

Document-Based Question

The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima & Nagasaki: A Military Necessity?

Compiled from Scott Fields, McKeel Academy and various sources

Directions

The following documents focus on the Pacific Theater during World War II and the decision by President Harry S. Truman and his advisors to use the world's first atomic weapons on Japan. You are to read/analyze each of the following documents in the order that they appear. Following each document you are to answer the questions based upon your reading/analysis to the best of your ability. Then you will utilize the documents, your answers to the questions, and your prior knowledge to write a well-organized **5 paragraph argumentative essay** based on the following prompt. Your essay should include an introductory paragraph followed by a body that includes specific details from the documents that have been provided for you.

Essay Prompt

One of the most controversial turning points in history was the decision made by U.S. President Harry S. Truman to use atomic weapons on Japan, the lone remaining Axis Power at the conclusion of World War II. In your opinion, was the decision to drop atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki a necessity? Justify your answer.

Historical Background

In the early morning hours of July 16, 1945, great anticipation and fear ran rampant at White Sands Missile Range near Alamogordo, New Mexico. Dr. Robert Oppenheimer, director of the Manhattan Project, could hardly breathe. Years of secrecy, research, and tests were riding on this moment. "For the last few seconds, he stared directly ahead and when the announcer shouted, 'Now!' and there came this tremendous burst of light followed abruptly thereafter by the deep growling of the explosion, his face relaxed into an expression of tremendous relief," recalled General L. R. Groves of Oppenheimer, in a memorandum for Secretary of War George Marshall. The explosion, which carried more power than 20,000 tons of TNT and was visible for more than 200 miles, had succeeded. The world's first atomic bomb had been detonated.

With the advent of the nuclear age, new dilemmas in the art of warfare arose. The war in Europe had concluded in May. The Pacific war would receive full attention from the United States War Department. As late as May 1945, the U.S. was engaged in heavy fighting with the Japanese at Iwo Jima and Okinawa. In these most bloody conflicts, the United States had sustained more than 75,000 casualties. These victories insured the United States was within air striking distance of the Japanese mainland. The bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese to initiate United States entrance into the war, just four years before, was still fresh on the minds of many Americans. A feeling of vindication and a desire to end the

war strengthened the resolve of the United States to quickly and decisively conclude it. President Harry Truman had many alternatives at his disposal for ending the war: invade the Japanese mainland, hold a demonstration of the destructive power of the atomic bomb for Japanese dignitaries, drop an atomic bomb on selected industrial Japanese cities, bomb and blockade the islands, wait for Soviet entry into the war on August 15, or mediate a compromised peace. “Operation Olympia”, a full-scale landing of United States armed forces, was already planned for the Japanese island of Kyushu on November 1, 1945, and a bomb and blockade plan had already been instituted over the Japanese mainland for several months.

The Japanese resolve to fight had been seriously hampered in the preceding months. Their losses at Iwo Jima and Okinawa had been staggering. Their navy had ceased to exist as an effective fighting force and the air corps had been decimated. American B-29 “Superfortresses” made bombing runs over military targets on the Japanese mainland an integral part of their air campaign. Japan's lack of air power hindered their ability to fight. The imprecision of bombing and the use of devastating city bombing in Europe eventually swayed United States Pacific theater military leaders to authorize bombing of Japanese mainland cities. Incendiary and other bombs decimated Japanese cities including Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, and Kobe. In all, hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed in these air strikes meant to deter the resolve of the Japanese people. Yet, Japanese resolve stayed strong and the idea of a bloody "house-to-house" invasion of the Japanese mainland would produce thousands more American and Allied casualties. The Allied leaders declared at the Potsdam Conference in late July 1945 that the Japanese must unconditionally surrender.

After Japanese leaders flatly rejected the Potsdam Declaration, President Truman authorized the use of the atomic bomb anytime after August 3, 1945. On the clear morning of August 6, the first atomic bomb, nicknamed *Little Boy*, was dropped on the city of Hiroshima. Leveling over sixty percent of the city, 70,000 residents died instantaneously in a searing flash of heat, while many thousands more were killed as buildings crumbled as a result of the explosions shock wave throughout the city. Three days later, on August 9, a second bomb, *Fat Man*, was dropped on Nagasaki. Over 20,000 people died instantly. In the successive weeks, tens of thousands more Japanese died from the after-effects of the radiation exposure of the blast.

