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Truman and the A-Bomb: Targeting Noncombatants, Using the Bomb, and His Defending the “Decision”*



Barton J. Bernstein

I have told the Sec[retary] of War, Mr. Stimson[,] to use it so that military objectives and soldiers and sailors are the target and not women and children. . . . The target will be a purely military one.

Harry S. Truman, 25 July 1945¹

The atomic bomb . . . is far worse than gas and biological warfare because it affects the civilian population and murders them by the wholesale.

Harry S. Truman, 19 January 1953²

I don't believe in speculating on the mental feeling and as far as the bomb is concerned I ordered its use for a military reason - for no other cause - and it saved the lives of a great many of our soldiers. That is all I had in mind.

Harry S. Truman, c. 1953-54³

SCHOLARS of the Truman administration have long benefited from the informed counsel and friendly atmosphere of the Harry S. Truman Library, dating back to its opening years under Philip Brooks, its first

* The author is grateful for assistance to the MacArthur Foundation, the Harry S. Truman Library Institute, and the National Science Foundation History of Science Program, and for discussions with many scholars on various sides, and some who are on no “side,” in the A-bomb controversy.

1. Harry S. Truman, “Potsdam Diary,” 25 July 1945, Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.

2. Harry S. Truman to Thomas Murray, 19 January 1953, President’s Secretary’s Files (PSF), Truman Library.

3. Harry S. Truman, interview with William Hillman and Morton Royse, c. 1953-54, Post-Presidential Papers, Truman Library. Some analysts place this interview in about 1955. No particular interpretation depends upon this small difference in dating, because all recognize that these notes were in preparation for Truman’s memoirs.

director, and Philip Lagerquist, its remarkably knowledgeable first supervising archivist, and continuing through the services of archivists Erwin Mueller (now retired) and Dennis Bilger, librarian Elizabeth Safty, and archivist Randy Sowell, among others. To assist students, and possibly also scholars, the library a handful of years ago, under supervisory archivist Ray Geselbracht, began putting together useful special boxes (called "student research files"), often including over sixty documents mostly drawn from the Library's archival holdings, on important issues and events in the Truman period. At present, there are over forty-eight special boxes on, among other subjects, the A-bomb, the Baruch Plan, the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, the Korean War, civil rights, the 1948 presidential campaign, immigration policy, McCarthyism, the recognition of Israel, and the steel dispute of 1952.

By design, these compilations seldom include many pages from published collections of documents or much secondary literature, and usually concentrate on presenting Truman Library holdings. These special research boxes, constituting a thoughtful distillation from the Library's very large archives in numerous files relating to a subject, can greatly help undergraduates and beginning graduate students, inform visiting laypeople, and also aid scholars who want to start by skimming the "cream."

About twenty of these "student research files" have been published in books by University Publishers of America.⁴ The A-bomb "student research file," which was intelligently compiled by archivists Mueller and Bilger, and then also sharply abridged for a small binder version, has been widely used. That very brief version, supplemented by two documents, has now been published as a slender book of thirty-eight documents, with the added editorial talents of noted Truman scholar Robert Ferrell, an emeritus professor of history from Indiana University, who has published many books exploiting the Library's valuable holdings. For this A-bomb volume, he has provided a brief interpretive introduction, short prefaces to the twenty-one segments, useful annotations to particular documents, and a page-long list of "recommended reading."⁵

4. Dennis Merrill of the University of Missouri at Kansas City is the general editor of this published *Documentary History of the Truman Presidency*. The first volume is *The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb on Japan* (1995), with over seventy documents (totaling 553 pages), including two sets (almost 30 pages) of the draft minutes of the 18 June 1945 White House conference, and three previously published mid-1946 reports (almost 200 pages) by the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey on the atomic bombing and the end of the Pacific War. Strangely, this volume does not include the Potsdam Declaration of 26 July 1945, calling for Japan's surrender.

5. Edited and with commentary by Robert Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman and the Bomb: A Documentary History* (Worland, Wyo.: High Plains Publishing, 1996). Occasionally, in printing the documents, Ferrell made some minor (but unmentioned) revisions in punctuation, capitalization, or abbreviations. See, for example, the documents of 25 July and 11 August 1945.

This small volume usefully supplements, and almost never duplicates, the documentary materials drawn from many archives but not the Truman Library, provided in the eighty-three-page appendix to Martin J. Sherwin's impressive *A World Destroyed: Hiroshima and the Origins of the Arms Race* (1987), expanded from his original 1975 book, and the 298-page collection, *The Manhattan Project: A Documentary Introduction to the Atomic Age* (1991), edited by Michael Stoff, Jonathan Fanton, and R. Hal Williams, who had originally put together versions for a Yale University undergraduate course. Unlike Ferrell's edited book, these two earlier published collections conceive of the A-bomb issues in a broad chronological and conceptual framework, and thus start well before Truman's presidency, and contain a number of documents from the Roosevelt period, illuminating the origins of the A-bomb project and the early wartime diplomacy with Britain and the Soviet Union, and also draw upon military archives, Interim Committee records, some British files (in the case of Sherwin), and scientists' archives.

Understanding the "Decision" To Use the A-Bomb

It is highly questionable, despite the prose on the jacket cover of *Harry S. Truman and the Bomb* and some of Ferrell's comments, to believe that an analyst can fully, or even adequately, understand the August 1945 use of the atomic bombs on Japan by starting with the Truman period, neglecting the Roosevelt administration's decisions, and thus focusing only on Truman-period documents. And it is difficult to appreciate the strength of anti-Soviet themes and their connection to high-level, pre-Hiroshima thinking about the bomb's uses without reaching outside the Truman Library compilation to, among other source materials, the diaries of Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson at Yale, the papers of presidential adviser Joseph Davies in the Library of Congress, the Bush-Conant files of the Office of Scientific Research and Development records at the National Archives, the Harrison-Bundy files and the Groves files of the Manhattan Engineer District papers at the National Archives, and the Map Room papers at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library on Anglo-American nuclear cooperation and purposeful exclusion of the Soviet Union from the wartime U.S.-British atomic partnership.

On the matter of beginning before Truman's mid-April 1945 entry into the presidency to understand the August use of the A-bombs, consider, for example, a very revealing memorandum from the Harrison-Bundy files, and not in this volume, by Harvey Bundy to his boss, Secretary of War Stimson, on 3 March 1945: "Here is a draft of a possible Presidential statement to be made *when* S-1 [code name for the A-bomb] is used" (emphasis added). As a respected Boston attorney and skilled wordsmith who

readily distinguished between the use of “when” and “if,” Bundy’s brief introductory memo is eloquent testimony—but not the only evidence—on the assumption already under Roosevelt that the weapon would be dropped on the enemy. Bundy’s three-page draft statement, attached to his 3 March memo, was dated 13 February 1945, eight weeks before Roosevelt’s death.⁶ That draft presumably proved to be the sketch for the later statements, issued on 6 August 1945 (and now reprinted in this book) from the White House and the War Department right after the A-bombing of Hiroshima.

In his interpretive introduction, in briefly explaining the use of the A-bombs on Japan, Ferrell excludes anti-Soviet themes, does not discuss some possible alternatives to the bomb (modifying unconditional surrender to guarantee the emperor, awaiting Soviet entry into the war, or continuing the siege strategy of blockade and conventional bombing), neglects the Roosevelt administration’s decisions, does not deal with the related issues of the powerful momentum and Roosevelt inheritance bestowed upon Truman, and omits the troubling matter that the bombs, as part of a campaign of terror bombing, were targeted on Japan in order, among other purposes, to kill and injure many enemy noncombatants.

