

U.S. History Honors - Ms. Murray - Period 2

What were the immediate effects of the atomic bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States within the next decade?

Seung-Gu Lee

Word Count 1854

At the end of World War II in the Pacific Theater, the Japanese Empire was in a desperate military situation where they had no allies with its navy almost destroyed, its island under a “naval block” and its cities were undergoing concentrated air attacks.¹ Despite, the Japanese military had “extremely sensitive national pride” and they were willing to fight to death,² showing that the continuance of the war would result in serious damages. In addition, it was estimated that the Soviet Union desires to control Japan and expand its communist influence,³ so the U.S. needed an effective solution to end the war as rapidly as possible with few casualties. For the United States in that situation, the atomic bomb was the most optimal way to end the problem. Consequently, on August 6th and August 9th of 1945, the United States dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively, forcing the Japanese Empire to unconditionally surrender.⁴ These atomic bombings by the United States, on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, had negative health and social impacts on the survivors; however, they also had positive effects on ultimately reducing casualties and maintaining peace by reforming the Japanese society in the next decade.

The atomic bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States left behind critical health and social impacts on the *hibakusha*. *Hibakusha*, a Japanese term created after the event, refers to the survivors of the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Tada Makiko was one of the many *hibakushas* in Hiroshima. According to her memoir, when the atomic bombs dropped from the sky, her body was “burnt from face to shoulder to navel” and her body

¹ Dennis D. Wainstock, *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 55-56, <http://www.questiaschool.com/read/30388790/the-decision-to-drop-the-atomic-bomb>.

² Ibid.

³ James R. Van de Velde, "Opinion: The Enola Gay Saved Lives." *Political Science Quarterly* 110, no. 3 (1995): 457-458. Accessed February 10, 2020. doi:10.2307/2152574. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2152574>.

⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Occupation of Japan: Policy and Progress* (Washington, DC: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1946), 62, <http://www.questiaschool.com/read/30479069/occupation-of-japan-policy-and-progress>.

was a “burning pale” even though she took her clothes off.⁵ Makiko was rejected from getting any help from the soldiers nor the hospital because she “wasn’t the only injured person,” and she fell asleep with the enormous physical pain and brain malfunctioning, as well as a temporary loss of vision and memories.⁶ This terrible experience gave Makiko a trauma; when she does chores that make her shoulders tense, such as laundry or sewing, she “always faints and lose [her] senses.”⁷ The burnings caused by the atomic bombings gave Makiko and other *hibakushas* a huge amount of pain of burning, challenging for them to endure. The health effects also continued for a long time after the event, causing its victims to have disabilities and difficulties doing daily tasks. Long-term diseases from the atomic bombs also physically and psychologically affected the survivors. Leukemia, a disease that closely resembles earlier radiation effects, was one of them. From 1948 and reaching the peak between 1950 and 1952, the survivors exposed closest to the hypocenter had 10 to 50 times more incidence of leukemia than the normal.⁸ This followed the *hibakushas* and continuously reminded them of their traumatic experience about the bombings for many years, giving them severe psychological damage. When leukemia seemed to be disappearing, other forms of cancer were increasing among the atomic bomb survivors.⁹ The continuance of cancer lead to many deaths and many people going through agony, and the fact that it began immediately after leukemia started fading out also created fear that the survivors will suffer from health hazards for the rest of their lives.

The *hibakushas* also suffered from pregnancy concerns followed by the physical impacts of the atomic bombs. Tada Makiko, for example, was diagnosed “traces of a miscarriage” a few

⁵ Mark Selden and Kyoko Selden, eds., *The Atomic Bomb: Voices from Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1989), 173-174, <http://www.questiaschool.com/read/59425757/the-atomic-bomb-voices-from-hiroshima-and-nagasaki>.

⁶ Ibid., 174-175.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Robert Jay Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (New York: Random House, 1967), 103-104, <http://www.questiaschool.com/read/58641921/death-in-life-survivors-of-hiroshima>.

