

The Atomic Bomb: Bridging the Gap Between the Scholarship and the  
Textbook

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## Introduction

“What sticks to the memory from... textbooks is not any particular series of facts, but an atmosphere, an impression, a tone.”<sup>1</sup> While this statement made by Frances FitzGerald seems rather innocuous, historians, teachers, and parents have taken this kind of sentiment to heart. If it's true that “the sources that reach more students than any other are the American history textbooks” and that these sources are the “principal means of informing collective memory,” as J. Samuel Walker argues, then it's understandable that a wide range of people would be concerned about the content of the textbooks that students are reading.<sup>2</sup>

This thesis, through careful analysis of the tone and content of the textbook, shows the different types of impressions that have been left by authors in their coverage of a very controversial topic—the decision to drop the atomic bomb. Although much has been written about the decision to use the atomic bomb and about history textbooks in general, I have only found one text that examines the former's place in the latter.<sup>3</sup> By tracing the atomic bomb in textbooks from 1949 to 1996, this thesis is doing something that has not been done before.

This thesis is driven by the simple question: how does the content of the textbook connect to the scholarly debate in reference to the atomic bomb? I argue that while the arguments of Secretary of War Henry Stimson remained constant in the textbooks, the scholarly debate gradually worked its way into the textbooks until it came to dominate the discussion in the 1990s.

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<sup>1</sup> FitzGerald, Frances. *America Revised: History School Books in the Twentieth Century*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 18.

<sup>2</sup> J. Samuel Walker, “History, Collective Memory, and the Decision to Use the Bomb,” in *Hiroshima in History and Memory*, ed. Michael J. Hogan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 191.

<sup>3</sup> The source above is the one I'm referring to. However, textbooks are not the focus of the article. Only textbooks from the late 1980s and early 1990s are examined in it.

Since the dropping of the atomic bomb is well-known as an event, it seems that little background is need for this thesis besides an explanation of how it is organized. In the first chapter, this thesis details the debates about the atomic bomb that have occurred amongst scholars since the end of World War II. This chapter will prepare the reader for the material that is presented in chapters two and three by allowing him/her to see when the textbook utilizes the debate and when it does not. Several pages are dedicated to the arguments advanced by Henry Stimson so the reader can clearly see just how often he is utilized as a source by the textbooks. Chapter one then continues chronologically, detailing the basics—who made what argument and when—of the complicated debates. Chapter one then ends with a brief look at the Enola Gay exhibit controversy.

Chapter two then dives into the textbook. Documenting books from 1949 to 1986, chapter two shows how textbooks gradually incorporated the debate about the bomb into the textbook. However, this process is very gradual and is full of ups and downs. Through all of this, Stimson's argument shows itself to be a durable source—many authors basically repeated it or rephrased it in their textbooks. While chapter two often shows how far behind the time the textbooks are with relation to the scholarly debate, it contains progress that culminates in chapter three.

Chapter three shows how, by the 1990s, textbooks finally included most of the debate that had been raging about the bomb since it had been dropped—or at least since the 1960s. Again, Stimson's argument proves its incredible durability, but it does not prevent the authors from recounting and criticizing the arguments made by those who opposed the bomb. In this chapter, the reader is finally able to see evidence of the scholars' arguments that are detailed in chapter one but not included in the textbooks examined in chapter two.

## Chapter 1: Stimson and the Scholarly Debate

Although the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki elicited Japan's surrender and the end of World War II, the nature of the bomb and the utter destruction that it caused muddled Allied triumph with tragedy. While many Americans accepted the use of the atomic bomb to end the war, many others questioned not only the necessity of the bomb but the motives behind its use. The war ended over sixty years ago, but debate has raged on about the atomic bomb ever since. Before examining the way textbooks handled this debate, we must first look at how discussions about the bomb have been carried out in the scholarship. With this knowledge, we will be able to see how much of the scholarly debate carried over into the textbooks. As it will be made apparent in chapter two, there were often times when the scholarly debate was either only implicitly referenced or ignored altogether in the textbooks.

Even though the initial reaction to the news of the use of the atomic bombs was positive, James B. Conant, chairman of the National Defense Research Committee during World War II, feared that public opinion towards the bomb might become more critical over time.<sup>4</sup> Because of this fear, Conant encouraged Henry Stimson, Secretary of War under Roosevelt and Truman, to publicly defend the decision to drop the bomb. In February of 1947, Stimson wrote an article for *Harper's Magazine* titled "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb" which did just that.<sup>5</sup> In his article, Stimson answered many of the questions that either had been raised about the bomb or might be raised as he explained the process of creating the bomb and the decision to use it. This

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<sup>4</sup> J. Samuel Walker, *Prompt and Utter Destruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 102.

<sup>5</sup> I'm drawing from a condensed form of that article, Henry Stimson, "The Government Was Justified in Using the Atom Bomb," in *Turning Points in World History: The Atom Bomb*, ed. Tamara L. Roleff (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2000), 91-102.

article sparked a conversation amongst historians that has continued until this day. As this thesis demonstrates in chapters two and three, this article and the arguments Stimson espouses in it would also become a dominant force in the textbooks. This first chapter examines the all-important debate that Stimson started.

While Stimson's argument is multifaceted, the main thrust of his article is the idea that using the atomic bomb ended up saving American and Japanese lives. That is, it saved lives compared to the casualties that would have occurred had the United States decided to invade Japan as they had been planning to prior to the development of the atomic bomb. According to Stimson, the primary goal of the United States in the summer of 1945 "was the prompt and complete surrender of Japan."<sup>6</sup> Stimson believed that "complete destruction of [Japan's] military power" would lead the way to "lasting peace."<sup>7</sup> Japan appeared to be prepared to fight to the end, and Stimson was wary of the total strength of the remaining Japanese army, which he estimated at 5 million men.<sup>8</sup> Judging from the Japanese tendency in the war to fight to the death and their increased usage of and reliance upon Kamikaze attacks, Stimson feared that the United States would have to fight until the Japanese ran out of forces in their homeland and abroad. Before Stimson and others were able to count on the atomic bomb—the test at Alamogordo happened on July 16<sup>th</sup>—to win the war, they had made plans about how to bring about the Japanese surrender without the bomb. According to Stimson, it would have taken until the latter part of 1946 to defeat Japan if the United States had intensified their strategic bombing, tightened the blockade, and invaded the main island of Honshu. More importantly, Stimson and others estimated that this plan would have caused over one million casualties for the United States alone.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>8</sup> Stimson claims that these estimates later proved to be in close agreement with the Japanese records.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 96.

While some argued that the bomb was cruel in its very nature, Stimson viewed the bomb “as legitimate as any other of the deadly explosives of modern war.”<sup>10</sup> In his mind, nothing distinguished it from the firebombing that took place in Dresden and Tokyo. In his words, “At no time from 1941 to 1945 did I ever hear it suggested by the president, or by any other responsible member of the government, that atomic energy should not be used in the war.”<sup>11</sup> Stimson’s usage of the word “responsible” not only implies that those few who objected to its use were irresponsible, but it also paints the picture of a rather harmonious group of informed decision-makers who saw no reason to refrain from using the bomb. “At no time” leaves little room for interpretation. As a trusted historical figure at the time, Stimson was able to use strong word choice to discredit those who opposed the bomb.

In his short but thorough article, Stimson also discussed the ideas of giving Japan a detailed warning about what would happen if the United States dropped the bomb or giving the Japanese leaders a demonstration of the bomb by using it on an uninhabited area. According to Stimson, these options were not only impractical, but risky. Considering the stubborn nature of the Japanese demonstrated thus far, Stimson had no evidence that a demonstration would compel the Japanese to surrender. Furthermore, Stimson feared that the bomb might fail to explode. Even though the bomb had already been tested at Alamogordo, nothing could prove that any given atomic bomb would explode when dropped from a plane.<sup>12</sup> He could imagine nothing more humiliating and damaging to the United States’ efforts to convince Japan to surrender than having the Japanese witness an atomic dud. Furthermore, the United States had only manufactured two bombs by August, bombs which Stimson thought could not be wasted.