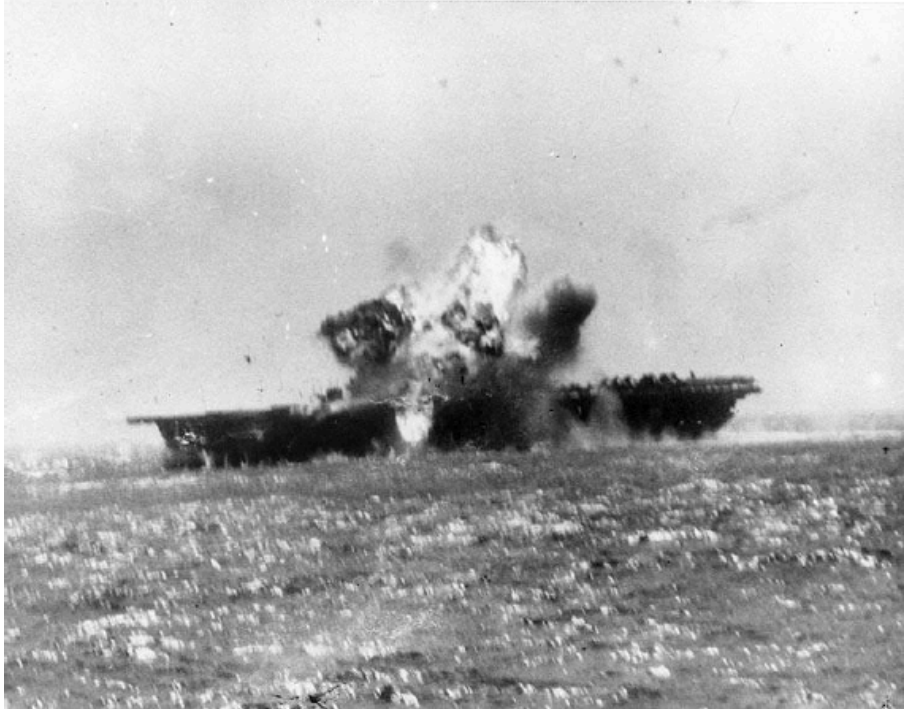
-taken from the President Harry S. Truman Library & Museum

PART I – Read/view the following historical documents. Answer all questions that follow the documents. For each document, you must complete the corresponding graphic organizer.

Document A: Japanese Kamikaze Attacks on U.S. Ships in the Pacific Theater
(from <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/images/g270000/g273032.jpg>)

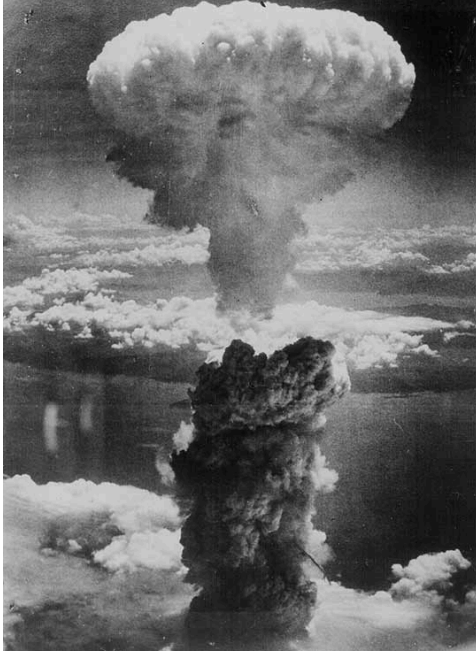


Photo # 80-G-273032 Kamikaze hits USS Essex, 25 November 1944



Document B: The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima

(from <http://www.hiroshima-remembered.com/history/hiroshima/image4.html>)



This is the mushroom cloud rising over Hiroshima, Japan. The city of Hiroshima was the target of the world's first atomic bomb attack at 8:16 a.m. on August 6, 1945. The cloud rose to over 60,000 feet in about ten minutes. About 30 seconds after the explosion, the Enola Gay circled in order to get a better look at what was happening. By that time, although the plane was flying at 30,000 feet, the mushroom cloud had risen above them. The city itself was completely engulfed in a thick black smoke. After the detonation and the subsequent destruction of Hiroshima, one of the crewmembers of the Enola Gay muttered, "Good God, how could anyone survive that down there?"

