

## World History

Arguments against the Atomic Bomb

Name:

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### Arguments Against The Bomb

by Michael Barnes

#### 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



Albert Einstein and  
Leo Szilard

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



[Ashtray: "Jam Your Cigarette Butts on This Rat" \(2 views\)](#)



[Poster: "Tokio Kid Say: Much Waste of Material Make So-o-o-o Happy! Thank You"](#)

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 "spaghettis," 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,

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*

[the Jap"](#)



[Full page  
Photograph of  
Japanese  
Skull, Life  
Magazine, May  
22, 1944](#)

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



[Heart Mountain  
internment Camp](#)

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.

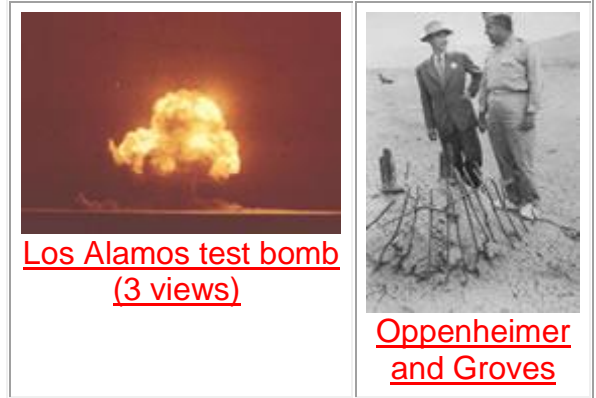
#### **Argument 4: There Were Alternatives**

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



Truman at Potsdam

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:



Japan's  
Emperor  
Hirohito

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



President Truman and  
James Byrnes

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 *Bonfish* 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.





Leo Szilard

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.



General Groves

### **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.



Truman and Byrnes  
returning from  
Potsdam

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 Byrnes'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.



"Little Boy" bomb,  
used against  
Hiroshima



"Fat Man" bomb

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



Still image from *Barefoot Gen*(1983)

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



Hiroshima survivor  
Sumiteru Taniguchi



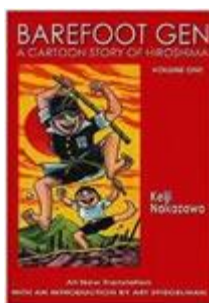
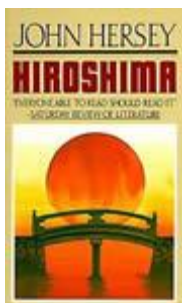
Hiroshima survivor  
Sumiteru Taniguchi in  
2004

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



Bomb survivors in  
2004, most with  
cancer



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.



Truman with Byrnes and Leahy



Lewis on This Is Your Life

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.



Ruins of a Catholic Church in Nagasaki

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.

*Barnes, Michael. "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb: Arguments Against." The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb: Arguments Against. Authentic History, 13 Jan. 2013. Web. 07 July 2014.*