Since the bomb was used against the vilified Japanese, Stimson was also aware that some

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

might see racist motivations in the decision. Stimson clarified that the bomb was originally designed to counter the efforts of German scientists to produce atomic weaponry. Stimson viewed the situation in a straightforward manner: "In 1941 and 1942 they (the Germans) were believed to be ahead of us, and it was vital that they should not be the first to bring atomic weapons into the field of battle."<sup>13</sup> By the time the first bomb was produced though, Germany had been defeated and Japan was the only nation standing between the United States and complete victory. Once scientists developed the bomb, they found themselves with "a great new weapon for shortening the war and minimizing destruction."<sup>14</sup> Again, Stimson refers to this idea of using the most destructive weapon heretofore known to man in an effort to limit overall death and destruction in the war.

According to Stimson, "all the evidence I have seen indicates that the controlling factor in the final Japanese decision to accept our terms of surrender was the atomic bomb."<sup>15</sup> After weighing the options and considering factors such as what they interpreted to be the stubborn resolve of the Japanese, the difficulties of attempting to land at the heavily fortified Kyushu, the dangers of Kamikaze planes, etc., Stimson and his Interim committee had decided that the best way to defeat the Japanese would be to shock them into surrendering. For Stimson, the atomic bomb seemed like the perfect weapon. What could shock a nation more than a single weapon destroying an entire city? By dropping the second bomb in quick succession, the United States made it appear as if they had unlimited bombs to drop on Japan. As Stimson put it, "the atomic bomb was more than a weapon of terrible destruction; it was a psychological weapon."<sup>16</sup>

Despite all the evidence Stimson presented, Hanson Baldwin could not accept the bomb

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 100.



as a necessary or morally acceptable weapon. Writing in 1949, Hanson W. Baldwin, former military analyst for the *New York Times*, could not disagree more with Stimson's insistence that the atomic bomb caused the Japanese to surrender. According to Baldwin, the Japanese were clearly headed down the path to surrendering well before the United States dropped the atomic bomb. Baldwin did not accept the "contention that the atomic bomb achieved or hastened victory" or "that it helped to consolidate the peace or to further the political aims for which the war was fought."<sup>17</sup> He did not think that proper historical analysis could accept these contentions either. By the time the U.S. dropped the bomb, U.S. forces were securely based in Okinawa and Iwo Jima, U.S. submarines were dominating the Sea of Japan, and the blockade continued to be crippling. The Japanese were in a hopeless state militarily. Considering the miserable status of Japan at the time of the bombing, Baldwin calls into question the need to use the bomb. Although Baldwin admits that no one can know whether or not the bomb was necessary for causing the surrender, he believes that the answer is almost certainly negative.

Although Stimson and the members of the Scientific Panel who discussed the bomb claimed that they saw no other option but to use the atomic bomb, Baldwin argues that "the truth is that we did not try" to do anything else.<sup>18</sup> Over the objections of many scientists and Japanese experts, like former ambassador Joseph Grew, the United States went on with the plan to drop the bomb. Stimson believed that the Potsdam ultimatum gave the Japanese fair warning of the atomic attack by threatening to use "the full application of our military power," which would lead to "the utter devastation of the Japanese homeland."<sup>19</sup> However, Baldwin saw no clarity in this threat. The Potsdam ultimatum merely rephrased points that had previously been made; it

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<sup>17</sup> Hanson W. Baldwin, "Using the Atom Bomb Was Unnecessary and Immoral," in *Turning Points in World History: The Atom Bomb*, ed. Tamara L. Roleff (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2000), 104.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>19</sup> Stimson, "The Government Was Justified in Using the Atom Bomb," 97.

contained no warning or even a hint about the atomic bomb. To make matters worse, it called for unconditional surrender, which Baldwin did not view as being feasible for the Japanese. Here, Baldwin emphasizes the fact that the U.S. ended up backing away from unconditional surrender when the war ended. If the United States bombed the Japanese because they failed to accept the Potsdam declaration, then why would they go back on its central tenet? For Baldwin, it was clear that the Japanese would have accepted this conditional surrender if the United States had proposed it earlier.

One of Stimson's fundamental arguments was that using the atomic bomb shortened the war considerably, but Baldwin thought that "a brief chronology of known events indicates that the atomic bomb may have shortened the war by a few days—not more."<sup>20</sup> Months before the U.S. dropped the bomb, Japan had sent out peace feelers to Russia but nothing had come out of these meetings. The U.S. did not know about every meeting of Japanese representatives with the Russians, but they did know about some of these efforts in late May 1945. Harry Hopkins cabled the President "1. Japan is doomed and the Japanese know it. 2. Peace feelers are being put out by certain elements in Japan..."<sup>21</sup> On July 12<sup>th</sup>, Prince Konoye was sent by the emperor to Russia to "secure peace at any price."<sup>22</sup> Given a little more time, Japan would have tried to work out a deal. Unfortunately, after the United States bombed Hiroshima, the Russians declared war on Japan.

To back up his claims, Baldwin referred to the conclusion reached by the United States Strategic Bombing Survey, which had been sent by the U.S. Air Force to investigate the efficiency of American bombing policy: "It is the Survey's opinion that certainly prior to December 31, 1945, and in all probability prior to November 1, 1945, Japan would have

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<sup>20</sup> Baldwin, "Using the Atom Bomb Was Unnecessary and Immoral," 108.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

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.”<sup>23</sup> According to Baldwin, by hastily dropping the atomic bomb on the weakened and soon-to-surrender Japanese, the United States relinquished its position as a highly moral country.

At this point in time, Stimson and Baldwin were arguing about a few main points. Stimson saw the bomb as the one thing that would shorten the war by forcing the fanatical Japanese to surrender. This would also save countless American lives. Baldwin argued that Japan was so close to defeat that the bomb was completely unnecessary, maybe only hastened the end of the war by a few days. Stimson claimed that the United States had tried to convince the Japanese to surrender through the Potsdam declaration, but Baldwin argued that the United States did not make any sincere effort to convince the Japanese to surrender.

Writing in 1949, British scientist P.M.S. Blackett was one of the first scholars to focus on the possibility that the United States had used the atomic bomb to gain power in the postwar world in relation to the Soviet Union. In his book *Fear, War and the Bomb*, Blackett imagined what the situation must have looked like to the U.S. strategists in the summer of 1945. Russia had already pledged to enter the war by August, which might in turn have led to the defeat of the Japanese armies on the Asian mainland and, in turn, Japanese surrender. According to Blackett, this could have occurred while American ground forces were further away in Okinawa and Iwo Jima.<sup>24</sup> In this scenario, the Soviets would emerge on top in Japan and would rival the United States as the most powerful nation. Blackett argued, however, that the successful test of the atomic bomb changed everything. “One can imagine the hurry with which the two bombs—the only two existing—were whisked across the Pacific to be dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>24</sup> P.M.S Blackett, *Fear, War and the Bomb*. (McGraw-Hill, 1949), cited in Paul S. Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 192.

just in time, but only just, to insure that the Japanese Government surrendered to American forces alone.”<sup>25</sup> Blackett believed that the U.S. targeted the crowded cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki instead of purely military objectives in order to make the bomb appear more powerful. In summary, Blackett thought that “the dropping of the atomic bombs was not so much the last military act of the Second World War, as the first major operation of the cold diplomatic war with Russia now in progress.”<sup>26</sup>

However, Blackett’s ideas seem to have remained largely unheard of or heavily criticized for several years. Maybe scholars were not yet ready to approach the war in a manner which might criticize the United States. Whatever the case, it was not until 1961 that Herbert Feis produced what J. Samuel Walker calls “the first scholarly treatment of the subject based on extensive research in primary sources.”<sup>27</sup> Walker, historian of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, documented the scholarly side of the debate in his article “The Decision to Use the Bomb: A Historiographical update.”<sup>28</sup> Feis, Pulitzer Prize winner and author of *Japan Subdued: The Atomic Bomb and the End of the War in the Pacific*, agreed with the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey’s conclusion that even without the bomb, the Soviet’s entry into the war, or the planned invasion of the Japanese islands, the war would have come to a close before the end of 1945. Despite these conclusions, Feis still argued that the United States was justified in using the bomb. Feis accepted the decision based on his belief that American policymakers thought that the bomb would save “probably tens of thousands” of American lives. According to Feis, “the impelling reason for the decision to use [the bomb] was military—to end the war victoriously as

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>27</sup> J. Samuel Walker, “The Decision to Use the Bomb: A Historiographical Update” in *Hiroshima in History and Memory*, ed. Michael J. Hogan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 13.

