**Final Paper**

**Tori Roser**

**“Should America have dropped the atomic bombs to end the war?”**

Placing myself in the position of President Truman, I know that I would also drop the atomic bombs on Japan. While the debate inside our classroom offered insight into what the opposition believes, it did not waiver my understanding or my opinion. I have no doubt that the bombs were necessary in ending the most brutal war in history.

It is fact that millions survived because of the bombs. It is fact that technological advancements flourished because of the bombs. It is fact that our relationship with Japan is stronger now because of the bombs. It is fact that global history altered in every way because of the bombs, and it is fact that nuclear weapons cause problems on Earth to this day because of the bombs. But this paper isn’t being written to discuss the facts. It is written about my assessment of us dropping them, and why I believe our choice was correct. Without the facts, the case is still clear that using these nuclear weapons was the only way to quickly end this war.

Morally and ethically speaking, I believe that nuclear weaponry was the right choice in ending a bloody, dirty war in a quick and less painful way for all parties involved. Looking at the emotional impact of the bombs, the need for an absolute action, and what the opposition believes, I will explain my reasoning behind my beliefs that the bombs were an accurate and incumbent decision.

Speaking on the emotional power in the use of nuclear weapons, I pull a quote from my favorite book, *The Hunger Games[[1]](#endnote-0)*. President Snow had one major belief throughout the three-part series that was stated in both text and film, “Hope. It is the only thing stronger than fear. A little hope is effective. A lot of hope is dangerous.” I believe that this quote is perfectly applicable to the war in the Pacific, because a land invasion brings hope to the Japanese. This is shown through the overwhelming escalation in deaths accounted for as battles crept up the eastern front. Fighting became more barbaric and deadly the closer the United States got to the homeland. Japanese fought with more tenacity, cruelty and bravery at Saipan, Peleliu and Iwo Jima than at any other point in the war.

Defending the homeland at all costs was the mindset. Their hope and confidence in ability, knowledge, skill, and power blinded them to that of the United States. Their hope for defeat on their turf turned them more savage and indomitable as the fighting continued. Every man, woman and child would be used in the resistance, and in preparation for defense, they prepared over 8,000 men for kamikaze flights[[2]](#endnote-1). The American choice to drop the atomic bombs left no room for hope. It killed hope. According to Emperor Hirohito’s radio broadcast[[3]](#endnote-2) to Japanese citizens, he knew that Japanese civilians would continue to die if he did not surrender. The bombs did not indict fear or panic. They did not spur outrageous hatred. With the bombs came understanding. All hope for a victory in Japan was lost. The United States does not bow down to those who declare war, and the United States will not lose to Imperial Japan. The statement etched in Japan from the bombs was an ultimatum that we could bring the war and devastation to the Japanese doorstep and let people die, or we can bomb the nation until everyone and everything are lost. This is what impending doom feels like. Surrender now or fail miserably at your attempt for victory. The bombs completed a task that the Postdam Declaration originally did not.

Convincing the Japanese directly relates to my next argument. As a collectivist culture, it would take a large and shocking event to catch the Japanese off guard and show the true power of the United States. As a culture, the belief is not that the individual matters. That isn’t to say that they don’t believe in person well-being or life, but the emperor and the country’s interests are priority. When something as permanent and impossible to defeat as an atomic bomb is used in warfare, it sets the tone that all limits are gone. Not only did it ruin their hope as previously mentioned, but it also ups the threat made by the enemy. The Japanese had absolutely nothing to combat a nuclear weapon with.