Ferrell does argue that there were two major reasons—Japan’s brutal conduct of the war and American desires to avoid the costly invasion—that largely explain Truman’s use of the atomic bomb. The first reason, Japan’s brutal conduct of the war, focuses on the rape of Nanjing, other massive atrocities against Asians, the “sneak” attack on Pearl Harbor, the deadly Bataan death march, and other cruelties against Allied POWs, and Ferrell loosely likens these various acts to the Holocaust and Germany’s vicious genocidal policies. But in so focusing on Japan’s war conduct as a reason for Truman’s atomic bombings, Ferrell leaves strangely unclear whether he means to imply American revenge and retaliation, or whether he means that the moral threshold in war was lowered, or whether he possibly means that only a terrible shock like the A-bomb could halt the Japanese war machine, which had already killed so many and perhaps injured even more people.

In explaining the atomic bombings, Ferrell properly stresses the Truman administration’s desire to end the war before the 1 November 1945 invasion of southern Kyushu (Operation Olympic), the terrible casualties (meaning wounded, missing, and killed) suffered by the United States in

6. H.H.B. [Harvey Bundy] to the Secretary, 3 March 1945, with attachment of 13 February 1945, all in Harrison-Bundy Files 74, Record Group 77 (Records of the Manhattan Engineer District [MED]), National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (hereafter RG 77, NA).

the recent campaigns on Iwo Jima and Okinawa, and the fear of painful casualties in the American invasion(s) of Japan.

The Casualty Issues

Ferrell sometimes deftly treats the changing, and often unclear, pre-Hiroshima, high-level casualty estimates for American forces, notes the evidence during summer 1945 of the growing Japanese troop buildup on Kyushu, but curiously does not deal explicitly with the Japanese numbers on *southern* Kyushu nor discuss the fact that General George C. Marshall, the army chief of staff, had apparently told the 18 June 1945 White House meeting, including Truman, that American casualties would not exceed 63,000 among the 190,000 U.S. combatant troops in the forthcoming operation on southern Kyushu.⁷

Although the entire southern Kyushu operation was scheduled to involve about 767,000 U.S. troops including these 190,000 men, Marshall did not provide a specific casualty estimate for the remaining 577,000 U.S. troops. Probably that casualty number was implied as part of his 63,000 estimate. There is no pre-Hiroshima record of any larger U.S. casualty estimate by Marshall, though he was undoubtedly more wary by early August 1945.

Among the arresting documents in this valuable book is the cluster of eight, from December 1952 to January 1953, which reveal how Truman's postwar, dubious claim of Marshall's *alleged* pre-Hiroshima casualty estimates for U.S. forces ("1/4 million casualties would be the minimum cost") was nearly quadrupled ("might cost as much as a million") by White House staff aides before the recast letter, with Truman's signature, was sent off to an air force historian for publication in the official air force history. That 12 January 1953 letter is now a major source—often trustingly cited by historians and laypeople—for the "million-casualty" contention. Despite an article on this subject in the Winter 1992 *Diplomatic History*,⁸ that million number, also claimed by Stimson in a dubious 1947 ghost-written essay, lingers oppressively in the scholarly and lay dialogue.

7. William Leahy Diary, 18 June 1945, Library of Congress, and also in the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin. It is highly unlikely that Marshall in June assumed even up to 100,000 U.S. casualties in Olympic. See Marshall to MacArthur, 16 June 1945; MacArthur to Marshall, 17 June and 18[19] June 1945; and Marshall to MacArthur, 18[19] June and 19 June 1945, MacArthur Memorial Archives, Norfolk, Virginia. At the 18 June White House meeting, Admiral William Leahy, in suggesting a 35 percent casualty rate was probably using 190,000 (not 766,700) as the base number and thus meant about 66,500 U.S. casualties. But Admiral Chester Nimitz estimated 49,000 U.S. casualties in the first thirty days

8. Barton J. Bernstein, "Writing, Righting, or Wronging the Historical Record," *Diplomatic History* 16 (Winter 1992): 163–73.

In fact, as the background documents on the revision of Truman's 12 January letter make clear, White House aide David D. Lloyd explained to the President, on 6 January, the need to revise and hence to increase Truman's autonomous recollection that Marshall had warned that "1/4 million casualties would be the minimum cost." A revision was necessary, Lloyd said, in order to bring Truman's "recollection" generally into line with Stimson's earlier published claims of having received pre-Hiroshima estimates of possibly "over a million U.S. casualties." Lloyd stated that Truman's recollection of 250,000 casualties "sounds more reasonable than Stimson's" million-plus number, but surely the President, as the aide understood, did not want to get into a public conflict on this matter. Lloyd's unstated implication was that Truman's publicly undercutting Stimson's very high number might also raise troubling questions about the A-bombs' use, and the aide undoubtedly knew that the President did not want to inspire such unsettling questions.⁹

Stimson's published claim of a very high casualty number, whether constituting the ex-Secretary's honest misremembering or his intentional deception, had fulfilled his essay's purpose of helping to justify the atomic bombing and of blocking doubts in America. As Lloyd had apparently surmised, Stimson's million-or-so claim was very dubious. McGeorge Bundy, Stimson's 1946–47 ghost writer, later tactfully acknowledged this problem. In fact, even after a half-century, no scholar has been able to find any *high-level* supporting archival document from the *Truman months* before Hiroshima that, in unalloyed form, provides even an explicit estimate of 500,000 U.S. battle casualties, let alone a million or more.¹⁰

9. Among those who trustingly use Truman's "revised" 1953 recollection is D. M. Giangreco, "Casualty Projections for the U.S. Invasions of Japan, 1945–1946: Planning and Policy Implications," *Journal of Military History* 61 (July 1997), esp. 569–70, 573–574, who unconvincingly seeks to finesse the issue and also, dismayingly, omits Lloyd's judgment that Truman's original version seemed "more reasonable."

10. For the background of Stimson's numbers, see in part Rudolph Winnacker to Stimson, 12 November 1946 and 18 November 1946, and Winnacker to McGeorge Bundy, 13 December 1946, Stimson papers, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. For later doubts about Stimson's numbers, see for example, McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years* (New York: Random House, 1988), 647. Careful readers of Giangreco, "Casualty Projections for the U.S. Invasions of Japan," will discover that he does not cite a single document that, in his 61 pages and 187 footnotes, fits these criteria. Despite my repeated written and phone requests to Giangreco starting in mid-January and continuing through late May 1998 that he send me, and mark the appropriate section of, a few JCS 924 documents after JCS 924/2 and through 924/15 to substantiate his claims about the steady continuation of the "Saipan ratio" for U.S. casualties in the 924 series, Giangreco failed to provide even one such corroborating document to support his very questionable claims. In fact, as the actual archival documents reveal, he has actually

The issue of high-level, pre-Hiroshima casualty estimates for United States forces in the invasion(s) has become a hot subject of debate in the past few years. Unfortunately, Ferrell's book, compiled by the library archivists before this became a subject of controversy, does not provide much help on pre-Hiroshima estimates. Most of the relevant documents are not included.