⁹ Ibid., 104-105.

months following the bombing.¹⁰ Soon she became pregnant again, but her mammary glands “became plugged” when her chest was “burnt” by the atomic bomb, so a “painful lump the size of a plum” grew by the side of her breast and disabled her from breast-feeding her baby.¹¹ To many survivors, the radiation from the bomb caused definite damage in the survivors’ uterus, causing stillbirths, abortions, and a high incidence of microcephaly with or without mental retardation,¹² and affecting their babies by causing them disabilities or even killing them before their birth. The atomic bombs also gave social difficulties to the survivors. There were also concerns among the *hibakushas* of the potential genetic effects of the atomic radiation that it would continue onto later generations.¹³ Although systematic studies revealed that the survivors’ offsprings had no higher incidence of abnormalities, “no one [could] assure that abnormalities will not appear,” according to historian Robert J. Lifton.¹⁴ This gave people a fear of the *hibakushas* that they could have abnormal or no children and diminished sexual potency, with a general feeling of undesirability as a mate.¹⁵ This prejudice created difficulty for the survivors in finding a good partner and forming a family; especially, in the Japanese culture that emphasizes family lineage and the continuity of generations,¹⁶ the survivors were intensively discriminated against for their weaker abilities to continue the family. In addition, there were also discrimination against the *hibakushas* in employment. Many survivors often lacked to overcome their physical and mental difficulties and deploy sufficient energy to compete with ordinary people, and some businesses even rejected them just because they were *hibakushas*.¹⁷ This

¹⁰ Mark Selden and Kyoko Selden, *The Atomic Bomb: Voices from Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, 176-177.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Robert Jay Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima*, 106.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 105-106.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 168-169.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 105-106.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 168-169.

severely impacted their daily lives and put them into lower social status, making them suffer socially and financially just because they were *hibakushas*.

Nevertheless, the atomic bombings ultimately contributed to the reduction of casualties for the allies, the Japanese Empire, and civilians. Before the decision of dropping atomic bombs, on June 18th, 1945, the military planners of the United States were planning on invading Kyushu, Japan in November 1945. However, it was estimated that landing on Kyushu would mean “250,000 killed and 500,000 maimed for life,” according to President Truman,¹⁸ and despite the severe casualties estimated, it was uncertain if it would actually induce Japan to surrender.¹⁹ Since the atomic bombs only caused approximately 100,000 Japanese deaths and few allied deaths,²⁰ the atomic bombs were effective in saving lives that would have died otherwise. The effects of the operation were also predictable from the previous battle in Okinawa. Earlier on April 1st, 1945, the United States launched a massive amphibious assault force of 180,000 men with naval gunfire and 1,724 carrier-based aircraft in Okinawa.²¹ However, the Japanese military resisted forcefully with the use of various strategies including *kamikaze*, or suicide bombing, causing 12,613 deaths and 40,000 injuries of American soldiers—roughly one-third of total troops—and killing up to 110,000 Japanese soldiers and Okinawa residents.²² The battle was a disaster, and it gave a preview that the attack on Kyushu would result in severe damages if it was initiated. Furthermore, it showed the Japanese military’s passion to resist despite their desperate military situation,²³ and that attacking Japan through traditional methods would be very costly. Under these conditions, dropping the atomic bombs was the most optimal solution to instigate Japanese surrender, since they were able to cause great damage to Japan with a relatively small

¹⁸ Dennis D. Wainstock, *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb*, 52-53.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁰ James R. Van de Velde, *Opinion: The Enola Gay Saved Lives*, 454.

²¹ Dennis D. Wainstock, *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb*, 4-5.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

expense while disallowing the passionate Japanese forces to fiercely resist. Hence, the atomic bombs were successful in making the Japanese Empire surrender, causing their government to “proclaim the unconditional surrender to the Allied Powers” on September 2, 1945.²⁴

The atomic bombs also reduced casualties because it ended the war rapidly, which would have caused more casualties than the bombs in the long term. World War II was already causing enormous damage to both the Japanese and Americans, and if the United States decided to use siege strategies to make Japan surrender, more soldiers and civilians would have died from extended periods of war.²⁵ According to the Japanese Ministry of Health and Warfare, approximately 3.1 million deaths occurred in Japan due to World War II.²⁶ This figure excludes the deaths of the United States and other countries, which is estimated to be a much larger number, nor the numbers of permanent impairment. Considering the fact that war in the Pacific Theater lasted a little less than four years, the war was already causing more than 780,000 Japanese deaths and more allied deaths per year on average. Although the 100,000 deaths caused by the atomic bombs²⁷ was still a huge amount, World War II was more fatal and destructive and was causing massive ongoing casualties and deaths. The atomic bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki significantly contributed to the reduction of casualties by ending the war quickly.