On top of this analysis, looking back at collectivist culture, I think there is an important, even critical, point to be made. After dropping the atomic bombs, Japanese officials knew within hours that the devastation was monumental. Exact numbers may not have come in right away but it was clear, in both cases, that the city was destroyed and civilians living miles away felt consequences. During combat fighting on islands hundreds of miles away with constant deaths mounting, there was no way for Japanese officials to know exactly how many were lost. Until the fighting stopped, they could only estimate how many were killed. It always seems that the Japanese underestimated their situations[[4]](#endnote-3). A large assault with clear, visual impact on the homeland was necessary to show Japan what the damage was mounting to. By bringing the war to their front door, and showing the Emperor what death tolls looked like, the US is able to shock Japanese power into realizing what this war was coming to. To explain better, I use this example to illustrate. If a friend buys me a pack of 500 Ramen Noodle packages, and a roommate of mine takes one a day for 50 days, I will not notice how many have been lost right away. If my roommate takes all 50 Ramen Noodle packages out of my 500 all at once, I will surely notice. Obviously, these aren’t comparable when it comes to deaths in the millions, but I think the point is valid. Thousands dead at once makes a much larger wave than one by one deaths on islands far from home.

Finally, I really would like to look at the points that the opposition made during our debate and time in class. I believe that they brought up valuable insights, but that most of their points actually belong on the pro-bomb side of the debate. When realistically looking and the ethics and principles behind the decisions, never has the decision seemed more simple. From their ideas on the value in life, their chances to live through invasion, and the start of the cold war, I believe even the heaviest of opposition would struggle to contend with my thoughts.

The opposition fought that the lives of Japanese could not be considered less valuable than American lives. I agree. All life is precious and a gift. Everything in our power must be done to protect and preserve life on Earth. With that being said, the math is simple. A land invasion leads to millions of American and Japanese deaths. Atomic bombs lead to thousands of Japanese deaths. Without any other information, data, emotions, or beliefs this should make the decision an easy one for anyone studying World War Two. In fact, I don’t know how the opposition even considers this a valid point for their side to consider utilizing. The bombs equal fewer deaths. Because some people need more proof than that statement, I can take it one step further.

The civilians, who died because of the bombs, would have been killed regardless if an invasion happens. To me, they have six clear options once the war reaches Japan.

The first, you will arm yourself and fight the Americans regardless of your age or gender. They were giving women and children bamboo sticks to start preparing for war at the home front.

The second, you will die in a firebombing. 71 cities in Japan were hit with firebomb raids. Of those, 66 were substantially destroyed or completely leveled.

The third, your own people will kill you when you try to surrender. There are multiple accounts from Americans and Japanese men that soldiers would open fire on anyone attempting to surrender to American forces.

 The fourth, Japanese military will lead you to slaughter to give them a better chance to survive. In the film series, *The Pacific*, we watched Japanese military would use islanders as shields and bombs in class.

The fifth, the Soviets will rape and kill you and your family. There is no fighting that the red army was cruel to civilians in the lands that they conquered. They raped and pillaged the cities of Germany as they beat the German armies. There is no doubting that it would have happened to the Japanese if they had the chance to enter and fight in Japan.

The sixth, you will become a prisoner of war to the Soviets and work until you die. 30,000 of the Japanese men who became POW to the Soviets were never seen or heard from again. This was without the war touching Japan.

A third point that the opposition rests on is the idea that the Cold War stemmed from our use of nuclear weapons. I believe that this arms race was inevitable. The moment that the Manhattan Project began, a race for technological supremacy was launched with all super nations on deck to win. Dropping the atomic bombs had no impact on whether or not other nations would want to develop atomic weapons. Creation was the issue, not use. Germans were already on their way to advanced weaponry. The United States did not create the idea, but it was first to fully develop the tools.

The Soviet Union and the United States’ ideological foundations are opposite of each other. Just as the US disagrees with China, Cuba, and many countries in the Middle East, the tension existed before advanced weapons were brought to the table. While religion is meant to be separate from our government, forms of authority and ruling have always impacted our relations with other nations. Our political and ideological differences paired with the creation, not the use, of the atomic bombs started the Cold War. The use of the weapons only aided in the rest of the world not using them to this day. Our use was a demonstration to the world of what they are capable of: something that no other country has wanted to live with.

Again, there will be people who believe that the bombs were not right. They will fight the above points with something else, I am sure. A critical question was asked at the end of our debate, and so, I have answered it below and left others with the same consideration. For anyone left on the border of whether dropping the atomic bombs were right or wrong, this final piece, hopefully, sets the answer in stone.