Undoubtedly, Marshall's 63,000 estimate on 18 June seemed too low to him by early August, when Ultra reported close to 600,000 Japanese forces in *all* of Kyushu, with the bulk (about 60 percent) in *southern* Kyushu, the area for Olympic.¹¹ Perhaps Marshall in August did express his concern to Truman about this buildup, and possibly Marshall even gave a larger estimate of American casualties, but there is no record of such a discussion or such an estimate. As a result, even Truman's claims, from his original draft of his January 1953 letter, are rather suspect, though certainly not implausible.

Truman's own postwar claims about what Marshall had estimated before the atomic bombing oscillated so widely that no responsible analyst should trust any particular recollection by Truman on this subject. In 1953 or 1954, for example, when answering questions for his ghost writers who were preparing his memoirs, Truman stated in a document not in Ferrell's book, "It was the estimate of General Marshall that [the A-bomb] would probably save the *lives* of 250,000 of our soldiers and probably twice as many casualties."¹² On another occasion in 1953 or 1954 with his ghost writers, in an interview that also remains unpublished, Truman seems in his memory to have merged the invasions of southern Kyushu (Olympic) in early November and Honshu (Coronet) the following March into a single military operation. Forgetting that the two invasions would have involved about 1,940,000 U.S. troops, he decided incorrectly that

misreported the contents of *at least eight* JCS 924s after 924/2, and thus important parts of his argument collapse. Indeed, the only government document from the four Truman months before Hiroshima that Giangreco cites in his article with actually an explicit number over a million is by War Department consultant William B. Shockley, who certainly was not a high-level official in summer 1945. It is questionable whether Stimson ever saw Shockley's mid-July 1945 report. For powerful evidence of Shockley's minor position, see William Shockley Papers, Stanford University, Stanford, California. On Shockley's report, for a different view, see Robert Newman, "Hiroshima and the Trashing of Henry Stimson," *New England Quarterly* 71 (March 1998), provided in galleys by Newman.

11. Edward Drea, *MacArthur's Ultra: Codebreaking and the War Against Japan, 1942-1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 222; and Joint War Plans Committee, "Alternatives to Olympic," JWPC 397, 4 August 1945, file 381 Pacific Ocean Area (6-10-43), RG 218 (Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), National Archives.

12. Truman in interview with William Hillman and Morton Royse, c. 1953-54, Post-Presidential Papers, Truman Library. Emphasis added.

only a million men would have been involved, and contended that he and top-level advisers before Hiroshima had estimated that total American losses (probably meaning fatalities but perhaps including injured) would have been 250,000 men.¹³ Yet, in another interview of 1953 or 1954 with memoir writers, also not printed in Ferrell's book, Truman stated that the invasion involving 2,000,000 Americans "would [have] cost us about 250,000 *casualties*."¹⁴

Ideally, if this collection of documents had been put together recently, it might well have contained the various relevant drafts of Truman's memoirs, written by ghost writers, who escalated the pre-Hiroshima casualty numbers. A first draft, reaching well beyond Truman's own December 1952 recollections, stated, "our military estimated no less than half a million [U.S.] casualties with at least 300,000 dead."¹⁵ Perhaps at Truman's own behest, and almost certainly with his approval, that number was increased elsewhere in the manuscript for the published version, which asserted, "General Marshall told me that it might cost half a million American lives to force the enemy's surrender," and therefore the atomic bomb saved a half-million American lives. That highly suspect number is often treated as authoritative.¹⁶

Some analysts have speculated that the use of large numbers in his memoirs was probably designed by Truman out of a need to stifle whatever uneasiness he felt about the mass killings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and perhaps also in an effort to quell the occasional criticisms offered in 1950s America about the use of the A-bomb on Japan.

The Path To the Use of the Bomb

Ferrell's volume does print Truman's fifteen-word, handwritten, pungent note from late July 1945 at Potsdam, "Reply to your 410111 sugges-

13. Truman in interview with Robert Harris, c. 1953–54, Post-Presidential Papers, Truman Library. Truman used the verb "lose."

14. Truman in interview with David Noyes, c. 1953–54, Post-Presidential Papers, Truman Library. Emphasis added.

15. Memoir draft 1, p. 249, Post-Presidential Papers, Truman Library.

16. Memoir draft 1, p. 1292Ka.; draft 2, p. 683; draft 3, p. 804, Post-Presidential Papers, Truman Library; and Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, *Year of Decisions* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955), 417. Strangely, Giangreco in his strained effort to defend Truman's casualty recollections, rebukes at least one scholar for mistrusting Truman's half-million *fatality* claim, but Giangreco avoids making an explicit argument defending Truman's half-million claim, misrepresents at least one critique of that claim, and then acknowledges, perhaps obliquely, that Truman's half-million-dead claim was "exaggerated." For both confusion and intellectual sloppiness, see Giangreco, "Casualty Projections," 521–522, 574. His deeply flawed essay, which is probably uncritically accepted by many, may merit a very sustained critical analysis.

tions approved[.] Release when ready but no sooner than August 2.” That text was speedily radioed to Secretary Stimson in Washington. But that message, contrary to the erroneous conclusion by David McCullough in *Truman* and by some careless journalists and historians, was not the formal approval of the forthcoming use of the A-bomb but a cable authorizing the release of the Washington-drafted presidential statement *after* the dropping of the first A-bomb.¹⁷ There is no signed or initialed order by Truman, as Ferrell correctly notes, authorizing the atomic bombing of Japan in early August 1945, though this cable clearly implies such authorization.

The only documentary hint in this volume of pre-Hiroshima opposition to the use of the A-bomb on Japan, or the urging of a prior warning or non-combat demonstration, peeks through, rather obliquely, in the post-Hiroshima letter of 17 August 1945 (printed in this volume) by dissenting physicist Leo Szilard. A Hungarian emigré, he had helped inspire the creation of the American A-bomb project and then, in spring and summer 1945, he had hoped to head off the use of the bomb. He did collect about 150 signatures from scientists on the secret wartime project, at the Chicago laboratory and the Clinton laboratory, warning about use of the bomb.¹⁸ On 28 May 1945, with two scientist associates, Szilard had also met in South Carolina, after being shunted there by the White House, to talk about the future use of the A-bomb with James F. Byrnes, who was soon to become Secretary of State.

In that strained meeting, which is not treated in any depth in this volume, Szilard apparently stressed to Byrnes that the combat use of the bomb could be defined by the Soviets as an implicit threat, thus spurring a postwar nuclear arms race, and the physicist also argued against dropping the bomb on Japan. According to Szilard’s 1949 recollection, not published in this volume, the unpleasant conversation took this turn:

Mr. Byrnes did not argue that it was necessary to use the bomb against the cities of Japan in order to win the war. He knew at the time, as the rest of the Government knew, that Japan was essentially defeated and that we could win the war in another six months [by late November]. At that time Mr. Byrnes was much concerned about the spreading of Russian influence in Europe; Rumania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary were all living under a shadow cast by Russia [and he took the] view that our possessing

17. David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), seventh (unnumbered) page of pictures, with caption, after p. 288.