Ironically, the destructive atomic bombs had a positive impact on maintaining peace because it allowed the United States to reform the Japanese society in the next decade. When Japan surrendered to the allied powers, it accepted the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) to take actions on the Japanese government, which was headed by a U.S. Army

²⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Occupation of Japan: Policy and Progress*, 62.

²⁵ James R. Van de Velde, *Opinion: The Enola Gay Saved Lives*, 455.

²⁶ Ishikida, Miki Y. *Toward Peace: War Responsibility, Postwar Compensation, and Peace Movements and Education in Japan*. New York [u.a.]: iUniverse, 2009. Accessed March 2020.
<https://books.google.com/books?id=5xM0AFEAmc4C>

²⁷ James R. Van de Velde, *Opinion: The Enola Gay Saved Lives*, 454.

Colonel.²⁸ This allowed the U.S. to reform and reconstruct the society in a way the peace could be maintained. In early 1946, SCAP “drafted a treaty for the disarmament and demilitarization of Japan,” disallowing Japan to possess a military that would do more than just defense,²⁹ preventing Japan from declaring war on other countries. SCAP also “gave the Japanese people the tools to begin building democracy” and extremely limited the power of the Emperor³⁰ to prevent him from having absolute power. It also published a new constitution on March 6, 1946 that “places sovereignty squarely in the hands of the people,” according to General McArthur.³¹ In addition, the United States was also able to effectively defend the Soviet invasion on August 1945 to contain the spread of communism in Japan and maintain democracy.³² These efforts by the SCAP, led by the United States, rectified anti-democratic and militaristic systems in Japan and reformed the country into a democratic, peaceful society. This significantly contributed to keeping Japan in peace away from war, benefitting the Japanese citizens, previous colonies, the allied powers including the United States, and ultimately, the whole world. SCAP also reformed the Japanese economy in a way to maintain peace. It transformed Japan’s industry and trade so that “Japan never again would be able to launch a war” by giving them an opportunity to supply their peacetime needs.³³ In addition, SCAP ruled in a way to avoid people from starving through continuing rationing, forbidding domestic use and forcing export of high-valued products such as silk, and increasing the production of silk to increase exports.³⁴ SCAP also required necessary imports of foods, fertilizers and raw materials³⁵ to make sure the Japanese people are being fed. If so many people were starving to death and suffering from lack of necessary supplies, there

²⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Occupation of Japan: Policy and Progress*, 62.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 20-22.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² James R. Van de Velde, *Opinion: The Enola Gay Saved Lives*, 457-458.

³³ U.S. Department of State, *Occupation of Japan: Policy and Progress*, 37-38.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

would have been riots or even demands for war, which would have agitated democracy and peace in the Japanese society. SCAP, which was able to gain control over Japan as a result of the bombings, played a critical role in keeping peace; therefore, the atomic bombs contributed to the peace in Japan.

There is controversy among historians whether the United States were justified in dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Some historians, such as James R. Van de Velde, views the bombings as positive for playing a significant role in reducing the overall casualties of World War II and bringing peace in Japan. However, some historians—Robert Jay Lifton for instance—criticizes the bombings for making the victims' lives difficult and to some extent miserable. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the bombings impacted and changed the Japanese people and society forever. The atomic bombings on the two Japanese cities inaugurated the new type of warfare to the world—nuclear war. Although most people do not desire any nuclear war, the risk still remains since many nations already possess nuclear weapons. As the first nuclear bomb ever dropped in warfare, its impacts on society and the victims serve an important role in preparing, predicting and preventing possible nuclear warfare in the future.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Mark Selden and Kyoko Selden, eds., *The Atomic Bomb: Voices from Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1989), vi,
<http://www.questiaschool.com/read/59425757/the-atomic-bomb-voices-from-hiroshima-and-nagasaki>.