<sup>28</sup> Most of the debate explored in the remainder of this chapter is based on my reading of this article, which is included in Michael J. Hogan’s *Hiroshima in History and Memory*.

soon as possible.”<sup>29</sup> This conclusion did not exclude the possibility of other motives for dropping the bomb, but it did claim that military motives were placed at the forefront of the decision-making process and that these reasons should be considered as legitimate.

Gar Alperovitz, author of *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam*, agreed with Feis that the bomb was not needed to end the war but disagreed about the main driving force behind the decision to drop the bomb. According to Alperovitz, the bomb was dropped for diplomatic reasons instead of military reasons. Although scholars like Blackett had expressed similar views before him, Alperovitz’s work, published in 1965, “triggered a sharply contested historiographical dispute.”<sup>30</sup> According to Walker, Alperovitz gained so much attention for three reasons: his work was based on recently opened sources which allowed him to explore the issues in detail, the timing of the Vietnam War and the uneasiness that surrounded U.S. foreign policy, and the contemporaneous scholarly debate about the origins of the Cold War.<sup>31</sup> Alperovitz’s book was filled with accusations that he had made based on this new data. For instance, Alperovitz attributed the difference in behavior by the presidents—while Roosevelt had tried to cooperate with the Soviets, Truman acted more confrontational toward them—to the Truman’s possession of the bomb. According to him, Truman even delayed the Potsdam conference until the bomb could be tested. After the use of the atomic bomb, Truman would have a leg up on Stalin in post-war affairs.

For those scholars who have struggled with Truman’s decision, one of the hardest questions to answer has been: why were other options not explored seriously? According to Alperovitz, Truman did not investigate the sincerity of Japanese peace efforts, bend on the

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<sup>29</sup> Herbert Feis, *Japan Subdued: The Atomic Bomb and the End of the War in the Pacific* (Princeton 1961), cited in J. Samuel Walker, “The Decision to Use the Bomb: A Historiographical Update,” 13.

<sup>30</sup> Walker, “The Decision to Use the Bomb,” 13.

<sup>31</sup> Walker, “The Decision to Use the Bomb,” 13

unconditional surrender policy, or wait for the Soviet Union to declare war on Japan because he wanted to use the bomb against Japan in order to gain power over the Soviets. Not only was the use of the bomb unnecessary, but it became one of the central issues that led to the Cold War. The first true “revisionist,” Alperovitz came to symbolize those who would not take Stimson’s defense of the bomb at face value.

As Alperovitz admitted later, “many people were, not surprisingly, disturbed by the idea that other than purely military factors were involved.”<sup>32</sup> Scholars responded negatively to Alperovitz’s work, some going as far as to criticize the way he conducted his research. The title of an article written by the professor Emeritus of History at Penn State Robert James Maddox, “Atomic Diplomacy: A Study in Creative Writing,” shows the type of criticism that Alperovitz’s work received. He found it “disconcerting...that such a work could have come to be considered a contribution to the historical literature on the period.”<sup>33</sup>

As additional sources became available by the mid-70s, scholars seemed more accepting about Alperovitz’s findings. In 1973, Lisle A. Rose, author of *Dubious Victory: The United States and the End of World War II*, viewed the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as vile acts and disapproved of the way that Truman’s administration took advantage of their atomic monopoly after the war, but he denied that Truman postponed the Potsdam meeting because of the atomic bomb or bombed Hiroshima for political reasons.<sup>34</sup> In 1975, Martin J. Sherwin, author of *A World Destroyed: The Atomic Bomb and the Grand Alliance*, claimed as Stimson had earlier that no one really ever questioned that the bomb would be used if it became available. While he

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<sup>32</sup> Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam: The Use of the Atomic Bomb and the American Confrontation with Soviet Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), cited in Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: Fifty Years of Denial* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995), 271.

<sup>33</sup> Robert James Maddox, “Atomic Diplomacy: A Study in Creative Writing,” *Journal of American History* 59 (March 1973): 925-34, cited in J. Samuel Walker, “The Decision to Use the Bomb: A Historiographical Update,” 14-15.

<sup>34</sup> Walker, “The Decision to Use the Bomb,” 15.

regretted that the administration did not seriously consider other options and while he believed that the administration recognized that the bomb could provide diplomatic leverage, he saw this leverage as a bonus for the administration, not the primary motivation for the dropping of the bomb. Despite this defense of Truman's decision, Sherwin thought that modifying the unconditional surrender policy might have made the bombing of Hiroshima unnecessary. Whatever the case, he saw the bombing of Nagasaki as indefensible.<sup>35</sup>

Also writing in 1975, Barton J. Bernstein explored some of the options that Sherwin may have been referring to. For instance, the United States could have waited for Soviet entry into the Far Eastern Conflict, demonstrated the power of the bomb by exploding it in an uninhabited area, mitigated the terms of the unconditional surrender, explored the proposals of Japanese peace feelers, or continued to use conventional weapons.<sup>36</sup> Like Stimson, Bernstein claimed that each alternative seemed less desirable, less feasible, or riskier for policy makers than did dropping the bomb. Like Sherwin, Bernstein emphasized that the policy makers saw no reason not to use the bomb. Although there were other motives, it was used primarily to end the war and save lives.

Even though many scholars disagreed with Alperovitz's findings, his work changed the questions that were asked about the bomb. The discussion moved past the question of whether the bomb was necessary to end the war quickly. Instead, the questions had become: "what factors were paramount in the decision to use the bomb and why was its use more attractive to policymakers than other alternatives?"<sup>37</sup> Although most scholars thought that Alperovitz exaggerated the impact that the bomb had on policymakers, they did believe that the bomb influenced the way that the United States acted towards the Soviet Union and that diplomatic

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

factors played a role in the decision to use the bomb against Japan. According to Walker, this was the scholarly consensus until new documentation came out. In 1980, Truman's handwritten notes from the Potsdam conference were published, and, in 1983, letters he had written to his wife were published.<sup>38</sup> While some of his comments, written in July 1945, suggested that he did expect the war to take another year to complete, which might have justified the use of the bomb, other comments suggested that he expected the Japanese to fall before the Soviets entered the war, which makes it seem like he used the bomb for diplomatic reasons. In other words, this new information seemed to complicate more than clarify the issues.

In 1985, Alperovitz released a new edition of *Atomic Diplomacy* in which he refused to back down from the claims he had made twenty years previously. Despite what Stimson, Sherry, and others had argued about no one questioning that the bomb would be used when ready, Alperovitz argued that Truman had not been forced to carry out every plan Roosevelt had made. According to Alperovitz, Truman even realized that the bomb was not necessary to end the war. However, the focus of the atomic bomb debate at this time became the number of deaths that were predicted to have occurred if the United States had decided to invade Japan. This focus was spurred by Barton Bernstein, who came out with a new article, "A Post-war Myth: 500,000 U.S. Lives Saved," that cited sources predicting a maximum loss of forty-six thousand lives if the U.S. had resorted to an invasion. Despite the fact that Truman and his advisors had been aware of these estimates, they had justified their decision by claiming that the bomb saved anywhere from a half-million to one million lives. Saving the lives of twenty to fifty thousand U.S. soldiers may well be considered a legitimate reason to use the bomb, but scholars could not come up with a legitimate reason for Truman and his advisors exaggerating their claims. Did they feel guilty? According to Walker, although moral questions about the bomb had always been under

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.



the surface, it was at this time that the morality of the bomb came to the forefront.<sup>39</sup>

Scholars had varied responses to the issue of justification. Some, like John Dower in *War without Mercy*, examined the atrocities of the war as a whole, implying that the morality of the bomb should not be called into question. Ronald Schaffer, in *Wings of Judgment: American Bombing in World War II*, presented the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a logical extension of the bombing policy already in place. While Truman's advisers did decide to remove Kyoto from the list of potential targets for the bomb because of its cultural significance, the moral qualms of leaders and scientists did not seem to change their decisions. Like Schaffer, Michael S. Sherry believed that the bombs could only be understood in context. Sherry thought scholars focused too much on the "sin of atomic bombing" and not enough on the "slow accretion of large fears, thoughtless assumptions, and incremental decisions" that characterized bombing policy throughout the war.<sup>40</sup> For Sherry, the largest blunder was failing to alter the demands for unconditional surrender. The risk of this political solution seemed much less morally problematic than the risk of using the atomic bomb.