18. William Lanouette, “The July 17th Petition of the Manhattan Project Scientists,” in Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifschultz, eds., *Hiroshima’s Shadow* (Stony Creek, Conn.: Pamphleteer’s Press, 1998).

and demonstrating the bomb would make Russia more manageable in Europe.¹⁹

Szilard's claimed recollection, which he subsequently repeated on a few occasions but strangely had omitted from his 1947-drafted sardonic tale criticizing the atomic bombing, is a staple of much "revisionist" A-bomb literature.²⁰ To some "revisionists," Szilard's 1949 recollection helps explain why Byrnes excluded the Stimson-backed guarantee of the emperor from the 26 July 1945 Potsdam Declaration, leading some "revisionists" to imply or contend that Byrnes wanted to prolong the war in order to use the bomb and thereby intimidate the Soviets. The interpretive controversy over Byrnes and his purposes does not appear in Ferrell's book, though he is very much aware of this issue.²¹

The book does print Truman's own revealing letters of 9 and 11 August 1945, which are very useful for understanding Truman's own values, purposes, and conflicted responses to the then-recent use of the A-bomb on Japan. These two documents have been occasionally used by historians, though presumably they were never seen by journalist Richard Rhodes, whose prize-winning *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, written within fifteen miles of the Truman Library, never employed previously unpublished Truman Library documents because he never examined the Library's rich archives. Like most valuable sources, these two letters of 9 and 11 August are obviously subject to interpretation, and thus to disputes about their meaning.

On 9 August, after receiving Democratic Senator Richard Russell's bloodthirsty telegram of 7 August (printed in this book), calling for harsh terms for Japan and continued pounding of Japan with atomic bombs, Truman replied:

I know that Japan is a terribly cruel and uncivilized nation in warfare but I can't bring myself to believe that, because they are beasts, we should ourselves act in the same manner.

For myself, I certainly regret the necessity of wiping out whole populations because of the "pigheadedness" of the leaders of a nation

19. Leo Szilard, "A Personal History of the Atomic Bomb," *University of Chicago Roundtable*, No. 601 (25 September 1949): 14–15. Often, unfortunately, Szilard's 1949 recollection is quoted without his reference to Byrnes's speaking of winning the war "in another six months," and thus the false impression is left that Szilard said that Byrnes in May did not think that the A-bomb could speed the ending of the war or possibly obviate the autumn 1945 invasion.

20. Leo Szilard, "My Trial as a War Criminal," available in draft in Szilard Papers, University of California (San Diego) Library, and also printed in, among other places, Szilard, *Voice of the Dolphins* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

21. See for example, Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965); and *ibid.* (New York: Penguin, 1985), esp. 1–60; see also, Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman: A Life* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 216–17.

and, for your information, I am not going to do it unless it is absolutely necessary. It is my opinion that after the Russians enter the war [they did on the 8th] the Japanese will very shortly fold up.

My object is to save as many American lives as possible but I also have a humane feeling for the women and children in Japan.

On 11 August, three days after the Nagasaki bombing and a day after Japan's offer of conditional surrender with the single proviso of continuation of the emperor, Truman replied to the 9 August letter (printed in this book) from a prominent Protestant leader, complaining about the "indiscriminate" bombing of Japan. In his 11 August letter, Truman wrote:

Nobody is more disturbed over the use of Atomic bombs than I am but I was greatly disturbed by the unwarranted attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor and their murder of our prisoners of war. The only language they seem to understand is the one we have been using to bombard them.

When you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him as a beast. It is most regrettable but nevertheless true.

On 14 August, Japan accepted America's somewhat ambiguous peace terms, and thus the imperial system was maintained. Significantly, on 10 August, Eugene Meyer, publisher of the *Washington Post*, had written to Truman urging him not to make a peace that did not greatly limit the emperor's power. In a reply of 11 August, not printed in this book, Truman wrote, "I believe we are going to get the thing settled without backing up on our unconditional surrender demand."²²

But actually, the United States did retreat from that demand, and that partial retreat helped end the war in mid-August at a time when a third A-bomb could soon be used, and when Truman himself, on 14 August, just before the surrender was accepted, spoke privately of soon authorizing use of that third A-bomb on Japan if Japan did not speedily surrender.²³

Postwar Justifications and Pre-Hiroshima Uneasiness

After the war, Truman publicly and privately continued to defend his use of the A-bombs, though often rewriting some of the important details of the pre-Hiroshima actions. He always insisted that he was comfortable with the decision, and frequently claimed that he had held a high-level decision-making meeting with his military chiefs, Stimson, and Byrnes, before Hiroshima about whether or not to use the weapon, but the indirect evidence is overwhelming, as Ferrell acknowledges, that such a

22. Eugene Meyer to Truman, 10 August 1945, and reply, 11 August 1945, Official File 197 misc., Truman Library.

23. John Balfour to Foreign Office, 14 August 1945, FO800/461, Public Record Office, Kew, United Kingdom.

meeting never occurred. Some historians claim that Truman, after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, was troubled by the mass killings, possibly worried about the rectitude of the atomic bombings, and thus had a need, operating through processes of self-denial, to rewrite parts of his pre-Hiroshima past. For that reason, some have suggested, Truman after the war normally referred to the two A-bombed cities incorrectly, as exclusively or almost entirely “military” targets.²⁴ The targets were, in fact, mostly noncombatants.

Before Hiroshima, in what might be termed an act of self-deception, Truman had managed not to admit to himself that the bomb would mostly kill civilians. In a diary entry of 25 July 1945, at Potsdam, and reprinted in this volume, Truman wrote:

This weapon is to be used against Japan between now and August 10. I have told the Sec[retary] of War, Mr Stimson[,] to use it so that military objectives and soldiers and sailors are the target and not women and children. Even if the Japs are savages, ruthless, merciless and fanatic, we as the leader of the world for the common welfare cannot drop this terrible bomb on the old capital [Kyoto] or the new [Toyko]. He and I are in accord. The target will be a purely military one.

It is highly unlikely that Stimson had deceived Truman about the nature of the target, and Truman never so accused Stimson in the aftermath of the atomic bombings, and the two men continued their relationship of respect and trust. True, on 16 May 1945, according to Stimson’s memorandum (not in this volume), he had told Truman that “the same rule of sparing the civilian population [of Japan] should be applied as far as possible to the use of any new weapons,” presumably including the A-bomb. At the time, despite the early March fire-bombing of Tokyo, resulting in possibly over 80,000 dead (mostly noncombatants), Stimson continued to hope that the air force would not kill Japanese civilians massively.²⁵

On 6 June, in a later meeting with Truman, also summarized in a Stimson memo that is not in this volume, the Secretary told the President that he was uneasy about the air force’s “area bombing” of Japan, because it could mean committing American atrocities, and because he did not want Japan bombed out before the A-bomb was ready for its dramatic use

24. See, for example, Truman to Stimson, 13 November 1946 and 31 December 1946, Henry L. Stimson Papers, and also in PSF, Truman Library. For a rare exception in the postwar years, see Truman in “Discussion,” 11 February 1954 (with Noyes and Hillman), Post-Presidential Papers, in which Truman was probably discussing the August 1945 A-bomb targeting, when he stated, “The civilian population is treated as a military asset in [modern] wars.”

25. Henry L. Stimson to President, 16 May 1945, Stimson Diary, Sterling Library, Yale University.

on Japan. According to this Stimson memo, Truman “laughed and said he understood.”²⁶

Just a few days before that session, on 31 May 1945, at a meeting with the blue-ribbon Interim Committee and its Scientific Advisory panel, in the words of the summary minutes (not printed in this volume), “the Secretary [Stimson] agreed that the most desirable target would be a vital war plant employing a large number of workers and closely surrounded by workers’ houses.”²⁷ Stripped of polite euphemisms, that meant massively killing workers and their families, the residents of those houses. Truman could not have been (cognitively) uninformed of such targeting before Hiroshima.

