Byrnes won the argument and eliminated crucial language in the Potsdam Declaration about the Emperor, Truman gave a less-than-convincing excuse that Congress didn't seem interested in modifying unconditional surrender, and the Japanese were left in the dark with regards to American intentions toward the emperor. Although there was certainly no guarantee that taking this action would bring about a Japanese surrender, bomb opponents argue that it was at least worth a try (although bomb supporters counter-argue that doing so

could have been interpreted as a weakness by the Japanese military leadership and could actually have emboldened the Japanese to fight on). Instead, the Japanese ignored the Potsdam Declaration, the atomic bombs were dropped, the Japanese surrendered, and the Americans, as planned, allowed the emperor to stay on the throne (where he remained until his death in 1989). This is the one area where Secretary of War Stimson had regrets. His biographer later wrote, “*Only on the question of the Emperor did Stimson take, in 1945, a conciliatory view; only on this question did he later believe that history might find that the United States, by its delay in stating its position, had prolonged the war.*”

Alternative 4: Continue Conventional Bombing

Some military analysts were convinced in the summer of 1945 that Japan was very near surrender, that the pounding they were taking from conventional weapons would soon convince the Japanese cabinet that further resistance was futile. That position was bolstered when, after the war, Secretary of War Stimson commissioned a board to perform a detailed investigation into the effectiveness of Allied bombings during the war. They subsequently interrogated 700 Japanese military, government and industrial officials, and they recovered and translated documents related to the war effort. Their report, the Strategic Bombing Survey, makes the obvious observation that Japan might have surrendered earlier if they had had a different government. But it goes on to express a more startling opinion:

Nevertheless, it seems clear that, even without the atomic bombing attacks, air supremacy over Japan could have exerted sufficient pressure to bring about unconditional surrender and obviate the need for invasion...Based on a detailed investigation of all the facts, and supported by the testimony of the surviving Japanese leaders involved, it is the Survey's opinion that certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945, Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated.

Bomb supporters are extremely critical of this alternative. Specifically, they charge that information counter to the Survey's conclusion was left out of the report, and that inter-service wrangling resulted in the Air Force over exaggerating its role in the war so as to secure a large post-war budget. They also point

out that even if the Survey's evidence and conclusions *were* accurate, it is illogical to criticize the Truman administration for not pursuing an alternative to the bomb that was based on information obtained only *after* the war was over. The President had to make his choice based on information known to him at the time. More importantly, bomb supporters are critical of this alternative because despite the overwhelming naval and air superiority enjoyed by US forces at the end of the summer of 1945; those forces were still suffering significant losses. Kamikazes were still attacking American vessels. The USS *Indianapolis*, after delivering the Hiroshima bomb materials to Tinian island in the Marianas, was sunk on July 30. Of 1,196 crewmen aboard, approximately 300 went down with the ship. Of the remaining 900 men who went into the water, only 317 survivors were picked up when the wreckage was discovered four days later. The rest died from exposure, dehydration, and shark attacks. It was the single greatest loss of life in the entire history of the US Navy. Meanwhile, Allied casualties were still averaging about 7,000 per week. As war veteran and writer Paul Fussell later pointed out, "Two weeks more means 14,000 more killed and wounded, three weeks more, 21,000. Those weeks mean the world if you're one of those thousands or related to one of them." And Allied losses continued even *after* the atomic bombings. Between August 9 and the actual surrender on the 15th, eight American POWs were executed via beheadings, the US submarine *Bonefish* was sunk with the loss of its entire crew, and the destroyer *Callagan* and the USS *Underhill* were lost.

Argument #5: Use of the bomb was more to scare Russia than to defeat Japan.

As discussed above, bomb opponents question why the United States used atomic bombs on August 6 and 9, when they knew the Russians were going to declare war on Japan a week later, and when Operation Torch wasn't scheduled for months. Why not wait? Bomb opponents believe that the American government did not wait for the Russians because they were already thinking about the post-war world and how they could best limit Soviet gains when they redrew the map of Europe. They believed the shock-and-awe effect of using the atomic bomb against Japan would make the Soviet Union more manageable in post-war negotiations. (This argument had been made most consistently by historian Gar Alperovitz). There was certainly reason to be concerned about the Soviet Union. When Germany collapsed, the Russians had made huge advances. Russian troops moved into Hungary and Rumania and showed no inclination to leave there or the Balkans. But was it an acceptable trade-off to annihilate several hundred thousand civilians just so the Russians wouldn't be able to get in on the kill of Japan, and so the U.S. might have the upper-hand in the post-war world? Bomb opponents are abhorred by the moral implications.