While some historians brought new arguments to the table, others reconsidered arguments which had already been made. Martin J. Sherwin, writing in 1981, agreed with Alperovitz that Truman failed to modify the unconditional surrender terms because he wanted to use the atomic bomb to strengthen America's diplomatic position with the Russians. Kai Erikson, writing in 1985, also wondered why a demonstration was not considered more heavily. The U.S. could have dropped the bomb on a relatively uninhabited Japanese target with minimal risks. However, Erikson believed that this was not more carefully considered because of many military and political factors, the most important of which was "the wish to make a loud

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>40</sup> Michael S. Sherry, *Rise of American Air Power*, 301-41, in J. Samuel Walker, "The Decision to Use the Bomb: A Historiographical Update," 26.

announcement to the Russians.”<sup>41</sup> Writing in 1988, forty years after he had coauthored Stimson’s memoirs, McGeorge Bundy also wished the United States had explored alternatives, but he would not accept the idea that relations with the Soviet Union played a major role in the decision. He even acknowledged that Stimson had overstated the extent to which the U.S. had considered other options.<sup>42</sup>

In 1988, Leon V. Sigal provided a new perspective on the situation by focusing on the bureaucratic side of the decision in his book *Fighting to the Finish: The Politics of War Termination in the United States and Japan, 1945*. According to Walker, “Sigal portrayed top American officials as largely powerless, ineffective, and ill-informed.”<sup>43</sup> In fact, Truman was so isolated from what was going on that he was essentially limited to being able to stop the bomb’s usage if he felt compelled to do so, but there seemed to be no reason for him to feel that way. General Leslie R. Groves, the director of the Manhattan Project, and other military commanders were in charge of the decisions on targeting and timing. Groves, who was eager to justify his efforts, avoided outlining alternatives to Truman that would have encouraged him to change the plan. Yet again, this new perspective proved insightful but not definitive.

According to Walker, the notion that the bomb was not needed to end the war as quickly as possible appeared to be generally accepted in the 80s. However, Bernard Bernstein reopened the debate in the early nineties, which turned into a dispute between Bernstein on one side and Gar Alperovitz and Robert Messer on the other. In 1991, Bernstein published an article on General Marshall’s thoughts on using tactical nuclear weapons as part of the assault on the Japanese home islands. In Bernstein’s opinion, the fact that Marshall was even considering this option should give pause to those analysts who claimed that U.S. leaders believed that Japan was

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<sup>41</sup> Walker, “The Decision to Use the Bomb,” 27.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

close to surrender before they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima.<sup>44</sup> Alperovitz and Messer responded that American leaders believed that a Soviet invasion of Manchuria would override the need to invade Japan. Truman's diary and letters were also referenced to show that Truman held this opinion.<sup>45</sup> The issue was not resolved and many questions remained.

Over the next few years, Walker believed that careful treatment of the records and manuscripts that had recently become available led to an even greater understanding of why Truman and his administration decided to drop atomic bombs on Japan. While disagreements do still exist, the consensus among scholars is that the bomb was not needed to prevent an invasion of Japan or to end the war within a relatively short time. It was also clear that alternative plans existed and that Truman and his advisers were aware of these plans.<sup>46</sup> An invasion also seemed highly unlikely. The claim that the bomb saved half a million American lives could not be supported by the evidence either. If U.S. did not drop the bomb to save lives, then why did it? According to Walker, the consensus of the mid-1970s became accepted again in the early 90s, the bomb was used primarily to end the war quickly and secondarily for diplomatic benefits.<sup>47</sup>

However, as *Truman*, the bestselling biography by David McCullough, would show, it can be easy for one to ignore various sources and see history the way that they would like to see it. Published in 1992, this Pulitzer Prize winning work on Truman was reminiscent of Stimson's *Harper's* article.<sup>48</sup> For McCullough, Truman faced the harrowing decision of dropping the atomic bomb or invading Japan. While McCullough acknowledged that military leaders estimated casualties in the first month of an invasion to be in 30,000 to 50,000 range, he added that some estimates put the number of American deaths around the 500,000 to one million mark.

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

Although he cited this as evidence that these high estimates were in use at the “highest levels,” Bernstein’s aforementioned article on projected casualties had demonstrated that these estimates were not taken seriously or even made known at the highest levels.<sup>49</sup> As the controversy at the Smithsonian exhibit showed, this tendency to ignore scholarship that had negative implications against the United States is more prevalent than one might hope.

Since the first chapter of this thesis is dedicated to examining the historiographical debate about the atomic bomb, it only seems fitting to take a brief look at the Smithsonian’s attempt to integrate this scholarship into their proposed *Enola Gay* exhibit. Curators at the Air and Space Museum set out to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the atomic bombing of Japan, but, after planning for months, drafting various scripts, and changing countless aspects of the exhibit in an attempt to address the complaints made by various interest groups, the exhibit was cancelled. The debate essentially boiled down to the curators and historical societies on one side versus organized interest groups, veterans, and conservative politicians on the other. While the curators “based their right to interpret the past on their scholarly credentials, on their mastery of the historical record, and on the advice they received from professional historians... American veterans appealed to the authenticity of personal experience.”<sup>50</sup> While attempts were made to reconcile these opposing sides, interest groups insisted upon defending a “conventional, patriotic picture of the past.”<sup>51</sup> Ultimately, the various sides could not agree, and the exhibit was cancelled. As this debate shows, there often times exists a gap between history and memory. Unfortunately, the curators and veterans were not able to bridge the gap in this case. The second

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<sup>49</sup> Walker, “History, Collective Memory and the Decision to Use the Bomb,” 197.

<sup>50</sup> Michael J. Hogan, “The Enola Gay Controversy: History, Memory, and the Politics of Presentation in *Hiroshima in History and Memory*, ed. Michael J. Hogan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 201.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

and third chapters of this thesis explore a similar gap, the one that exists between the textbook and the debate amongst scholars.

## Chapter 2: The Evolution of the Textbook

As Chapter 1 demonstrates, scholars have argued about the atomic bomb since Stimson's article came out in 1947, with the debate especially gaining steam with the release of Alperovitz's *Atomic Diplomacy* in 1965. However, as this chapter shows, this debate did not quite translate over to the textbooks. While the limitations of the textbook publication process might account for a gap of a few years between the time findings are published by scholars and the time those findings are incorporated into the textbooks, this chapter reveals the surprising absence of this debate from many of the textbooks. From the end of World War II to the 1990s, authors gradually incorporated criticisms against the bomb into their textbooks. While the texts as a whole seemed to dive deeper into the bomb as time passed, the changes in the text seemed to come about slowly and inconsistently.

This chapter looks through the textbooks chronologically in order to show how the tone and content of the textbooks changed over time, and, in many instances, how they stayed the same. Though the topic covered, the atomic bomb, is the same throughout this chapter, the manner which authors approach it can be quite different. Some authors marveled at the scientific achievement of the bomb; some were scared by the potential use of this weapon in future warfare; some saw it as a terrible weapon that was used out of necessity. Despite their various approaches toward the bomb, these authors demonstrate an incredible reliance upon Stimson's argument for the bomb. Although this reliance may not always be obvious, a careful examination

of the texts often reveals arguments that either borrow from Stimson's 1947 *Harpers* article or reinforce the spirit of it.

