

Argumentative Essay on the United States' Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb

Sources A-V

Neutral Sources

Document A: Textbook overview of the Atomic Bombs.

Even before the bomb was tested, American officials began to debate how to use it. Admiral William Leahy, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, opposed using the bomb because it killed civilians indiscriminately. He believed that an economic blockade and conventional bombing would convince Japan to surrender.

Secretary of War Henry Stimson wanted to warn the Japanese about the bomb while at the same time telling them that they could keep the emperor if they surrendered. Secretary of State James Byrnes, however, wanted to drop the bomb without any warning to shock Japan into surrendering.

President Truman later wrote that he “regarded the bomb as a military weapon and never had any doubts that it should be used.” His advisers had warned him to expect massive casualties if the United States invaded Japan. Truman believed it was his duty as president to use every weapon available to save American lives.

Source: American History Textbook, *American Vision*, pg. 615.

Document B: The Costs of the Manhattan Project

The cost of the project that designed and built the atomic bombs used at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was \$1,889,604,000 dollars. Today the same project would cost \$21,570,821,000.

Source: “The Costs of the Manhattan Project.” Brookings. 2002. The Brookings Institute.
<<http://www.brookings.edu/projects/archive/nucweapons/manhattan.aspx>>.

Document C: Hiroshima and Nagasaki Casualties

TABLE A: Estimates of Casualties

	Hiroshima	Nagasaki
Pre-raid population	255,000	195,000
Dead	66,000	39,000
Injured	69,000	25,000
Total Casualties	135,000	64,000

TABLE B: Cause of Immediate Deaths

Hiroshima	
Cause of Death	Percent of Total
Burns	60%
Falling debris	30
Other	10

Nagasaki	
Cause of Death	Percent of Total
Burns	95%
Falling debris	9
Flying glass	7
Other	7

Source: "The Atomic Bomb." Stanford History Education Group. <<https://sheg.stanford.edu/atomic-bomb>>.

Arguments FOR Using the Atomic Bomb

Document D: Marshall, King, and Leahy, military advisors to President Truman, discuss predicted casualties during the planning for the invasion of Japan:

"He said Marshall and King both strongly advocated the invasion of Kyushu (one of Japan's islands) at the earliest possible date. Leahy had been opposed to invasion of the Jap mainland. Marshall held that such an attempt on Kyushu would cost in casualties not more than 63,000 of the 190,000 combatant troops estimated as necessary for the invasion."

"Admiral Leahy recalled that the President had been interested in knowing what the price in casualties for Kyushu would be and whether or not that price could be paid. He points out that the troops on Okinawa had lost 35 percent in casualties. If this percentage were applied to the number of troops to be employed in Kyushu, he thought from similarity of the fighting to be expected that this would give a good estimate of the casualties to be expected."

Source: 1945 Ayers Papers, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum. 2014. 11 Mar. 2015

<<http://archive.today/www.trumanlibrary.org>>

Document E. *Thank God for the Atomic Bomb, 1990*

My division, like most of the ones transferred from Europe was going to take part in the invasion at Honshu (an island of Japan). The people who preferred invasion to A-bombing seemed to have no intention of proceeding to the Japanese front themselves. I have already noted what a few more days would mean to the luckless troops and sailors on the spot.... On Okinawa, only a few weeks before Hiroshima, 123,000 Japanese and Americans killed each other. War is immoral. War is cruel.

Source: Paul Fussell, a World War II Soldier, *Thank God for the Atom Bomb, 1990*.

Document F: Lester Bernstein, *New York Times*, 10/24/65

"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."

Source: Bernstein, Lester. *New York Times*, October 24, 1965.

Document G: Journalist onboard Enola Gay - pity or compassion

Nagasaki, 9 August 1945

William T. Laurence

...

My mind soon returns to the mission I am on. Somewhere beyond these vast mountains of white clouds ahead of me there lies Japan, the land of our enemy. In about four hours from now one of the its cities, making weapons of war for use against us, will be wiped off the map by the greatest weapon ever made by man. In one tenth of a millionth of a second, a fraction of time immeasurable by any clock, a whirlwind from the skies will pulverize thousand of its buildings and tens of thousands of its inhabitants.