Before and after pictures of the Atomic Bomb, Hiroshima

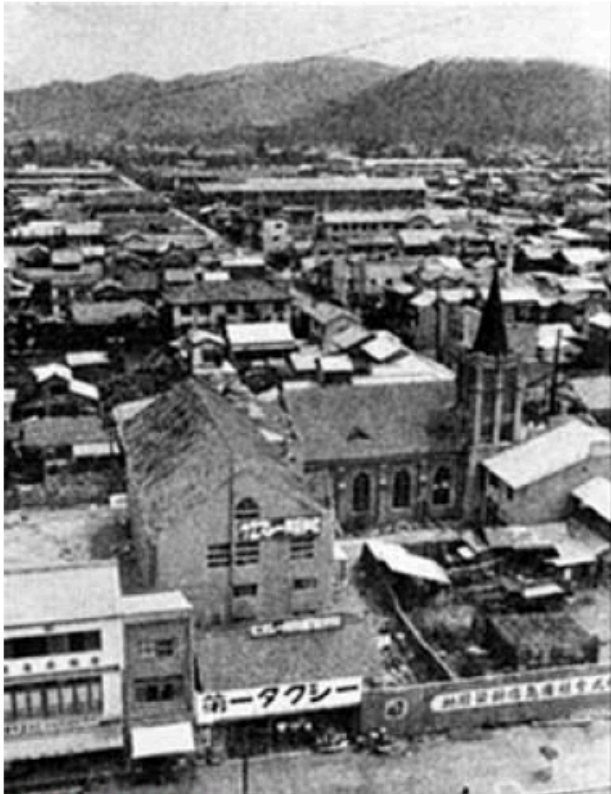


Photo: AFP



www.terror-victims.com

Document C: Paul Fussell, U.S. Infantryman in Europe, upon Receiving Word of the Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima & Nagasaki

“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. “

“When the atom bombs were dropped and the news began to circulate that we would not be obligated in a few months to rush up the beaches near Tokyo assault-firing while being machine gunned, mortared and shelled we broke down and cried with relief and joy. We were going to live. We were going to grow to adulthood after all.”

– “Thank God for the Atom Bomb” by Prof. Paul Fussell, 1990

1.) Why would American troops assigned occupation duty in postwar Germany be relieved that American bombers had deployed two atomic weapons on Japan?

Document D: President Harry S. Truman’s Press Release Announcing the Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 and Statement Defending the Use of Atomic Weapons

“...The Japanese began the war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid many fold. And the end is not yet. With this bomb we have now added a new and revolutionary increase in destruction to supplement the growing power of our armed forces. In their present form these bombs are now in production and even more powerful forms are in development... We are now prepared to obliterate more rapidly and completely every productive enterprise the Japanese have above ground in any city. We shall destroy their docks, their factories, and their communications. Let there be no mistake; we shall completely destroy Japan's power to make war... It was to spare the Japanese people from utter destruction that the ultimatum of July 26 was issued at Potsdam. Their leaders promptly rejected that ultimatum. If they do not now accept our terms they may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth.”

“We have used it against those who attacked without warning at Pearl Harbor, against those who have abandoned the pretense of obeying international laws of warfare. We have used it to shorten the agony of war, in order to save the lives of thousands and thousands of young Americans.”

2.) According to President Truman, for what reason(s) was the atomic bomb used on Japan?

Document E: The Soviet Invasion of Japanese-Held Manchuria - August 8, 1945



3.) At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, Stalin agreed to the U.S. and Great Britain's pleas to enter World War II's Pacific Theatre within three months of the end of the war in Europe. Germany surrendered on May 8 (May 9 at 0:43 A.M. Moscow time). Did the scheduled Soviet invasion of Japanese held Manchuria influence President Truman's order for the bombing of Nagasaki the next day? Explain your answer.

Document F: Critics of Truman's Decision to Use Atomic Weapons

“...It is the Survey's opinion that certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945 (well before the date of the [proposed] invasion) Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped.”

-United States Army Air Force Strategy Bombing Survey, 1946

“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 because of the effective sea blockade and the successful bombing with conventional weapons...My own feeling was that being the first to use [the atomic bomb], we 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”

-Admiral William D. Leahy, President Truman's Chief of Staff,
in his memoir “I Was There” (Whittlesey, 1950)

4.) For what reasons do these critics of President Truman's decision oppose the use of the atomic bomb?

5.) Based on the above statements, why do you think President Truman ordered the use of atomic bombs to end the war with Japan?

Document G: 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 in Percentages

	Hiroshima	Nagasaki
Burns	60%	95%
Falling Debris	30%	9%
Flying Glass	---	7%
Other	10%	7%

Document H: Iwo Jima Casualties

American and Japanese Casualties at the Battle of Iwo Jima

	U.S.	Japan
Total Forces	110,000	21,060
Casualties	26,038 (24%)	18,375 (87%)