### The Textbooks

*The Heritage of America*, published in 1949 and edited by historians Henry Steele Commager and Allan Nevins, presented the atomic bomb with a mixture of pride in the United States' military success and awe of the atomic bomb. This mixture is facilitated by the format of *The Heritage*—it is comprised entirely of personal narratives which are prefaced with comments from the editors. By collecting various primary sources from the people of the United States, Commager and Nevins hoped to show what history is like from the perspective of the “actual participants and observers.”<sup>52</sup> Although this approach becomes complicated in regards to the dropping of the atomic bomb—only a handful of people were on the planes that dropped the atomic bombs—the sources that the Commager and Nevins included in their text obviously reflected the way they wished American history to be viewed. Of course, the comments that preface these sources are even more revealing of the editors' views.

By mid-summer of 1945 Japan was reeling under repeated blows. Great cities...were charred ruins; Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet cruised at will up and down the coast; submarines cut off Japanese access to the Asiatic mainland. Meeting at Potsdam, Germany, in July the Allied leaders served notice on Japan to get out of the war. But the Japanese ignored the Potsdam declaration. On August 6 a lone B-29 flew over the great industrial city of Hiroshima and dropped a single atomic bomb...President Truman gave a new ultimatum, which was once more ignored...On August 8 a second, improved bomb was released on the city of Nagasaki.<sup>53</sup>

While Commager and Nevins did not make any explicit, analytical statements in this introduction, their text remained in line with one of Stimson's bigger points—the Japanese just

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<sup>52</sup> Henry Steele Commager and Allan Nevins, *The Heritage of America*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1949), vii.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 1195.

would not surrender in the face of defeat. Despite the dire situation that Commager and Nevins described in the first few lines above, it took the dropping of two atomic bombs for the Japanese to surrender. The Japanese chose to “ignore” multiple requests to surrender, and the bombs were used as a result.

In this short background text, the Nagasaki bomb is also described as being “released” as opposed to dropped, the way it is most often phrased, and as being “improved” compared to the first bomb.<sup>54</sup> Although these details are minor, they put the focus on the bomb as a scientific achievement as opposed to the means that brought World War II to a close. The selection for their source, “An American Plane Ushers in the Atomic Age,” further emphasized their view of the bomb as a scientific watershed in history. The article, written by William E. Laurence, at that time a consultant to the war department, described his experience riding in the plane that dropped the second bomb.

As he eloquently retold the event, one could see why people would be so enthralled by the sheer power of the bomb. In reference to the gigantic mushroom cloud that it left behind, Laurence said, “it was a living thing, a new species of being born before our incredulous eyes.”<sup>55</sup> As the smoke continued to rise and change form, he said “it was as if a decapitated monster were growing a new head.”<sup>56</sup> While the term “monster” might invoke a sense of fear or apprehension toward the bomb, the focus of this article seems to be the marvel of a bomb that “at one stage of its evolution, cover[ed] millions of years in terms of seconds.”<sup>57</sup> His description is vivid but it is noticeably devoid of any reflection upon the positive or negative consequences of this act. The monster Laurence saw had not won the war, claimed the lives of innocent people, or prevented

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<sup>54</sup> See later quotes from Blum, Dulles, and Brinkley.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 1196.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 1196.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 1197.

Russia from staking claims on the defeated Japanese. Instead, the monster was a miracle of science. By choosing to put this article in their book, Commager and Nevins made a choice about how their readers would be able to understand the atomic bomb.

*Our Nation*, written in 1950 by Eugene Barker and Henry Steele Commager, contained a relatively short section on the atomic bomb—two short paragraphs—which is telling in and of itself. The controversy about the bomb was being discussed in the scholarship, but it had not made its way into the textbooks by this point. As would be expected, the authors essentially labeled the atomic bomb as the straw that broke the camel's back. Although they admitted that this "terrible weapon" caused a "frightful loss of life," they made no further comments about the morality of the decision or the possible consequences for the future.<sup>58</sup> Instead, the bombs had made it "clear, now, to the stubborn Japanese leader that the Allies could destroy from the air every Japanese city."<sup>59</sup> This reiterates Stimson's point about the psychological advantages of the atomic bomb; it alone proved to the Japanese that the United States could destroy their country with ease.

Some of the logistical choices made by Barker and Commager also downplayed the significance of the bomb. Breaking chronological order, they place the discussion of the Pacific War and the atomic bomb before their coverage of the war in the European theater. While one might interpret this choice as emphasizing the bomb by putting it first, the text appears to actually brush aside the bomb. World War II may have ended with the dropping of the atomic bombs, but the authors conclude their discussion of the war by focusing on the European theater, which would leave the reader with the impression that this was the most important part of the war.

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<sup>58</sup> Eugene C. Barker and Henry Steele Commager, *Our Nation*. (Evanston: Row, Peterson, and Company, 1950), 953.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 953.



By omitting the atomic bomb from the summary of the chapter, the authors again minimize the significance of the bomb.<sup>60</sup> In over a page of summary about World War II, the only thing that came close to mentioning the bomb was this statement: "In August Japan surrendered." Evidently, Barker and Commager did not see much importance in the atomic bomb or much controversy. In their discussion of the United Nations, the authors recognized that the bomb was a source of contention in the process of disarmament, but that is where the concern stopped.<sup>61</sup> Although it may be unfair to expect the authors to present the atomic bomb in full detail considering its proximity to the publication date, it is clear that the readers of this book would struggle to find much significance in this event.

In *A History of the American People*, published in 1953, authors Harry Carman and Harold Syrett not only recognized the significance of the use of the atomic bomb, they also showed regret for the manner in which it was used. The following quote subtly demonstrates the doubts that they appeared to harbor. "Although the fighting on Iwo Jima and Okinawa seemed to indicate that the Japanese were in no mood to end the war on American terms, President Truman on July 26, 1945, announced that Japan could only avoid total destruction by an immediate and unconditional surrender. No mention of the newly perfected, but still secret, atom bomb was made..."<sup>62</sup> In other words, *although Truman had no reason to expect his demands for surrender to be met, he threatened the Japanese with "total destruction." On top of that, he didn't even mention the atomic bomb that would be used to bring about this discussion.* Although Carman and Syrett do not write with this overtly critical tone, one could see how their writing reveals some of the possible flaws of Truman's decision. From their writing, it seems that they would

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 971.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 966.

<sup>62</sup> Harry J. Carman and Harold C. Syrett, *A History of the American People*. Vol. 2: *Since 1865*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 645.

support the claims made by Baldwin in 1949 that the Potsdam declaration was unrealistic and lacked clarity.

Carman and Syrett come across as remorseful for the devastation caused by the bombs, but they focused more on the implications of the bomb for future warfare. Although the Allies had won, “American jubilation over the end of the war was tempered by a realization of how the final victory had been achieved.”<sup>63</sup> At this point in the book, one might expect a statement about the morality of killing so many innocent civilians, but this type of discussion was not being carried out at this time. While Carman and Syrett, like Laurence, acknowledge the impressive nature of the bomb, they were more concerned about the immediate consequences of the bomb. “The atom bomb...was acclaimed on all sides as a marvel of scientific achievement. But no amount of pride over the accomplishments of the Allied scientists could obscure the fact that the bomb...was the most destructive weapon ever invented by man.”<sup>64</sup> In the early stages of the Cold War, the authors were understandably more concerned about this new, “most destructive weapon.” “While Americans talked hopefully of the use of atomic energy in peacetime pursuits, all knew that its use in another war could lead to the annihilation of mankind.”<sup>65</sup> This book clearly captured the fears of the society at that time. For now, the question now was not *why did Truman use the bomb?* Instead, it was *what would the world be like if these weapons were ever used again?*

In *The American Pageant* published in 1956, author Thomas A. Bailey regarded the bomb with awe and a hint of remorse. In the body of the text, Bailey refers to the bomb as a “fantastic ace up [the Americans’] sleeve” and the test at Los Alamos as “an awesome exhibition

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 647.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 647.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 647.

of unchained fury.”<sup>66</sup> However, the title of the section, “Atomic Awfulness,” conveys a different interpretation of the bomb.<sup>67</sup> So does his description of the second bomb, “the explosion took a horrible toll of 80,000 persons killed or missing.”<sup>68</sup> However, this is the extent of negative language in this text.