In the spring of 1945, as Germany surrendered, some of the scientists who had developed the new weapon as a Nazi deterrent started to have reservations about their invention. One was Leo Szilard, who had written the letter along with Einstein back in 1939 that had convinced Roosevelt to start the Manhattan Project. In April 1945 Einstein wrote a letter of introduction for Szilard, who was able to get a meeting with Mrs. Roosevelt on May 8. But then the President died. When Szilard tried to get a meeting with Truman, he was intercepted by James Byrnes, who received him in his South Carolina home. Szilard's biggest concern was that the Soviet Union should be informed about the bomb ahead of time. He was afraid that the shock of America using the bomb on Japan would NOT make the Soviets more manageable, but would instead spur them to develop their own atomic bomb as quickly as possible, possibly igniting an arms race that could eventually lead to a nuclear war. But Szilard was talking to exactly the wrong person. Byrnes told

Szilard, "Russia might be more manageable if impressed by American military might, and that a demonstration of the bomb [on Japan] might impress Russia." Years later, Szilard wrote of the encounter, "*I shared Byrnes' concerns about Russia's throwing her weight around in the post-war period, but I was completely flabbergasted by the assumption that rattling the bomb might make Russia more manageable.*" He later mused, "How much better off the world might be had I been born in America and become influential in American politics, and had Byrnes been born in Hungary and studied physics."

Having met with Szilard, Byrnes was even more firmly convinced of the rightness of his own views. At the Interim Committee meetings, he cut off any debate about warning the Soviets, and Secretary of War Stimson gave in. When Stimson briefed Truman on June 6, he informed the President that the Interim Committee recommended he not tell their Soviet ally about the bomb, "Until the first bomb had been

successfully laid on Japan.” But Stimson wasn’t sure how they should handle the meeting with Stalin at Potsdam. Truman replied that he had purposefully delayed the meeting for as long as possible to give the Manhattan scientists more time. Having been counseled by Byrnes, Truman was already thinking about how to handle the Russians. According to historian Gar Alperovitz in the 1985 edition of his work, *Atomic Diplomacy*, when Truman was on his way to Potsdam, he was overheard by a White House Aide to have said during a discussion about the test bomb and what it meant to America's relationship with the Soviet Union, *"If it explodes, as I think it will, I'll certainly have a hammer on those boys."* For decades now bomb opponents have cited this story as evidence of Truman’s true intentions. However, a close look at the sources raises questions about Alperovitz’s methods. That story was first told by the White House Aide himself, Jonathan Daniels, in a book published in 1950. Daniels says he had heard the story second-hand and he stated specifically that Truman had been referring to Japan. He only speculated that the President might also have had the Russians in mind.

While at Potsdam, Truman received a coded message confirming the success of the test bomb. According to Winston Churchill, it completely changed Truman’s demeanor toward Stalin; made him more confident and bossy. Just before leaving Potsdam, Truman did feel obliged to say something to the Soviet leader. He writes in his diary, “I casually mentioned to Stalin that we had a new weapon of unusual destructive force.” But Truman did not say it was an atomic bomb. On his way back from Potsdam,

Truman gave the order to use the new weapon (even though they had not yet issued the Potsdam Declaration).

But Leo Szilard wasn’t quite finished yet. Having been dismissed by Byrnes, he wrote a petition to the President of the United States, in which he warned that unless handled properly, the bomb might ignite an arms race that could result in “devastation on an unimaginable scale.” Dated July 17, the petition was co-signed by 69 Manhattan Project scientists. President Truman did not see the petition until after the atomic bombs had been dropped. It was intercepted and held back by General Leslie Groves, military head of the Manhattan Project and a key advisor to James Byrnes.