Perhaps fortunately, the book does not include a deceptive memorandum, cast after Nagasaki in 1945 or 1946 by an assistant, on Truman’s A-bomb remembrances. According to the White House aide’s notes, Truman claimed that he had told Stimson at Potsdam that the target must be “a *military* city,” and the President had “hoped not more than 1 drop—decided on Nagasaki and Hiroshima.”²⁸ There is absolutely no pre-Hiroshima archival evidence—including Stimson’s diary as well as Truman’s—that Truman, Stimson, or others near the President hoped for the use of only one bomb on Japan. And, in fact, the particular target cities were not determined by Truman; and Kokura, not Nagasaki, was actually selected as the city for the second A-bomb. Nagasaki became the target for the second bomb because Kokura was badly clouded over on 8 August and the bombardier was able to drop the plutonium weapon on Nagasaki.

On a rare occasion, in December 1945, at the “Gridiron Dinner,” in a little-known talk not reprinted in this book, Truman did seem somewhat uneasy but not defensive about his A-bomb decision. He claimed, dubiously, that it had been a difficult decision. Both his diary and Stimson’s make that characterization seem questionable. In that December talk, he referred to the bombing, agonizingly, as “the wholesale slaughter of human beings,” and he acknowledged bluntly that the bomb had killed many “women, children, and [other] noncombatants.”²⁹

26. Stimson Diary, 6 June 1945.

27. Interim Committee Minutes, 31 May 1945, Harrison-Bundy Files 100, MED Records.

28. Undated, unsigned (probably George Elsey) notes, 1945–46 folders (Atomic Energy), George Elsey Papers, Truman Library. For a naively trusting use of this source, see Ronald Takaki, *Hiroshima: Why America Dropped the Atomic Bomb* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), p. 150. For a remarkable number of factual and conceptual errors about Truman’s pre-Nagasaki knowledge and expectations, see Stanley Goldberg, “What Did Truman Know, and When Did He Know It?” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 54(May-June 1998): 18–19. That essay merits a systematic, published critique.

29. Harry S. Truman, Gridiron Dinner notes, 15 December 1945, PSF 46, Truman Library.

Usually in his postwar public pronouncements about the 1945 use of the A-bombs on Japan, Truman seemed both firm and defiant. Sometimes his defiance, as well as his rewriting of the pre-Hiroshima past, inclined some analysts to believe that he was trying to conceal a lingering post-Hiroshima uneasiness, if not guilt. For example, consider Truman's response in 1946, when physicist and former atomic-energy adviser Karl T. Compton cast a pro-Hiroshima article (reprinted in this volume) for the *Atlantic Monthly*. Truman on 16 December, in a letter in this volume, strongly endorsed Compton's effort, somewhat petulantly stressed that the "final decision had to be made by the President," dubiously claimed that he had first made "a complete survey of the whole situation," thus misrepresenting the processes leading up to the use of the bombs, and also incorrectly stated, "The Japanese were given fair warning." In fact, in the 26 July 1945 Potsdam Declaration (printed in this book), there had been no mention of the A-bomb, and some earlier efforts by scientists and Under Secretary of the Navy Ralph Bard to urge such an explicit warning had been defeated within the American bureaucracy, reaching up to Stimson and the Interim Committee, well before Potsdam.

In either 1953 or 1954, in another interview-transcript with memoir writers, but one not printed in this volume, Truman admitted that the B-29 conventional bombings might have produced the desired surrender without the use of the A-bomb. He went on to stress, "no schools of afterthought are worth much. Anybody could tell afterwards what should have been done." He then added what was for him a familiar saying, "Any school boy's afterthought is worth more than a general's forethought."³⁰

Truman and the Attacks on His A-Bomb "Decision"

Truman's often feisty, and sometimes rather defensive comments about his 1945 use of the atomic bombs should make historians wonder about his responses to the *postwar* writings by most of his wartime five-star generals and admirals, who raised serious questions about whether the A-bombs had been necessary and should have been used.³¹ General

30. Truman in interview with Noyes, c. 1953–54, Post-Presidential Papers, Truman Library.

31. For doubts about Eisenhower's claims, see Barton J. Bernstein, "Ike and Hiroshima: Did He Oppose It?" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 10 (September 1987), 377–79. For postwar claims by the others, see: MacArthur press release, 12 September 1945, Bonner Fellers Papers, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford, California; MacArthur to Herbert Hoover, 8 October 1959, MacArthur archives, Norfolk, Virginia; D. Clayton James, *The Years of MacArthur*, vol. 2, 1941–1945 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 775; Ernest J. King and Walter Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King: A Naval Record* (New York: Norton, 1952), 620–621, 598, 604–609; and H. H. Arnold, *Global Mission* (New York: Harper, 1949), 598.

Dwight D. Eisenhower dubiously claimed that he had given July 1945 advice to Stimson against using the A-bomb on Japan; MacArthur announced soon after the war that the use of the atomic bomb had been unnecessary, and three of the four Joint Chiefs also criticized or opposed the atomic bombings in their postwar memoirs. Admiral Ernest King, the retired chief of naval operations, stated in his 1952 memoir that the bomb had been unnecessary, that the blockade could have won the war without the bomb, and he dubiously implied that he had held such convictions before Hiroshima. General Henry Arnold, the retired commanding general of the Army Air Forces, implied that conventional bombing could have soon won the war without the A-bomb, and he suggested, questionably, that he had given such advice at the time of the July Potsdam meeting.

Ironically, the only one of the Joint Chiefs who actually had raised serious pre-Hiroshima doubts about the use of the A-bomb had been General Marshall. He had not objected to its use, but he had strongly urged—presumably for ethical reasons and the protection of America’s moral reputation—that the weapon should be used on a truly military target. He had made that proposal to Stimson on 29 May, obviously did not win support then,³² and apparently never again raised the issue. After the war, in loyalty to Truman and Stimson, Marshall never disclosed that he had given such advice.

Among top U.S. military leaders, the strongest condemnation of the atomic bombing came from Admiral William Leahy, retired wartime chairman of the Joint Chiefs, in his 1950 memoir. Ironically, that book carried a warmly endorsing preface by Truman, who obviously had not read the A-bomb segment before one of his aides crafted that preface. In his memoir, Leahy implied, dubiously, that he advised before Hiroshima against the use of the bomb and had stated that it was unnecessary. His memoir asserted that the bombing had been both unnecessary and immoral. “In being the first to use it,” he declared, “we had adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages.”³³

Truman should have regarded Leahy’s harsh words as an act of betrayal, and the President should have also been troubled, if not

32. John J. McCloy, Memorandum of Conversation with General Marshall, 29 May 1945, Safe File, RG 107 (Records of the Secretary of War), National Archives, and also in McCloy Papers, Amherst College, Amherst, Mass., and in George C. Marshall Collection, Marshall Library, Lexington, Virginia.