If the choice came down to the United States of America being invaded by the Japanese and German armies versus two, low population cities being bombed by nuclear weapons, what would you chose? The choice is simple to me.

 Maybe I’m heartless. Maybe my lack of religion makes the answer clearer. Maybe I’m uneducated on the topic. I don’t think any of the three are true, but that’s what the opposition makes me out to be. For me, the thought of Japanese soldiers entering my home, shooting my grandmother or dog, raping my sister, or cutting the penis off of my father and brother to shove in their mouths seems much worse than all of us dying at once from a nuclear bomb. Who would want to witness, fight, and survive that? Even if we lived with side effects of the radiation from the bombs, at least we lived without the fear of what the Japanese would do to us during an invasion and after a victory.

I do not discredit the lives that were lost when the bombs dropped. I feel for those who survived but live with genetically mutated DNA that now passes through their family’s blood. There is no denying that this war brought out some of the ugliest actions that any human has preformed on Earth. I wouldn’t wish a war, an atomic bomb, or a lost life on anyone. However, when it comes down to it, with the information that was provided at the time, I know that it was the right thing to do. At least those who are living with genetic disorders and mutations are living. Their grandparents or parents were able to come home, to a house, and raise a family that continued.

In this course, we often attempt to place ourselves in the 1940s. We’ve tried to grasp what it would be like to live as a woman, as a civilian, as a soldier and as a government official during the war. We’ve looked at the western and eastern fronts, and the impacts of both. We debate, laugh, grow, and respond with each other. We struggle together to understand concepts and decisions. But to me, the decision to drop two nuclear bombs to end the war is easy.

I would have dropped them: probably sooner than President Truman. He did not know the way they would impact the world after being dropped, which is why I did not fully discuss them in this paper, but he did understand that they would save lives and bring our troops home. I hope that I haven’t seemed too heartless, but the opposite. This seems like a morbid and merciless stance to many, but the more I read and research the topic, the clearer it all seems. All of us must live with the decisions that our leaders make for us. This is one decision that I stand behind with full confidence in being right.

**Endnotes**

1. The Hunger Games Citation
Collins, Suzanne. The Hunger Games. New York: Scholastic, 2008. [↑](#endnote-ref-0)
2. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surrender_of_Japan>
“As a final attempt to stop the Allied advances, the Japanese Imperial High Command planned an all-out defense of Kyūshū codenamed [Operation Ketsugō](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Ketsug%C5%8D).[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surrender_of_Japan#cite_note-10) This was to be a radical departure from the [defense in depth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defence_in_depth) plans used in the invasions of [Peleliu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Peleliu), [Iwo Jima](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Iwo_Jima), and [Okinawa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Okinawa). Instead, everything was staked on the beachhead; more than 3,000 [kamikazes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamikaze) would be sent to attack the amphibious transports before troops and cargo were disembarked on the beach.[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surrender_of_Japan#cite_note-Reynolds363-8)

If this did not drive the Allies away, they planned to send another 3,500 kamikazes along with 5,000 [*Shin'yō* suicide boats](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shinyo_%28suicide_boat%29) and the remaining destroyers and submarines—"the last of the Navy's operating fleet"—to the beach. If the Allies had fought through this and successfully landed on Kyūshū, only 3,000 planes would have been left to defend the remaining islands, although Kyūshū would be "defended to the last" regardless. The strategy of making a last stand at Kyūshū was based on the assumption of continued Soviet neutrality.” [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
3. <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/hirohito.htm>
“Moreover, the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do damage is, indeed, incalculable, taking the toll of many innocent lives.   Should we continue to fight, it would not only result in an ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation, but also it would lead to the total extinction of human civilization.”- Emperor Hirohito [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
4. What I mean to say is that, they declared war on the US without realizing just how strong our nation would be. They didn’t know how many men were being killed at war, and would have been assuming it was less than it actually was. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)