...

Does one feel any pity or compassion for the poor devils about to die? Not when one thinks of Pearl Harbor and the Death March on Bataan (Carey 635.)

Source: Carey, John, Ed. Eye-Witness to History. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.

Document H: *President Truman responds to the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America.*

My dear Mr. Cavert:

Nobody is more disturbed over the use of Atomic bombs than I am but I was greatly disturbed over the unwarranted attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor and their murder of our prisoners of war. The only language they seem to understand is the one we have been using to bombard them. When you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him as a beast. It is most regrettable but nevertheless true.

Sincerely yours, Harry S. Truman

Source: "Public Paper of the Presidents: Harry S. Truman 1945-53." Harry S. Truman Library and Museum. March 3, 2015. Truman Library. <<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=1494>>.

Document I: *New York Times, August 6, 1995*

"The bomb was unfortunate, but it was the only means to bring Japan to a surrender," argues Sadao Asada, a historian at Doshisha University in Kyoto. Professor Asada cites Japanese archival evidence that military officials were likely to fight on, furiously, until the end. "Sacrifice 20 million Japanese lives," a senior Japanese navy official urged in August 1945, with tears in his eyes, as he proposed a huge suicide attack on the Allies."

Source: Kristof, Nicholas D. "Hiroshima: A special report; The Bomb: An Act That Haunts Japan and America." New York Times, August 6, 1995.

Document J: Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, on the decision to drop the bombs.

"The face of war is the face of death; death is an inevitable part of every order that a wartime leader gives. The decision to use the atomic bomb was a decision that brought death to over a hundred thousand Japanese...

"But this deliberate, premeditated destruction was our least abhorrent alternative. The destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki put an end to the Japanese war. It stopped the fire raids, and the strangling blockade; it ended the ghastly specter of a clash of great land armies. In this last great action of the Second World War we were given final proof that war is death."

- Secretary of War Henry Stimson

Source: Stimson, Henry L. "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb." Harper's Magazine, February, 1947.

Document K: President Truman on his decision

"I had then set up a committee of top men and had asked them to study with great care the implications the new weapons might have for us. It was their recommendation that the bomb be used against the enemy as soon as it could be done. They recommended further that it should be used without specific warning... I had realized, of course, that an atomic bomb explosion would inflict damage and casualties beyond imagination. On the other hand, the scientific advisors of the committee reported... that no technical demonstration they might propose, such as over a deserted island, would be likely to bring the war to an end. It had to be used against an enemy target. The final decision of where and when to use the atomic bomb was up to me. Let there be no mistake about it. I regarded the bomb as a military weapon and never doubted it should be used."

- President Harry S. Truman

Source: "Truman, Harry S." *World War II Reference Library*. Ed. Barbara C. Bigelow, et al. Vol. 4: Primary Sources. Detroit: UXL, 2000. 117-128. *U.S. History in Context*. Web. 11 Mar. 2015.

Document L: Telegram from Senator Richard Russell to President Harry Truman the evening after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima:

Permit me to respectfully suggest that we cease our efforts to cajole Japan into surrendering in accordance with the Potsdam Declaration. Let us carry the war to them until they beg us to accept the unconditional surrender. The foul attack on Pearl Harbor brought us into war and I am unable to see any valid reason why we should be so much more considerate and lenient in dealing with Japan than with Germany..... The contemptuous answer of the Japs to the Potsdam Ultimatum justifies a revision of that document and sterner peace terms....Our people have not forgotten that the Japanese struck us the first blow in this war without the slightest warning. They believe that we should continue to strike the Japanese until they are brought groveling to their knees. We should cease our appeals to Japan to sue for peace. The next plea for Peace should come from an utterly destroyed Tokyo. With assurances of esteem,
Richard B. Russell, US Senator.

