Source: U.S. History. Org: America in the Second World War: The Manhattan Project & The Decision to Drop the Bomb. Revised. [www.ushistory.org/us/](http://www.ushistory.org/us/)

**Focus: Atomic Weapons’ Use in World War II**

**Section One Reading: The Manhattan Project**

Early in 1939, the world’s scientific community discovered that German physicists had learned the secrets of splitting a uranium atom. Fears soon spread over the possibility of Nazi scientists utilizing that energy to produce a bomb capable of unspeakable destruction. Scientists, Albert Einstein, who fled Nazi persecution, and Enrico Fermi, who escaped Fascist Italy, agreed that the President must be informed of the dangers of atomic technology in the hands of the Axis powers. Fermi traveled to Washington to express his concerns to government officials. Einstein penned a letter to President Roosevelt urging the development of an atomic research program.

The President saw neither the necessity nor the utility for such a project, but agreed to proceed slowly. The American effort to design and build an atomic bomb received its code name, the Manhattan Project. **(Stop. Come to consensus on your answer to question 1.)**

**Section Two Reading: Hiroshima**

The bomb was built and successfully tested. Now America had the bomb. Now what? Harry Truman knew he was faced with a decision of unprecedented gravity. The capacity to end the war with Japan was in his hands, but it would involve unleashing the most terrible weapon ever known.

American soldiers and civilians were weary from four years of war, yet the Japanese military was refusing to give up their fight. American forces occupied Okinawa and Iwo Jima and were intensely fire bombing Japanese cities. But Japan had an army of 2 million strong stationed in the home islands guarding against invasion.

First, an Allied demand for an immediate unconditional surrender was made to the leadership in Japan. Although the demand stated that refusal would result in total destruction, no mention of any new weapons of mass destruction was made. The Japanese military command rejected the request for unconditional surrender, but there were indications that a conditional surrender was possible.

Regardless, on August 6, 1945, a plane called the ENOLA GAY dropped an atomic bomb on the city of HIROSHIMA. Instantly, 70,000 Japanese citizens were vaporized. In the months and years that followed, an additional 100,000 perished from burns and radiation sickness. **(Stop. Come to consensus on your answer to question 2.)**

**Section Three Reading**

Two days later, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan. On August 9, a second atomic bomb was dropped on NAGASAKI, where 80,000 Japanese people perished.

On August 14, 1945, the Japanese surrendered.

Some military analysts insist that Japan was on its knees and the bombings were simply unnecessary. The American government was accused of racism on the grounds that such a device would never have been used against white civilians.

Truman stated that his decision to drop the bomb was purely military. A Normandy-type amphibious landing would have cost an estimated million casualties. Truman believed that the bombs saved Japanese lives as well. Prolonging the war was not an option for the President. Over 3,500 Japanese kamikaze raids had already wrought great destruction and loss of American lives.

Even the scientific community failed to foresee the awful effects of RADIATION SICKNESS. Truman saw little difference between atomic bombing Hiroshima and FIRE BOMBING Dresden or Tokyo.

The ethical debate over the decision to drop the atomic bomb will never be resolved. The bombs did, however, bring an end to the most destructive war in history. The Manhattan Project that produced it demonstrated the possibility of how a nation's resources could be mobilized. **(Stop. Come to consensus on your answer to question 3.)**

**Statement 1:**

The atomic bomb should have been built.

10 = Absolute Agreement 1 = Absolute Disagreement

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

1. How much does your table group agree with Statement 1? Circle the number that best matches.
2. Explain why your table group got the number it did. Include evidence.

**Statement 2:**

The first atomic bomb should have been dropped on Hiroshima.

10 = Absolute Agreement 1 = Absolute Disagreement

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

1. How much does your table group agree with Statement 2? Circle the number that best matches.
2. Explain why your table group got the number it did. Include evidence.

**Statement 3:**

The second atomic bomb should have been dropped on Nagasaki.

10 = Absolute Agreement 1 = Absolute Disagreement

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

1. How much does your table group agree with Statement 3? Circle the number that best matches.
2. Explain why your table group got the number it did. Include evidence.