

## **FID American History**

The United States enlisted men and women from all ethnic groups, cities, towns, and farms across America for World War II, but American Indians, 25,000 strong, provided the largest percentage of available personnel for the war. Code talkers, transmitting messages in their native languages, provided an especially valuable skill that the Japanese and Germans found impossible to decipher.

Battles were waged in the Pacific, primarily by the United States, with extensive resources supporting the effort to target Japan directly. The initial wins in the Coral Sea and at Midway positioned the United States to win important positions in the Pacific by leapfrogging islands rather than trying to conquer all of the South Pacific. General MacArthur led American and Australian forces to a win in New Guinea in January 1943 on his way to take back the Philippine Islands, islands he had lost at the onset of the Pacific War. Navy Commander Nimitz secured the Mariana Islands, a strategic location from which to wage attacks directly on Japan, in July of 1944. MacArthur and Nimitz then focused on taking back the Philippines, waging a win at the Battle of Leyte Gulf in October of 1944, followed by Luzon in the Philippines in January 1945, Iwo Jima in March, and Okinawa next in a three-month battle finally ending in June 1945. Meanwhile, the United States began a frequent firebombing of Japan, especially Tokyo, with B-29 raids in 1944 and lasting until the end of the war in August 1945.

Vice President Harry S. Truman took the oath of office for the presidency immediately following Roosevelt's death. Truman, having served less than three months as vice president, had little knowledge of war details and agreements, including the development of the atomic bomb.

The bomb, which was suggested to Roosevelt in 1940 by exiled German scientist Albert Einstein, was hastily created at a cost of \$2 billion. The effort to create the bomb, known as the Manhattan Project, was headed by General Leslie Groves with Professor Robert Oppenheimer serving as scientific head of the project.

### **The Manhattan Project**

There was no question that the bomb would be used during the World War II conflict; however, the target for the bomb changed from Germany to Japan due to the timing of the completion of the bomb. The initial test for the bomb occurred on July 16, 1945, in New Mexico.

The United States had won the race to create the atomic bomb, but at what cost? While the bomb was being tested in the United States, Harry Truman was meeting with Stalin and Churchill at Potsdam, Germany, from July 16 to August 2, 1945, to complete the postwar arrangements initiated at Yalta. The spirit of collaboration that had existed during the war had deteriorated to the point where the Allies faced difficulty even agreeing on the demilitarization of Germany or the proceedings for Nuremberg. By the time the former Allies met in Potsdam, Truman had already reduced aid to the Soviets and Stalin had begun to break his Yalta promises with his increased control over eastern Europe. The seeds of the Cold War were planted.

On July 25, 1945, Harry Truman ordered the atomic bomb dropped if Japan did not surrender before August 3, 1945. The American, British, and Chinese governments passed the Potsdam Declaration on July 26 demanding that Japan surrender or face "prompt and utter destruction." The war losses were extensive in the final battles in the Pacific, and the United States had been actively engaged in bombing civilian targets in Japan to force a surrender. The deadline came and went with no response. The United States dropped the first bomb on August 6, 1945, at Hiroshima, killing some 140,000 people. Two days later, the Soviets finally entered the war in Asia. Truman authorized the second bomb, dropped at Nagasaki on August 9, killing 36,000 people. That night, Japan surrendered on the condition that the Emperor Hirohito be allowed to keep his throne. The Allies accepted the conditional surrender on September 2, 1945. The war was finally over, but the impact of the atomic bomb would influence foreign and even domestic policy for the remainder of the century and beyond. Robert Oppenheimer, the scientist who developed the bomb, urged moderation in its use. He was later admonished severely and tried with various charges for not supporting its extensive use during the escalating cold war due to its tremendous destructive power.

### **Why Did the US Drop Atomic Bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?**

The question of whether or not the United States was right to drop atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 is surely among the 20th century's most enduring and divisive.

For many, the horrors inflicted by an atomic attack are so devastating and widespread that there will never be any justification. Others, however, will claim that war invariably demands unpalatable actions to bring about an end to conflict.

### **The main reasons given**

To better understand whether atomic action was justified in 1945, we must first consider the likely motivations behind it. The main reason given for America's decision to take atomic action is that it was a way to conclude the war without suffering further losses (on the American side at least).

There are also those who see the attacks as retribution for Pearl Harbor and the many American lives lost in bloody warfare with Japan.

We might also consider the geopolitical impact that the Hiroshima and Nagasaki attacks had at a time when tensions were rising between the US and the Soviet Union. As a signal of American military might, the atomic attacks on Japan were undoubtedly emphatic, especially at a time when the Soviet Union lagged behind the US in the race for nuclear armament.

### **The case for the attacks ending the war**

The most commonly expressed justification for the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings has been that they brought a halt to a war that would have otherwise claimed many more lives. It was believed that America's only alternative to an atomic assault was an invasion of Japan, which would have almost certainly involved the loss of thousands more US soldiers.

The bombings, remember, followed a long period of conflict that had already seen 418,000 Americans killed.

Recent battles with Japan at Iwo Jima and Okinawa had proved extremely costly for the US in terms of casualties and, despite Japan's weakened military position, there was a strong sense that the Japanese would not lay down without a bloody fight. The shock of Japanese kamikaze attacks had not helped this impression.

In such circumstances, the US decided that a significant Japanese death toll was a justified means to an end. Indeed, it would have been politically difficult for President Harry S. Truman to make any other decision.

Truman had assembled a committee, chaired by Secretary of War Henry Stimson, to consider the question of an atomic assault and there was a strong consensus that the

bombs should be used; it was seen as a solution that would end the conflict without sacrificing further American lives.

## **Criticism**

Critics of the decision, however, have pointed out that Japan was on the cusp of defeat anyway and that naval blockades and conventional bombing would have forced it to surrender without the need **for** such a devastating assault.

Henry Stimson has acknowledged that Japan was already on its knees before the atomic bombings.

Even Stimson, Truman's secretary of war, has commented that "Japan had no allies; its navy was almost destroyed; its islands were under a naval blockade; and its cities were undergoing concentrated air attacks".

Some historians also suggest that the bombings weren't even the principle reason for Japan's eventual surrender, asserting instead that the Soviet Union's declaration of war on August 8 was the overriding factor

## **ASSIGNMENT**

### **Dropping the Bomb**

- **Inquiry Skills**—You will analyze societal issues, trends, and events; develop credible explanations of historical events and developments based on reasoned interpretation of evidence; develop explanations and make persuasive arguments in support of your conclusions; communicate your conclusions; and evaluate and use historical evidence.
- **21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills**—You will employ online tools for research and analysis, apply creativity and innovation, and assess and validate information.

### **Directions**

Write down your response to each question, and check your answers. At the end of the activity, write a brief evaluation of your work.

### **Questions**

1. What was the name of the project to develop the Atomic Bomb?

2. Who was the President that ordered the dropping of the Atomic Bomb?

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**3.** What Japanese cities were attacked with the Atomic Bomb?

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**4.** What were the Native Americans called that transmitted messages during the War in their native language? \_\_\_\_\_

**5.** Who was the German scientist that suggested to FDR to develop the Atomic Bomb? \_\_\_\_\_

**Activity**

Now, write a short essay of 2-3 paragraphs expressing your opinion on whether the decision to drop the bomb was justified. Be sure to include evidence from the readings and the lesson to support your position.

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**Self-Evaluation**

How did you do? Rate your work on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 as the highest score. Then write a brief evaluation of your work below. Note what you learned and what challenged you.

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