Source: "For Victory, Not Vengeance - America in WWII magazine." 2012. 11 Mar. 2015
<<http://www.americainwwii.com/articles/for-victory-not-vengeance/>>

Document M: Warning the Soviet Union of the US's new power

On July 24, at the Potsdam conference, Truman walked carefully around to Stalin, who had stood up and was preparing to leave the hall and told about the test explosion of a nuclear bomb. Truman did not use the word "nuclear" and simply related that the United States had just successfully tested a new weapon of great explosive power and that he wanted the Soviets to know this fact. Truman proudly annotated the photograph of adjournment of the July 24 session, "This is the place I told Stalin about the Atom Bomb, which was exploded July 6, 1945 in New Mexico. He didn't realize what I was talking about.

Source: "Warning the Soviet Union of the US's New Power". Harry S. Truman Library and Museum. March 3, 2015. Truman Library. <<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/>>.

Document N: James Byrnes was one of Truman's advisers on the atomic bomb. In addition to defeating Japan, he wanted to keep the Soviet Union from expanding its influence in Asia and to limit its influence in Europe.

"[Byrnes] was concerned about Russia's postwar behavior. Russian troops had moved into Hungary and Romania, and Byrnes thought it would be very difficult to persuade Russia to withdraw her troops from these countries, that Russia might be more manageable if impressed by American military might, and that a demonstration of the bomb might impress Russia."

Source: "Using Atomic Bombs against Japan, 1945 - Digital History." 2012. 11 Mar. 2015

<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/topic_display.cfm?tcid=63>

Arguments Against Using the Atomic Bomb

Document O: Oak Ridge Petition

To the President of the United States:

We, the undersigned scientific personnel of the Clinton Laboratories, believe that the world-wide social and political consequences of the power of the weapon now being developed on this Project impose a special moral obligation on the government and people of the United States in introducing the weapon in warfare.

It is further believed that the power of this weapon should be made known by demonstration to the peoples of the world, irrespective of the course of the present conflict, for in this way the body of world opinion may be made the determining factor in the absolute preservation of peace.

Therefore we recommend that before this weapon be used without restriction in the present conflict, its powers should be adequately described and demonstrated, and the Japanese nation should be given the opportunity to consider the consequences of further refusal to surrender. We feel that this course of action will heighten the effectiveness of the weapon in this war and will be of tremendous effect in the prevention of future wars (Szlyard.)

Source: Szlyard, Leo. "A Petition to the President of the United States." Atomic Bomb: Decision. September 6, 2014. Gene Dannen. November 14, 2014. <<http://www.dannen.com/decision/franck.html>>.

Document P: Nippon Times (Tokyo), August 10, 1945

"How can a human being with any claim to a sense of moral responsibility deliberately let loose an instrument of destruction which can at one stroke annihilate an appalling segment of mankind? This is not war: this is not even murder; this is pure nihilism. This is a crime against God and humanity which strikes at the very basis of moral existence. What meaning is there in any international law, in any rule of human conduct, in any concept of right and wrong, if the very foundations of morality are to be overthrown as the use of this instrument of total destruction threatens to do?"

Source: Nippon Times (Tokyo), August 10, 1945.

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

"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."

Source: William D. Leahy, *I Was There*, pg. 441.

Document R: Telegram from the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America to the President of the United States

Many Christians are deeply disturbed over use of Atomic Bombs against Japanese cities because of their necessarily indiscriminate destructive efforts and because their use sets extremely dangerous precedent for future of mankind. Bishop Oxnam, President of the Council and John Foster Dulles Chairman of its commission on a just and durable peace are preparing statement for probable release tomorrow urging that Atomic bombs be regarded as trust for humanity and that Japanese nation be given genuine opportunity and time to verify facts about new bombs and to accept surrender terms. Respectfully urge that ample opportunity be given Japan to reconsider ultimatum before any further devastation by atomic bomb is visited upon her people.