33. William D. Leahy, *I Was There: The Personal Story of the Chief of Staff to Presidents Roosevelt and Truman Based on his Notes and Diaries Made at the Time* (New York: Whittlesey, 1950), 441. Strangely, in 1950, Leahy also claimed privately that he would not criticize the A-bomb decision. Leahy to Professor George Carroll, 13 March 1950, Leahy Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

offended, by the anti-Hiroshima claims of Arnold, King, MacArthur, and Eisenhower. Strangely, there is no record of Truman's responses.³⁴

Thinking about the Bomb and Other Deadly Weapons

In 1958, when the Hiroshima City Council complained about Truman's recent statement that he felt no compunction about having dropped the atomic bombs on Japan, the President reaffirmed in a letter (printed in this book) his public arguments for using the weapon. But privately, probably at about the same time, he sketched additional thoughts, found years later by a Truman Library archivist, about the terrible peril created by nuclear weapons. That document, closing the volume, states in part:

The world is faced with a situation that means either total destruction or the greatest age in history can be its lot. . . . Well, that destruction is at hand unless the great leaders of the world would prevent it. . . . It is up to our leaders.

Perhaps this document would have more meaning, and greater resonance, if this volume, extending beyond its original Truman Library binder version, had also included two telling documents from Truman's last days in the White House. On 16 January 1953, after Truman's "Farewell Address" of the previous night, in which he had warned against thinking about preventive nuclear war, Atomic Energy Commissioner Thomas Murray, a Democrat and religious Catholic, worried that Truman's comments suggested that atomic warfare was itself immoral. In what was apparently conceived as a polite, brief private lecture to the departing President, who was the very man who had presided over the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Murray wrote, in part:

In a sense we started atomic warfare in 1945 and we believed and still believe that in doing so we were not committing an immoral act. To my mind the only change today is in the fact of Russian power to retaliate. I am sure that you will agree that the morality of an act should not depend upon how power happens to be distributed.³⁵

On 19 January 1953, a day before the Trumans would leave the White House, Harry S. Truman replied to Murray: "I rather think you have put a wrong construction on my approach to the use of the Atomic bomb. It is far worse than gas and biological warfare because it affects the civilian population and murders them by the wholesale."³⁶ In writing those words,

34. All efforts to locate Truman's responses have failed, despite my searches in the Truman Library and in the files of the various critics, and despite help from archivists at the Truman Library and the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas.

35. Thomas Murray to President, 16 January 1953, PSF, Truman Library.

36. Truman to Thomas Murray, 19 January 1953, PSF, Truman Library.

did Truman intend to reveal that he further understood, in ways that he had often denied, the horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with the mass killing of well over 100,000 noncombatants? Was Truman not also implying, as Commissioner Murray feared, that he felt guilty for having, as President, atomic-bombed Japanese cities?

What Murray undoubtedly did not know, and perhaps Truman himself had forgotten, is that he had also implied such feelings on 10 August 1945 in telling his cabinet, after the Japanese offer of conditional surrender arrived, that he was halting the atomic bombing of Japan, because as Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace recorded in his diary (not printed in this volume): "He [the President] 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." But Truman did continue the less deadly conventional bombings of Japan.³⁷

Truman's 19 January 1953 letter to Murray also implies that if the war had not soon ended, the President might well have been tempted to authorize gas warfare and also a form of biological warfare. In a theme not treated in Ferrell's volume, General Marshall, as early as 29 May 1945, had recommended to an unwilling Stimson the use of gas against Japanese troops, in the words of the summary minutes, to deal with the "last ditch defense tactics of the Japanese."³⁸ Marshall had also proposed in June the use of gas to his fellow military chiefs, but that had provoked the ire of Admiral William Leahy, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, who emphasized, among other anti-gas arguments, that such use would violate President Roosevelt's 1943 public pledge that the United States would not initiate gas warfare.³⁹ After the atomic bombings, however, gas might well have seemed attractive.

During the spring and summer of 1945, there had also been some consideration of America's using chemical crop killers, then classified as biological warfare, to destroy part of Japan's rice crop and to induce starvation. Such plans undoubtedly evoked moral uneasiness among American leaders, and the air force much preferred to continue its deadly bombing campaign and not be diverted to crop-killing. Had the war dragged on for a few months after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and with the air force having destroyed most of Japan's cities by about October, the use of this form of biological warfare might also have won the President's endorsement.⁴⁰

37. Henry Wallace diary, 10 August 1945, Wallace Papers, University of Iowa, Iowa City.

38. McCloy, "Memorandum on Conversation with General Marshall," 29 May 1945.

39. Barton J. Bernstein, "Why We Didn't Use Poison Gas in World War II," *American Heritage* 36 (August-September 1985): 40-45.

40. Barton J. Bernstein, "America's Biological Warfare Program in the Second World War," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 11 (September 1988): 306-17.

The U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey's Anti-Hiroshima Reports

Ferrell leaves unclear, in this volume, whether he believes that the atomic bombings were necessary, justifiable, and moral. He seems to imply, more by tone and occasional words than by explicit formulation, that the answer is “yes” on all three counts. Those implicit judgments place him in the American majority.

In obliquely suggesting his views, he does comment critically on the mildest of the three mid-1946 reports, issued by the chairman's office of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS), a substantially civilian group designated by Truman to assess bombing in Japan. Perhaps unfortunately, Ferrell's volume does not reprint the often-cited harsh, anti-Hiroshima conclusion that appears in two of the other summer 1946 Strategic Bombing Survey studies. Crafted by vice-chairman Paul Nitze, that often-quoted statement is this:

Based on a detailed investigation of all the facts and supported by the testimony of 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.⁴¹

Unfortunately, many critics of the atomic bombings trustingly rely upon this conclusion for authority, without realizing that this Survey statement was not supported by the evidence the USSBS gathered. Indeed, the Survey's important pre-November counterfactual was sometimes undercut by troubling evidence that was gathered but *not* included in the Survey's reports.⁴²

Reconsidering the A-Bomb's Use

Rejecting that Survey conclusion as a reliable authority still leaves open the important, tantalizing counterfactual: Could the war have been ended before 1 November, and therefore the invasion obviated, if the United States had not used the A-bomb, but guaranteed the emperor's continuation, awaited Soviet entry into the war, and maintained the strangling naval blockade and the “conventional” bombing of Japanese cities?

41. Chairman's Office, United States Strategic Bombing Survey, *Summary Report (Pacific War)* (Washington: GPO, 1946), 26; and *Japan's Struggle to End The War* (Washington: GPO, 1946), 13.

42. Barton J. Bernstein, “Compelling Japan's Surrender Without the A-bomb, Soviet Entry, or Invasion: Reconsidering the US Bombing Survey's Early-Surrender Conclusions,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 18 (June 1995): 101–48; and Robert Newman, *Truman and the Hiroshima Cult* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1995), 33–56.

And, if so, would more or fewer Japanese have died? The inability to provide definitive answers should not mean dismissing these questions.

Quite probably, but surely *less than definitely*, the war could have been ended by Japan's surrender before November 1945 *without* the A-bomb, *if*, in a three-part, counterfactual scenario, the Soviets had entered the conflict in early or mid-August, the United States had guaranteed the maintenance of the imperial institution, and the strangling naval blockade and deadly conventional bombing of Japan had continued and even escalated. Such bombing, in addition to killing and injuring many noncombatants in cities, would undoubtedly have destroyed key transportation systems (there was such an Air Forces directive) and aimed to produce famine and to further cripple industry.