Unlike Carman and Syrett, who seemed slightly critical of the bomb and wary of its future use, Bailey made no critical comments about the bomb and essentially reiterated Stimson’s assessment of the situation. By opening his discussion of the bomb with the following quote, Bailey subtly reinforced Stimson’s later-disputed claim that an invasion of Japan was the primary plan for the United States military. “The high command in Washington was meanwhile perfecting plans for an all-out invasion of the main islands of Japan—an invasion that would presumably cost hundreds of thousands of American casualties.”<sup>69</sup> This passage also utilizes Stimson’s estimation of potential casualties from this invasion in the hundreds of thousands. However, Bailey did not feel the need to defend the bomb by insisting that it was dropped in order to save American lives.

Following in Stimson’s footsteps, Bailey basically implied that Japan had left the U.S. with no other choice but to drop the bomb. In reference to the Potsdam Declaration, U.S. bombers “showered the grim warning on Japan in tens of thousands of leaflets, but silence was the official response.”<sup>70</sup> After Hiroshima was bombed, “the fanatically resisting Japanese, though facing atomization, did not surrender.”<sup>71</sup> Here, Bailey uses strong language to reinforce the idea that “the fanatically resisting Japanese” brought the atomic bombs on themselves. Again, this

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<sup>66</sup> Thomas A. Bailey, *The American Pageant: A History of the Republic*. (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1956), 900.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 899.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 900.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 899.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 899.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 900.

line of thinking was not new; it essentially reinforced Stimson's viewpoint. However, the amount of detail given in Bailey's account sets it apart from the other textbooks examined thus far. Quite simply, *The American Pageant* contained more text about the events surrounding the use of the atomic bomb. Maybe the amount of time that had passed since the end of the war allowed Bailey to include more information about the bomb. Of course, the tensions of the Cold War may also explain an increased awareness of the bomb. Whatever the case, the controversy about the bomb was still absent from the text, just as Walker claimed it was in the scholarship.

*A College History of the United States*, written in 1962 by Jennings B. Sanders, continued to demonstrate increased interest in the atomic bomb, as well as an increased reliance upon Stimson's arguments. Sanders prefaced his discussion of the bomb with the following quote: "[The bomb's] destructive power was so vast that it was clear the war might be shortened if the new weapon were used against the enemy. Nevertheless, the decision to use the bomb against Japan was not made lightly."<sup>72</sup> Of the textbooks examined above, this is the first text to defend the use of the bomb. Like Stimson, Sanders felt the need to clarify that Truman's decision was backed up by scientists and experts. In another clear reference to Stimson's article, Sanders claimed that the U.S. would look "ridiculous" if they demonstrated a bomb that turned out to be a dud.<sup>73</sup> Scholars like Blackett had wondered why the U.S. hadn't dropped the bomb on a purely military target. However, Sanders insisted, like Stimson, that the bomb had been used only against military targets. Hiroshima was an "important Japanese headquarters and military storage center."<sup>74</sup> Echoing Stimson's belief that the bomb was a psychological weapon, Sanders explained that "to [the Japanese] it appeared that all their cities were in immediate danger of

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<sup>72</sup> Jennings B. Sanders, *A College History of the United States*. Vol. 2: *1865 to the Present*. (Evanston: Row, Peterson & Company, 1962), 448.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 448.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 448.

being obliterated.”<sup>75</sup>

Although the debate had not fully erupted in the scholarship by 1962, it seems that Sanders was aware of the sources that had either defended the bomb or questioned it. The following quote responded to either the conclusions of the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey or Hanson Baldwin’s work: “While it is possible that Japan would shortly have had to sue for peace, even if the atomic bomb had not been used against her, this was not known at that time.”<sup>76</sup> With Sanders made a concession in the quote that the bomb may not have been necessary, he also made his own claim that “this was not known at that time”—a point which Blackett and Baldwin would have argued against.

In response to this claim that the bombs were unnecessary, Sanders—again relying heavily on Stimson—countered with several reasons why Truman could not have known this. First, he cited the report of the Chief of Naval Operations from late 1943 which estimated that the war against Japan might go far into 1947.<sup>77</sup> According to Truman’s memoirs that Sanders also relayed, Truman was told in mid-April of 1945 that it would take about six months to defeat Germany and an additional year and a half to conquer Japan.<sup>78</sup> Sanders then directly referenced Stimson, who had said that in the summer of 1945 the Japanese army was estimated at 5 million men and that invasion projections predicted American casualties at over one million men. Sanders again quoted Stimson, this time describing the bomb as the “least abhorrent” way to end the war.

In fact, the strongest statement made by Sanders in the entire text was an adaptation of a quote made in Stimson’s *Harper’s* article. This is Sanders argument:

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

If, in a contest as fiercely fought as the Japanese war, President Truman and his advisers had recoiled from using an atomic weapon produced at colossal cost to the United States government, and instead had fought the war to a conclusion with conventional weapons only, they would have made themselves vulnerable to the charge, once all the facts were known, of having needlessly sacrificed countless human lives.<sup>79</sup>

Fifteen years earlier, Stimson wrote in the summary of his *Harper's* article that he believed "that no man... holding in his hands a weapon of such possibilities for accomplishing [victory] and saving those lives, could have failed to use [the bomb] and afterwards looked his countrymen in the face."<sup>80</sup> Sanders' statement not only shows his incredible reliance upon Stimson's argument, it more importantly demonstrates how Sanders attempted to shape the reader's interpretation of the atomic bomb. Not only was it a weapon that the United States had no reason not to use, it was a weapon that the United States absolutely had to use. While Walker claimed that the debate about the atomic bomb did not truly pick up until 1965, Sanders' text makes it seem as if he had some reason to defend the atomic bomb. Unlike the textbooks from the 1950s, Sanders' text did more than explain the basic facts about the bomb; it justified its usage. However, many textbooks that followed in the sixties did not seem to be put under this type of pressure to defend the bomb.

*The American Democracy: Its Rise to Power*, written in 1964 by Dexter Perkins and Glyndon G. Van Deusen, clearly defended the bomb in the text, but it also focused more on the bomb before it was dropped. This is evident from the section of the text titled *The Technological Factor*, which spent nearly two pages describing the making of the bomb. From the reasons that Hitler failed to produce a bomb, to the methods used to produce the proper uranium, to the different sites where research was done, to a multiple-paragraph account of what the scientists

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 450-451.

<sup>80</sup> Stimson, "The Government Was Justified in Using the Atom Bomb," 102.

experienced at Alamogordo, this section of text had a wealth of information about the bomb.<sup>81</sup>

Like Laurence, and to some extent Bailey, Perkins and Deusen seemed more concerned with the scientific marvel of the bomb rather than the circumstances of its deployment.

Despite their focus on the construction of the bomb, Perkins and Van Deusen were clearly aware of the debate about the bomb. In the section about the dropping of the bomb, they explained Truman's actions in a straightforward manner. "Firm in his conviction that it was his responsibility to shorten the struggle and to save possibly hundreds of thousands of American lives, President Truman gave orders for the dropping of the bomb" after the Japanese ignored his threat of "prompt and utter destruction."<sup>82</sup> This sentence reaffirmed the main thrust of Stimson's article. While this quote addressed the debate subtly, the following quote directly acknowledged the conversation occurring outside of the textbooks and responded to it.

It has often been asked if dropping the bomb could have been avoided. Probably not. Even after the attack on Hiroshima the decision to surrender nearly provoked a revolt within Japan. The President acted only after the advisers he had asked to study the question unanimously recommended using the bomb. To Truman, issuing the order was a patriotic duty; to Winston Churchill, it was a 'merciful abridgement' of the slaughter; to the great body of Americans, it was the decisive act that ended the war. And it was later pointed out that terrible though the bomb was, the destruction was no greater than that which took place in the fire-raids over Tokyo.<sup>83</sup>

In these few sentences, Perkins and Van Deusen, like Sanders in his text, explicitly expressed their position on the atomic bomb. However, unlike Sanders, they left open the possibility that the bomb did not have to be used. While this may seem like a milestone in the textbooks, the text that follows did little to encourage readers to think any differently than Sanders did. By showing

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<sup>81</sup> Dexter Perkins and Glyndon G. Van Deusen, *The American Democracy: Its Rise to Power*. (New York: MacMillan Company, 1964), 569-572.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 583.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 584.

the quality and quantity of the people who approved of the decision—Truman’s advisers, Churchill, the American people—Perkins and Van Deusen affirmed the consensus that the bomb should have been used.