Source: "Telegram from the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America sent President Truman on August 9, 1945." [Shapell Manuscript Foundation](http://www.shapell.org/). <<http://www.shapell.org/>>.

Document S: Japanese Government's Official Protest to US State Department over Bombing

"Combatant and noncombatant men and women, old and young, are massacred without discrimination by the atmospheric pressure of the explosion, as well as by the radiating heat which result there from. Consequently there is involved a bomb having the most cruel effects humanity has ever known. . . . The bombs in question, used by the Americans, by their cruelty and by their terrorizing effects, surpass by far gas or any other arm, the use of which is prohibited. Japanese protests against U.S. desecration of international principles of war paired the use of the atomic bomb with the earlier firebombing, which massacred old people, women and children, destroying and burning down Shinto and Buddhist temples, schools, hospitals, living quarters, etc. . . . They now use this new bomb, having an uncontrollable and cruel effect much greater than any other arms or projectiles ever used to date. This constitutes a new crime against humanity and civilization."

Source: U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945: The British Commonwealth, The Far West (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 6: 473-473.

Document T: *Hiroshima Diary*

The explosion was a momentary happening but it profoundly changed the lives of the Hiroshima citizens. Those who were close to the hypocentre are dead. Those who were somewhat removed have recovered. A month has passed and we have treated and studied some 5,000 patients and our work continues. I would like to summarise the results of our study and present the following conclusions:

Those who were exposed within 500 metres out of doors were killed instantly or died within four or five days. Some who were within 500 metres were protected by buildings and hence not burned. Within a period of two to 15 days, many of these people developed the so-called "radiation sickness" and died. This sickness was manifested by anorexia, vomiting, haematemesis,[vomiting blood] and haemoptysis [coughing blood].

Those exposed in the 300 to 1,000-metre zone have shown symptoms similar to those who were exposed within 500 metres, but the onset of symptoms was late and insidious. The death rate in this group has been high.

Source: Hiroshima Diary: The Journal of a Japanese Physician, 6 August to 30 September 1945 (University of North Carolina Press).

Document U: An account of *Yoshitaka Kawamoto, who was thirteen years old when the first Atomic bomb was dropped near his classroom.*

One of my classmates, I think his name is Fujimoto, he muttered something and pointed outside the window, saying, "A B-29 is coming." He pointed outside with his finger. So I began to get up from my chair and asked him, "Where is it?" Looking in the direction that he was pointing towards, I got up on my feet, but I was not yet in an upright position when it happened. All I can remember was a pale lightening flash for two or three seconds. Then, I collapsed. I don't know much time passed before I came to. It was awful, awful. The smoke was coming in from somewhere above the debris. Sandy dust was flying around. . .

I crawled over the debris, trying to find someone who were still alive. Then, I found one of my classmates lying alive. I held him up in my arms. It is hard to tell, his skull was cracked open, his flesh was dangling out from his head. He had only one eye left, and it was looking right at me. . . . he told me to go away.

I, so, was running, hands were trying to grab my ankles, they were asking me to take them along. I was only a child then. And I was horrified at so many hands trying to grab me. I was in pain, too. So all I could do was to get rid of them, it s terrible to say, but I kicked their hands away. I still feel bad about that. I went to Miyuki Bridge to get some water. At the river bank, I saw so many people collapsed there. . . I was small, so I pushed on the river along the small steps. The water was dead people. I had to push the bodies aside to drink the muddy water. We didn't know anything about radioactivity that time. I stood up in the water and so many bodies were floating away along the stream.

Source: "Voice of Hibakusha - Inicom, Inc." 11 Mar. 2015 <<http://www.inicom.com/hibakusha/>>

Document V: United States Strategic Bombing Survey

The 1946 United States Strategic Bombing Survey concluded that it had been unnecessary to the winning of the war. After interviewing hundreds of Japanese civilian and military leaders after Japan surrendered, it reported: "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."

Source: "United States Strategic Bombing Survey; Summary Report" pg. 26. United States Government Printing Office (1946). Retrieved on July 28, 2006.