Depending upon *when* before November 1945 the war ended, *if* it ended before November and the planned invasion, fewer Japanese might have died—or more might have died than did in the two atomic bombings. A surrender in August or perhaps very early September 1945 *suggests* fewer deaths in this three-part, counterfactual scenario than in the two atomic bombings. In turn, a surrender in late October 1945, or even somewhat earlier, *suggests* that probably more Japanese would have died in this three-part, counterfactual than did in the atomic bombings.

Admittedly, such hedged estimates of likely dead are very “soft,” and highly speculative, because, among other problems, the evidence on how many were ultimately killed by the two A-bombs ranges from about 100,000 (which seems low) to 340,000 (which seems far too high), and the estimates of Japanese killed by the 1945 conventional bombing also range very widely.⁴³ Thus, any extrapolation from the bombing data available for

43. A brief indication of the complexity and range of estimates is available in Michael Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), 413–14 n. 43, and further suggested by the differences among the following sources: Committee for the Compilation of Materials on Damage Caused by the Atomic Bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, *Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Physical, Medical, and Social Effects of the Atomic Bombings*, trans. Eisei Ishikawa and David Swain (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 113–15 (194,000 for the total atomic-bomb fatalities through late December 1945 for Nagasaki, and into August 1946 for Hiroshima), 364 (33,000–122,000 for atomic-bomb fatalities for Hiroshima, and 23,000–74,000 for Nagasaki), and 367 (340,000 for the total atomic-bomb fatalities into 1950); USSBS, *The Effects of the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (Washington: GPO, 1946), 33 (105,000–120,000 for the total atomic-bomb fatalities, and 83,000 for the fire-bombing fatalities in Tokyo); USSBS, *Summary Report (Pacific War)*, 22–24 (100,000–110,000 for total atomic-bomb fatalities) and 20 (220,000–230,000 for conventional-bombing fatalities); Manhattan Engineer District, “The Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki” (1946), 18 (105,000 for total atomic-bomb fatalities), Manhattan Engineer District records, RG 77, NA; “Salient Points in Report of Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission,” *Military Surgeon* 50 (June 1947): 520–21 (115,000–123,000 for total atomic-bomb fatalities); USSBS, *Field Report: Covering Air-Raid Protection and Allied Subjects in*

the months up to mid-August 1945 is a risky effort, and made more risky by the prospects of pockets of starvation or near-starvation in the early autumn in Japan, and the illness and death then or later from such deprivation. So, such an analytical venture in what should be forthrightly called “counterfactual speculation,” relying upon *very soft* data, must be conducted with uneasiness, caution, and humility. But such an effort should not be dismissed, because at minimum the venture helps clarify the range of uncertainty and indicates the difficulty of reaching comfortable judgments about the number of lives in Japan that might have been saved or lost without the atomic bombings, *even if* the planned November 1945 invasion had been obviated.

Nor should one dismiss the related but quite different question, the question that would have dominated American concerns in 1945 and that still engages the patriotism and passions of many Americans: Under these counterfactual conditions of not using the A-bomb but pursuing other diplomatic and military strategies, how many Americans and Allies,

Nagasaki, Japan (Washington: GPO, 1947), 1 (loosely implies over 100,000 atomic-bomb casualties—fatalities and injuries—in Nagasaki); “Documents Submitted to the Supreme Commander for the Allied Forces by the Japanese Mission to Negotiate Surrender,” 19 August 1945, part I (11,733 for atomic-bomb fatalities in Hiroshima, though this number may very well be a typographical error, and 87,583 fatalities in Tokyo), box 13, Bonner Fellers Papers, Hoover Institution; and USSBS, *The Effects of Strategic Bombing on Japanese Morale* (Washington: GPO, 1947), 193–95 (about 900,000 fatalities in *all* kinds of bombings). Using that 900,000-fatality estimate (based on USSBS polling, which may have overestimated fatalities), and subtracting about 100,000–125,000 for the atomic-bomb fatalities that the USSBS estimated in its various reports, the total fatalities in conventional bombing could be over 775,000. Because that 900,000-fatality estimate may be high, and the atomic-bomb fatality numbers low, the reasonable conclusion is *probably* about 450,000–700,000 fatalities in conventional bombing. Interestingly, the Department of Energy’s recent glossy study, by F. G. Gosling, *The Manhattan Project: Science in the Second World War* (Washington: Department of Energy, 1994), 51–54, 60 n. 60, concluded that atomic-bomb fatalities reached 200,000 for Hiroshima and 140,000 for Nagasaki, and cited three sources for “summaries [of] casualty rates”: Vincent C. Jones, *Manhattan: The Army and the Atomic Bomb*, a volume in the U.S. Army in World War II (Washington: GPO, 1985), and Leslie R. Groves, *Now It Can Be Told: The Story of the Manhattan Project* (New York: Harper, 1962), both of which gave much lower numbers; and the less-than-reliable volume by Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 733–34 (Hiroshima) and 740 and 742 (Nagasaki). It might be unfair to rely heavily on Gosling’s Department of Energy high numbers as an authoritative official source, though it constitutes added evidence of the nature of the complexity of this matter and also useful evidence that high atomic-bomb fatality numbers do not in some important cases correlate with anti-atomic-bomb attitudes. For a different view of this matter, see Ken Ringle, *Washington Post*, 5 August 1995, as cited in John Correll, “The Activists and the *Enola Gay*” (circulated in about September 1995 by the U.S. Air Force Association), 15–16, who shares Ringle’s view.

including POWs, would have been likely to die in the period between mid-August, the date of Japan's actual surrender, and the undoubtedly later date of Japan's hypothesized surrender?

As Ferrell would emphasize, but some A-bomb "revisionist" historians are reluctant to acknowledge, the implications of that question help powerfully to explain why Truman used the A-bomb on Japan as soon as it was ready. That is not the entire explanation, but it is a crucial theme. It does not stop some analysts from wishing that other strategies had first been tried, that the bomb's use had been delayed, or that the targets had not been significantly noncombatants.

In reaching well beyond Ferrell's volume, and many of the unused documents on the 1945 atomic bombings, it is worth pondering whether there would be as much heated concern in the 1990s if the two bombs had killed "only" 30,000 or so, if most of the dead and injured had been Japanese soldiers and sailors, if they had been the intended targets as General Marshall had once hoped, and if the bomb had killed only by blast and heat and not also by radiation? Do not the large numbers of dead and injured, the fact that most were intentionally noncombatants, and the horror of radiation, raising spectres worse than those suggested by poison gas, help make the 1945 use of the atomic bombs a passionately contested and often troubling issue?

In 1945, before Hiroshima and even afterward, Truman rightly believed that the use of the A-bomb on Japan would be warmly endorsed by Americans, that they never would have understood, much less approved, a decision not to use the weapon if it was available, and that no mainline American politician, who would have been likely to be President at the time, would have decided otherwise. Truman never sought to avoid using the A-bomb, and he was unwilling before Hiroshima to take the risks to seek to pursue other tactics that might have obviated both the bomb and the invasion. To follow such alternative routes seemed perilous and undesirable, and he did hope to end the war, aided by the bomb as well as by conventional bombing and the blockade, before 1 November and the costly invasion of southern Kyushu.