Argument #6: Truman Was Unprepared for Presidential Responsibility

Another criticism directed toward President Truman is that he simply wasn’t ready for the responsibility of being president; he didn’t understand the ramifications of his decisions, he delegated too much authority, and he was unduly influenced by James Byrnes.

Byrnes has been discussed in detail above, but a summary of the key moments where his influence was most critical is appropriate. He intercepted Leo Szilard and made sure the President never heard his views. He dominated the Interim Committee as Truman’s personal representative, where he stifled debate and pushed successfully for a recommendation to the President that the bomb be dropped without warning either the Russians or the Japanese. Additionally, Truman allowed Byrnes to erase crucial language in the Potsdam Declaration. The original draft specifically mentioned the bomb, and American intentions to allow the emperor to stay. The result was a final draft that threatened only vague “utter destruction,” and might have been interpreted as a threat to the emperor. Without the specific language regarding the emperor, the Japanese were left with the promise that justice would

be meted out to all war criminals. Critics argue that Truman, who stood so small in FDR’s shoes, was too inexperienced to form his own opinions, and too weak to resist Byrne’s dominance.

A second criticism of Truman is that he did not keep enough personal control over this terrifying new weapon. The military order to use the bomb, delivered before the Potsdam Declaration had been issued, is an open-ended order in which the Air Force had too much control. The aircraft group that included the Enola Gay was directed to deliver the first atomic bomb, weather-permitting, on any of the four target cities: Hiroshima, Kokura, Niigata, or Nagasaki, on or after August 3. The order goes on to say, *"Additional bombs will be delivered on the above targets as soon as made ready by the project staff. Further instructions will be issued concerning targets other than those listed above."* In other words, the Air Force had instructions to bomb any or all of these four cities whenever atomic bombs were ready. If a dozen atomic bombs had been ready instead of only two, no further permission would have been required to use them. In fact, it took an order from President Truman to stop any further bombing after Nagasaki had been hit.

At the very least, critics argue, Truman should have required permission to use the second bomb. Originally, the second target was not scheduled to be attacked until six days after Hiroshima. But with bad weather in the forecast, and with the Russians suddenly declaring war on Japan after the Hiroshima bomb, General Groves moved up the date to make sure that the plutonium bomb was “field tested” before the war could end (Hiroshima had been hit with a Uranium bomb). Some critics have pointed

out that three days was simply not enough time for the Japanese to even confirm what had happened in Hiroshima, which appeared to them to have simply blinked off the map. Although the Japanese leadership suspected the bombing was atomic in nature, they sent scientists to Hiroshima to confirm these suspicions and they had not even returned with their findings when Nagasaki was hit. There are some critics who support dropping the first bomb, but feel the second was completely unnecessary. Either way, critics of the dropping of “Fat Man” on Nagasaki blame Truman for a lack of leadership.

Some critics question whether or not Truman really understood the weapon, and the human consequence of his decision to use it. On July 25, Truman describes in his diary some of the details he had just received about the test bomb in Los Alamos. He then writes, “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.” On the 9th, the day Nagasaki was bombed, President Truman addressed the nation on radio. He said, “The world will note that the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, a military base. That was because we wished in this first attack to avoid, insofar as possible, the killing of civilians.” Considering the nature of the weapon, the Interim Committee’s recommendation to use the bomb against “workers’ dwellings”, and that the center of the city was the aiming point for the bomb, these claims are jaw-dropping. Either President Truman really did not understand the bomb, or he was covering his “posterity”. Either

way, critics argue, it does not reflect well on the President. If the former is true, evidence suggests Hiroshima and Nagasaki quickly educated the president. On August 10, having received reports and photographs of the effects of the Hiroshima bomb, Truman ordered a halt to further atomic bombings. That night, Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace recorded in his diary, “Truman said he had given orders to stop atomic bombing. He said the thought of wiping out another 100,000 people was too horrible. He didn’t like the idea of killing, as he said, ‘all those kids’.”