Lewis Paul Todd and Merle Curti, who wrote *The Rise of the American Nation* in 1966, provided a unique perspective on the atomic bombing but implicitly argued that the bomb was regrettably needed to end the war. While many authors provided a rather distant perspective of the bombings by talking about the mushroom cloud, Todd and Curti made the reader think of what it would be like to be on the ground when the bomb hit. “On August 6, 1945, at eight-fifteen in the morning, a solitary plane crossed over the Japanese city of Hiroshima. It flew very high. A few people looked up. No alarm was sounded. Then, suddenly, the city disintegrated in a single searing atomic blast.”<sup>84</sup> The usage of short, choppy sentences stands out in an otherwise flowing narrative. The authors only gave the readers a taste of what it would have been like in Hiroshima, but it is enough to at least encourage the reader to think about the Japanese perspective. While some of the texts above conveyed a regretful tone about the bombing, this text takes it one step further by making the reader think about the people killed by the bombs.

Even in their description of the casualties, Todd and Curti emphasized the innocence of those who died by saying that 100,000 “men, women, and children were killed instantly or died soon after.”<sup>85</sup> The death toll did not differ much from other casualty counts, but its presentation is noticeably different. Saying 100,000 people died does not come across as strong as saying that 100,000 men, women, and children died. While they all fall under the category of people, women and children are culturally seen as more vulnerable and are thus more likely to make someone feel poorly about the knowledge that many of them died. In another part of the text, the

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<sup>84</sup> Lewis Paul Todd and Merle Curti, *Rise of the American Nation*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.), 739.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 739.



bombings were described as “holocausts,” which further emphasized the terrible nature of the atomic bomb.<sup>86</sup> However, the remainder of the text seemed to acknowledge the regrettable need for the bomb.

Todd and Curti continued by describing the difficulty of Truman’s decision and his hesitation to make it. “In authorizing the bombing of Hiroshima, President Truman knew that he had made a momentous decision. He had given the order only after days of conferring with his key military and political advisers.”<sup>87</sup> This passage seems to create a scene in which Truman and his advisers were holed up in a room, refusing to budge until they had decided whether or not they were going to use the atomic bomb. “His decision was made as a last resort to force Japan to surrender, and thus to save the lives of hundreds of thousands of American fighting men.”<sup>88</sup> Like many authors before them, Todd and Curti referred to Stimson’s argument that the bomb was used to save hundreds of thousands of lives, but they differ from most authors by claiming that Truman’s decision was a “last resort.” Although they do not make any explicit comments against the bomb’s use, it seems that they are regretful of the consequences of its use.

While their inclusion of an excerpt from Henry Stimson *Harper’s* article, Todd and Curti demonstrate the durability of Stimson’s argument, but, more importantly, emphasized their focus on the negative nature of the bomb. This included Stimson’s claim that “death is an inevitable part of any order that a wartime leader gives” and his belief that the bomb fit into the natural progression of barbarism in twentieth century warfare.<sup>89</sup> Stimson continued: “Now with the release of atomic energy, man’s ability to destroy himself is very nearly complete. The bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended a war. They also made it wholly clear that we

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 739.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 739.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 739.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 739.

must never have another war.”<sup>90</sup> By including this excerpt in the book, Todd and Curti showed that the atomic bomb accomplished its purpose, but it had done so in a barbaric way. While their text was devoid of an explicit acknowledgment of the debate about the atomic bomb, Todd and Curti seemed to guide their readers towards the conclusion that the bomb was unfortunate but necessary.

While Todd and Curti had provided a unique look at the atomic bomb, Oscar Handlin’s *America: A History*, published in 1968, provided a very minimal account of the atomic bomb. “When Germany fell, plans were ready for an invasion of Japan. But a new instrument of destruction developed by the scientists made that costly venture unnecessary.”<sup>91</sup> Although he gave no estimates about how many casualties would have occurred, his argument perfectly aligns itself with Stimson’s claims. The bomb replaced the need for a deadly invasion. Handlin also claimed that “the desire to shorten the war dissolved hesitation about the use of the new weapon.”<sup>92</sup> This quote reiterated Stimson’s argument: ending the war quickly took precedence over any other concerns. While the word “hesitation” implies that there was some discussion about whether or not to use the bomb, Handlin quickly dismissed any doubts that might have existed.

In some of Handlin’s final remarks about the war, he subtly defended the atomic bomb. “The culminating act of destruction over Hiroshima was symbolic of the fury of a war that cost the world uncountable lives and wasted precious resources... Yet much of Europe and Asia was but degrees removed from the devastation left by the atomic bomb.”<sup>93</sup> Although these sentences do not come across as overly defensive of the atomic bomb, Handlin clearly made the argument,

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 739.

<sup>91</sup> Oscar Handlin, *America: A History*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 912.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 912.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 913.

like Stimson did, that the atomic bomb did not differ greatly from the other types of weapons used in war and the overall military conduct in the war. By mentioning the types of atrocities and morally questionable acts committed by the Germans and Russians, Handlin categorized the bomb as a logical step in warfare.

*The National Experience: A History of the United States*, written in 1968 by a team of historians headed by John Blum, provided a much more balanced, detailed discussion of the bomb. The text opened in the typical manner. “But Japanese resistance grew everyday more fanatical. The use of kamikaze suicide planes and the last-ditch fighting in Iwo Jima and Okinawa seemed to confirm the horrendous American estimates of casualties to be expected in an invasion of the homeland.”<sup>94</sup> Here, the word “fanatical” is used to describe the Japanese fighting techniques and perhaps to justify the use of the bomb. While the exact estimates of potential casualties are not given, the word ‘horrendous’ implies that the number would be very high. Even though the phrase “seemed to confirm” implies that there had been some discussion or doubts about the estimated casualties of an invasion, Blum did not bring up these doubts. According to Blum, after Truman found out about the existence of the bomb, “the next question was how and when this frightful weapon should be employed.”<sup>95</sup> In other words, like Stimson had said, the administration did not even consider not using the bomb. While many scientists were “aware of the ghastly character of the weapon” and opposed using the bomb as soon as possible, a demonstration of the bomb was turned down because of the limited number of bombs and potential for a dud. Again, this rebuttal echoed Stimson’s argument.

By providing details that were absent in previous texts, the author was able to justify the

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<sup>94</sup> John M. Blum, et al. *The National Experience: A History of the United States*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968), 755.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 756.

use of the bomb even more. He explained that Japan was looking for mediation through Russia but would not negotiate if unconditional surrender was still demanded. “The American government, following the Japanese peace explorations through decoded cable intercepts, came to the conclusion that the best way to hasten the end of the war would be to issue a solemn plea to the Japanese to surrender before it was too late.”<sup>96</sup> This is how the author explains the Potsdam Declaration. However, the author admits that “the warning was embodied somewhat cryptically” in the Potsdam Declaration. Although the Japanese government wanted to accept the ultimatum, the military leaders prevented this from happening. Their rejection of the ultimatum “convinced [Truman] that the militarists were in control of Tokyo and that there was no point in delaying the use of the bomb.”<sup>97</sup> Although Truman wanted the Japanese to surrender, they just would not do so. In his description of the bombings, Blum also took some of the responsibility away from the United States with phrases written in the passive voice like “the first atomic bomb fell...” and “the remaining bomb was dropped...”<sup>98</sup>

However, the passage that followed revealed that a debate had been going on among historians.

The decision to drop the bomb was the most tragic taken in the long course of American history. It may well be that only so drastic a step could have ended the war and thereby averted the losses an invasion would have brought to both sides. On the other hand, thoughtful observers have wondered whether the American government, with Japan essentially beaten and on the verge of capitulation, had exhausted all the possible alternatives before at last having recourse to the bomb—whether there were not resources of negotiation and demonstration that should have been first attempted, with the bomb held in reserve as a weapon of last resort.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 756.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 757.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 757.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 757.