He also seemed to believe that the use of the bomb, as Secretary Byrnes contended, might help him in dealing with the Soviets. But that hope was never a controlling reason but only a supplementary, and thus a confirming, reason to do what Roosevelt would probably have also done, what virtually all top-level presidential advisers seemed to endorse, and what only one adviser, Under Secretary Bard, who was on the fringes of decision making, ever questioned *before* Hiroshima: dropping the bomb on Japan in order to speed a surrender.

After the war, as Truman could not foresee, three of his wartime military chiefs somewhat rewrote their pasts to contend or imply that they had been pre-Hiroshima opponents of the bomb's use. And some other

high-level wartime leaders, including Eisenhower and MacArthur, joined that criticism, which undoubtedly upset Truman.

But in the first nineteen years after Hiroshima, most Americans did not notice this criticism. They continued very strongly to endorse the 1945 atomic bombings, though the immediate post-Hiroshima support of 85 percent approval (with 10 percent disapproval),⁴⁴ dropped somewhat in the 1950s and early 1960s. Nevertheless, nineteen years after Hiroshima, despite earlier postwar dissents from Herbert Hoover, former Under Secretary of State Joseph Grew, physicist Edward Teller, *U.S. News* (later *U.S. News and World Report*) editor David Lawrence, Atomic Energy Commission head Lewis Strauss, USSBS vice chairman Paul Nitze, theologian Reinhold Niebuhr,⁴⁵ and other notables, the 1945 use of the atomic bombs was not a broadly contested matter or of much concern to most Americans. The matter seemed settled and the answers obvious.

In ways that Truman probably never foresaw, attitudes changed in later years, and certainly historians have sharply argued since the mid-1960s, and the work of Gar Alperovitz (whose books do not appear on Ferrell's "recommended reading" list), about the use of the bombs on Japan in 1945. Over the years, the support for the 1945 use of the A-bombs has dropped considerably, and the opposition has grown appreciably. By 1995, when Ferrell was probably completing this useful book, approval had fallen to 59 percent, disapproval had risen to 35 percent, and America was deeply divided—by race, gender, age, and income—on this issue.⁴⁶

44. Poll of 10–15 August 1945, in *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935–1948* (New York: Random House, 1972), 1: 521–22.

45. See, for example: Herbert Hoover, memorandum, 8 August 1945, John O'Laughlin file, and Hoover to Bonner Fellers, 12 March 1947, Fellers file, Hoover Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa; Joseph Grew to Henry Stimson, 12 February 1947, Joseph Grew Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.; "Was A-Bomb A Mistake?" *U.S. News and World Report* 60 (15 August 1960): 75–76 (Teller), 71–73 (Strauss); David Lawrence, "The Right to Kill," *U.S. News* 19 (5 October 1945): 38–39; and Reinhold Niebuhr to James Conant, 12 March 1947, Reinhold Niebuhr Papers, Library of Congress. Of this group, only Hoover apparently did not clearly express his objections in public. See Harry Elmer Barnes, "Hiroshima: Assault on a Beaten Foe," *National Review*, 10 May 1958, 442–43; and "RIP," *ibid.*, 29 March 1958, 296.

46. Gallup poll, 20–22 July 1995, courtesy of Roper Center. The percentages do not add up to 100 percent because of the omission here of the "no opinion" responses. In slight contrast to the July 1995 poll, the 2–5 December 1994 poll results, before the Enola Gay/Smithsonian controversy had greatly heated up, were 55 percent approval and 39 percent disapproval, but the breakdown by various demographic categories sometimes differed more substantially between early December 1994 and mid-July 1995 than the overall shift of four percentage points would suggest. In late November 1994, in a separate question, Americans, when asked if they would have dropped the atomic bomb first or have instead first "tried some other way

In mid-1995, African Americans substantially disapproved (57 percent “anti” and 31 percent “pro”) of the atomic bombings of Japanese cities, while whites overwhelmingly (64 percent to 31 percent) approved. A near-majority of American women (47 percent) disapproved of the atomic bombings of Japanese cities and 40 percent approved, while men overwhelmingly (74 percent) approved, with only 23 percent disapproving. Young adults divided almost equally (46 percent “pro” to 49 percent “anti”), while the elderly, who had lived through World War II, overwhelmingly (80 percent to 15 percent) approved. A near-majority of the comparatively poor (49 percent to 44 percent) approved, while the comparatively wealthy overwhelmingly approved of the 1945 atomic bombings (69 percent to 27 percent).⁴⁷

Ferrell’s book, perhaps despite his hopes, is not likely to change attitudes, even if it is widely read, which is unlikely. But it does provide important documents for laypeople and non-specialists, inviting a reconsideration of the A-bomb decision, an analysis of its meanings, and an opportunity better to understand Truman’s own attitudes and reasons. It is a book for laypeople and scholars that should be supplemented by other sources, and by other interpretations beyond Ferrell’s, to understand the rich complexity of the 1945 decision to use the A-bomb, to decide whether or not it was carefully considered, and to dwell upon alternatives to the 1945 bombings.

In doing all that, it is worth recalling Truman’s own admonitions against “Monday-morning quarterbacking.” But such admonitions should not bar counterfactual analysis, block the consideration of alternative pasts, nor prohibit people from applying moral principles that were sometimes asserted, and more often eroded, in World War II. It is important also to recognize that the United States was unique in 1945 in that it alone possessed the atomic bomb, and it is important to remember that the British government before Hiroshima endorsed the use of the bomb, and that Stalin approved the atomic bombing two days after Hiroshima. Indeed, it is difficult to believe that any major World War II nation that had the bomb would have chosen not to use it in 1945 against the enemy. In that sense, the United States was not unusual but typical, as was Harry S. Truman,

to force the Japanese to surrender,” answered by a near-majority (49 percent to 44 percent) that they would have first sought “some other way.” Gallup poll, 28–29 November 1994, courtesy of Roper Center. A substantial majority of women, of African Americans, and of Hispanics, by approximately two-to-one ratios for each group, selected “some other way” first. In contrast, whites split evenly, but men, by nearly two to one, would have first dropped the bomb. Unfortunately, this poll did not specify “other” ways, nor note that the heavy conventional bombing and the strangling naval blockade, both of which began well before August 1945, could be defined as such an “other” way or ways.

47. Gallup poll, 20–22 July 1995.

too. But some, like General Marshall, and possibly also Admiral Leahy, would have chosen not to use the bomb on noncombatants, a value that Secretary Stimson had also sometimes endorsed and ultimately violated.

Might the bomb have been used truly on a military target and not substantially on noncombatants, if Marshall had pleaded such a case with the President, if Leahy had affirmed such values, and if Stimson had also joined them? Then, quite probably, Truman could have written, correctly, in his Potsdam diary “that military objectives and soldiers and sailors are the target and not women and children.” Would the 1945 use of the bomb then raise such troubling moral issues for many in the 1990s?⁴⁸

48. See Bernstein, “The Struggle Over History: Defining the Hiroshima Narrative,” in Philip Nobile, ed., *Judgment at the Smithsonian* (New York: Marlowe, 1995), 166–206; G. E. M. Anscombe, *The Collected Philosophical Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe*, vol. 3, *Ethics, Religion, and Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), 51–81; Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), esp. 125–75 and 253–83; and James Turner Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 229–357. For an uneasy effort to move away from these issues, see Major General Charles W. Sweeney, with James and Marion Antonucci, *War’s End: An Eyewitness Account of America’s Last Atomic Mission* (New York: Avon Books, 1997), 283–84.