Argument 7: The Atomic Bomb Was Inhumane

The logical conclusion to the list of arguments against the bomb is that use of such a weapon was simply inhumane. Hundreds of thousands of civilians with no democratic rights to oppose their militarist government, including women and children, were vaporized, turned into charred blobs of carbon, horrifically burned, buried in rubble, speared by flying debris, and saturated with

radiation. Entire families, whole neighborhoods were simply wiped out. The survivors faced radiation sickness, starvation, and crippling mutilations. Then there were the “hidden cracks,” the spiritual, emotional, and psychological damage. Japanese outside of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, scared and ignorant about radiation sickness, treated bomb victims as if they had a communicable disease. They were shunned and ostracized from Japanese society. Some blamed themselves for various reasons—like a woman who convinced her parents to move to Hiroshima before the bomb was dropped,

or those who were the only survivor of a family, or of an entire school. Others, unable to cope with trauma left untreated, committed suicide. Radiation continued to haunt the survivors, bringing a lifetime of sickness, not the least of which was an increase in the rates of various cancers. Birth defects for those pregnant at the time jumped significantly, and although the data on birth defects passed down through generations is inconclusive (Hiroshima and Nagasaki are ongoing laboratories of the long-term effects of radiation exposure), bomb survivors and their offspring continue to suffer anxiety about the possibilities. It is impossible to do justice to this argument in a simple summary of the arguments. A few specific first-hand accounts could be repeated here, but they would be

insufficient. To truly grasp the magnitude of the suffering caused by the use of atomic weaponry on human beings, one has to be immersed in the personal. The cold statistics must give way to the human story. For some Americans that process began with the publication of John Hersey’s *Hiroshima* in 1946, and it continues today through such autobiographical accounts as Keiji Nakazawa’s epic manga series *Barefoot Gen* (all ten volumes of which were recently published in English by Last Gasp Press),

and through stunning documentaries like HBO's *White Light, Black Rain* (2007).

In 1945, not many Americans seemed to be thinking things through. Those cold statistics and that war-time hatred made using the bomb easy to rationalize. Leo Szilard was one of those few, when he worried that using it without any warning would hurt America's moral standing in the world. In the years that followed, some Americans who were intimately involved with the atomic bombs did start to think things through. Admiral Leahy, President Roosevelt's Chief of Staff, wrote in his memoir: It is my opinion that 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... My own feeling was that in being the first to use it, we had adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages. I was not taught to make wars in that fashion, and that wars cannot be won by destroying women and children.

Even some of those who participated in the mission had regrets. Captain Robert A. Lewis, co-pilot on the Enola Gay's mission over Hiroshima, wrote in his log as the bomb exploded, "My god, what have we done?" In 1955 he participated in an episode of the television show *This is Your Life* that featured a Hiroshima survivor. Lewis donated money on behalf of his employer for operations to help remove the scar tissue of young Japanese women horribly disfigured by the bomb ten years earlier.

In his recent autobiography, film maker Michael Moore tells a story from his time as a young man in Flint, when he befriended a Catholic priest. Father Zabelka was retired, but still active in community service. One day he told Moore that he wanted to make a confession. "I have serious blood on my hands," he said. He plunked down an old photograph of a group of crewmen standing before the Enola Gay, and then pointed to one of those young men in the photo. "That's me," he said. On August 6, 1945, Father Zabelka, had blessed the Little Boy bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima. He continued: With my blessing. With the blessing of Jesus Christ and the Church. I did that. And three days later, I blessed the crew and the plane that dropped the bomb on Nagasaki. Nagasaki was a Catholic city, the only majority Christian city in Japan. The pilot of the plane was a Catholic. And we obliterated the lives of forty thousand fellow Catholics, seventy-three thousand in all. There were three orders of nuns in Japan, all based in Nagasaki. Every last one of them was vaporized. Not a single nun from any of the three orders was alive. And I blessed that.

America supposedly places a high value on life. To a significant portion of the country, protecting a fertilized human egg is so important; they are willing to base their vote on this one issue alone. And humaneness extends to the animal world as well. People go to prison for being cruel to their pets. In a society that places so much value on life, how can the immense death and suffering of non-combatants caused by the atomic bombs be justified? Opponents of President Truman's decision to use those weapons argue simply that it cannot.