James R. Van de Velde, "Opinion: The Enola Gay Saved Lives." *Political Science Quarterly* 110, no. 3 (1995): 453-59. Accessed February 10, 2020. doi:10.2307/2152574.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2152574>.

Secondary Sources

Dennis D. Wainstock, *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996),
<http://www.questiaschool.com/read/30388790/the-decision-to-drop-the-atomic-bomb>.

Ishikida, Miki Y. *Toward Peace: War Responsibility, Postwar Compensation, and Peace Movements and Education in Japan*. New York [u.a.]: iUniverse, 2009. Accessed March 2020.
https://books.google.com/books?id=5xM0AFEAmc4C&pg=PA28&source=gbs_toc_r&ad=4#v=onepage&q&f=false.

O'Bryan, Scott Patrick. "Growth Solutions: Economic Knowledge and Problems of Capitalism in Post-War Japan, 1945–1960." Order No. 9985930, Columbia University, 2000.
<https://search.proquest.com/docview/304592205?accountid=201365>.

Robert Jay Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (New York: Random House, 1967),
<http://www.questiaschool.com/read/58641921/death-in-life-survivors-of-hiroshima>.

U.S. Department of State, *Occupation of Japan: Policy and Progress* (Washington, DC: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1946),
<http://www.questiaschool.com/read/30479069/occupation-of-japan-policy-and-progress>.

Van De Velde, James R. "Opinion: The Enola Gay Saved Lives." *Political Science Quarterly* 110, no. 3 (1995): 453-459. Accessed February 10, 2020. doi:10.2307/2152574.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2152574>.

Research Paper Reflections

My topic for this research paper was the immediate effects of the U.S. atomic bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki within the next decade. I came up with this topic because I was also personally curious about how the atomic bombings affected the society. I have heard many historians say that they made the Japanese military surrender in World War II, but I wanted to learn more about the other effects that are not frequently discussed in the media. To find the sources, first, I researched the internet to learn the very basic information of my topic. Then, I found some keywords that could be helpful, and using those keywords, I used various database services such as ProQuest, Questia School, JSTOR, and Google Scholar to find the specific sources that would support my argument. Writing this research paper was a great experience because it was the first time writing a paper this long based on modern historical events. I was able to learn a lot from this assignment that would help me write longer papers in the near future.

I faced some challenges while writing the initial draft of my research paper. One of them was that I really knew nothing about the atomic bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I knew that the atomic bombs made Japanese surrender and led World War II to an end, but I knew nothing else about the event and its consequences. At first, I did not know where to start with, and I sometimes thought that it would have been better off if I had chosen another topic. That my original proposal for the research question was rejected made it more challenging. I had a brief plan of what to do for the initial one, but I did not have a clear plan for the final question that I decided to go with. However, I did not want to give up on this major assignment. I spent hours and hours studying about my topic outside of class, which allowed me to deeply understand the atomic bombings and start doing the research. I kept being patient and I was able to overcome the difficulty and find the necessary sources and finish the research paper.

When I get a chance to do a similar research paper assignment, what I want to change next time is excess perfectionism. Of course, finding good sources are essential to a good quality research paper, but I was too obsessed with finding only the perfect sources. I spent too much time researching sources because I was constantly filtering out the “good” sources because they weren’t the “best.” Due to this time wasted, I often had to stay up late the night before the deadline, or sacrifice my free time to catch up on the work. I learned that being perfect is nice, but also painful. Next time I write a similar paper, I will try to remove the thoughts that every source I choose should be the best source for my topic. I will lower my standards on sources to a level where there is a balance between the quality and the time spent. I also learned that I am personally too much of a perfectionist. When I work on something, I want to remind myself that I don’t have to do the best work I can. Hopefully that will make my life easier.

* At home I found some post-it notes and other cool stuff with the “JSTOR” and “ProQuest” watermarks. I asked my mom where she got it from, and she told me she negotiated with these companies on behalf of a company to lower the database usage costs. I think it’s interesting.