This passage is full of strongly-worded statements. The first sentence expresses regret, while the second sentence calls into question the necessity of the bomb. The remaining sentences advocate Baldwin's argument and the conclusions of the U.S. Strategic bombing survey. Even the use of the words "thoughtful observers" adds credibility to those who argued against the bomb.

Blum went on to question the doctrine of unconditional surrender, wondering if it had terrible consequences. Echoing the sentiment of some of the other textbooks examined thus far, Blum lamented that "victory thus came—but in a way that converted triumph into tragedy."<sup>100</sup> By ending his discussion of the bomb with the two quotes above, Blum left his readers with a negative impression of the bomb.

By including two excerpts from sources dealing with the atomic bomb, Blum was also able to provide the reader with some of the debate. To represent some of the opposition to the bomb, Blum included an excerpt from "The Atomic Bomb: A Plea for Restraint," written in June 1945 by the Committee on Social and Political Implications.<sup>101</sup> This short document argued against the use of the bomb, not because of its inherent evils or ghastly nature, but because of the future problems it might bring to the United States in policy. This excerpt not only added a new dimension to the debate about the use of the bomb, but it also allowed Blum to raise more questions for the reader about the wisdom of using the bomb.

Blum also included an excerpt from a radio address given by Truman in August of 1945 which explained the use of the bombs on Japan. Truman first defended the bomb by citing the threat of Germany acquiring such a weapon as the impetus for research. He then described the people who became the eventual target of the bomb.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 757.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 756. From the Committee on Social and Political Implications, Report to the Secretary of War, June 1945.

Having found the bomb we used it. We used it against those who attacked us without warning at Pearl Harbor, against those who have starved and beaten and executed American prisoners of war, against those who have abandoned the pretense of obeying international laws of warfare. We have used it in order to shorten the agony of war, in order to save the lives of thousands and thousands of young Americans.<sup>102</sup>

Although Blum did not use this type of argument in his writing, his inclusion of this radio broadcast adds Truman's side of the story to the discussion. Through his inclusion of opposing primary sources and through concluding paragraph about the opinions of "thoughtful observers," Blum was able to create a fairly-detailed discussion about the atomic bomb. While he did not blatantly condemn the bomb, he certainly did not hesitate to point out its shortcomings.

In *The United States Since 1865*, published in 1969, author Rachel Foster Dulles predominantly reiterated Stimson's main points, but she too passed some judgment on the bomb. Dulles set up the scene at the end of World War II by describing the poor condition that Japan found itself in. "Nevertheless, the American military believed that an actual invasion of the home islands would be necessary to force Japan's final surrender, and they were preparing two separate operations..."<sup>103</sup> Again, the situation is described as bombing the Japanese or invading—Stimson's argument. After the bomb became available, Truman warned Japan that failing to surrender would lead to "prompt and utter destruction." When Japan failed to comply, "an American plane dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, and three days later another fell on Nagasaki."<sup>104</sup>

In this straightforward style of writing, Dulles made a comment that could have otherwise been critical of the atomic bomb, but she explained herself by defending the decision with Stimson's argument.

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 757.

<sup>103</sup> Foster Rhea Dulles, *The United States Since 1865*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 468.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 468.

Whether surrender could have been obtained at this time without dropping the atomic bomb can never be known with absolute certainty. It would appear with all the advantages of hindsight that Japan's collapse was imminent. But the decision to employ this most terrible of all weapons of destruction was taken in the conviction that the bomb would save countless American lives—estimated at a million—that might otherwise have been lost in the invasion of Japan itself.<sup>105</sup>

While Baldwin argued that the U.S. should have known that Japan's collapse was imminent, Dulles argued that only hindsight showed that to be the case; no one could know for sure if Japan would have surrendered without the bomb. Of course, Dulles was staking her claim in this passage by diagnosing Japan's collapse as imminent and by labeling the bomb as the "most terrible of all weapons." She left the necessity of the bomb in question, but she seemed to have little reservations about its usage. Her use of the word "conviction" and her reference to Stimson's estimates of a million casualties show that she accepted the reasons that the bombs were dropped.

Written in 1970 by Frank Freidel and Henry Drewry, *America: A Modern History of the United States* took Blum's discussion of the bomb one step further--breaking the narrative about the bomb in half with a discussion of the controversy surrounding it. This section, labeled "decision making," occupies a majority of the space dedicated to the atomic bomb, which may reflect the increased debate about the bomb amongst scholars described by Walker in chapter one. Freidel and Drewry prefaced this section with questions that had not been explicitly asked in the previous textbooks: "What should be done with this newly developed weapon? Should it be used against Japan? What would be the repercussions of such use?"<sup>106</sup> Yet again, they turned to Henry Stimson for answers.

As they looked at Stimson's argument, they provided the details as to how Stimson came

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 468.

<sup>106</sup> Frank Freidel and Henry Drewry. *America: A Modern History of the United States*. (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1970), 706.

to the conclusion to urge Truman to use the bomb. Stimson was guided by an Interim committee of high officials and scientists along with a panel of four physicists who had helped developed the bomb.<sup>107</sup> This committee wanted to use the bomb against Japan as soon as possible, ideally a dual military and residential target, and do so without prior warning.<sup>108</sup> While the use of the term “residential” displays an aspect of the decision-making process that had not been seen before, attention was not drawn to this point. However, this detail may reveal what appeared in Blum and Dulles’ work as an increasing willingness to discuss the negative aspects of the bomb. Prefacing their look at Stimson’s argument with the parenthetical remark that “some experts have severely criticized” these factors that went into the decision to drop the bomb also reveals an increased willingness to admit to uncertainty.

Like Blum, Freidel and Drewry also turned to primary sources to show the debate about the bomb. One source was the Scientific Panel, which released a report on June 15<sup>th</sup> detailing what opinions had been considered but concluded by saying that “we see no acceptable alternative to direct military use.”<sup>109</sup> After reading this report with the knowledge that Stimson had turned to these scientists for counsel, the reader would be led to believe that Stimson and the War department had weighed their options carefully. However, Freidel and Drewry, from their inclusion of a dissenting report from seven University of Chicago scientists who had worked to develop plutonium for the atomic bomb, made it clear that opinions from highly-involved people had been swept aside.<sup>110</sup> Despite the opposition of these scientists, “Truman had no doubts then or later about the advisability of using the atomic bomb.”<sup>111</sup> Truman may not have debated the decision, but Freidel and Drewry made it clear that differences of opinion did exist.

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 706.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 706.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 707.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 707.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 707.



While Freidel and Drewry did not openly question the dropping of the bomb as the right decision to make, three questions provided at the end of the chapter reflect their open-ended view of this issue. “[1.] Why did Japan refuse to surrender by July, 1945, when it was clear that it could not win the war? [2.] Both the decisions made at Yalta and the decision to use the atomic bomb have been defended from the standpoint that they saved lives. Is this a valid position from which to judge these decisions? [3.] Would it have been better for America not to use the atomic bomb?”<sup>112</sup> This first question often ties into the confusion surrounding the atomic bombs. If Japan was going to lose, why did we bomb them, twice? By asking this first question, the authors make the readers think about why the U.S. leaders saw the need to bomb a country that was clearly on the road to defeat. The second question gets at the heart of the matter, is it morally acceptable to kill innocent people in order to prevent the deaths of others? Can we really express the value of human life by looking at the numbers? While this debate would become a focal point amongst scholars later on, it is used in this instance to question the thrust of Stimson’s argument, which dominates the text. Lastly, the authors show that the U.S. did have a choice in using the bomb. By asking the readers’ interpretation of this decision, Friedel and Drewry did not insist upon a right answer to this question. Through their questions, Friedel and Drewry pushed the discussion of the bomb in their textbook to a new level.

By examining the fourth edition of Blum’s *The National Experience*, published in 1977, one can see how the debate had changed in the textbooks over the nine year gap between the two publications. The new edition curiously added these lines after discussing the question about how the bomb was to be used. “Roosevelt seems never to have doubted that, once available, the bomb

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 708.

would be dropped. The momentum of wartime atomic policy militated to that conclusion.”<sup>113</sup>

Why would Blum add Roosevelt’s support to the decision to use the bomb? While one can only speculate about Blum’s motivations, it is not unreasonable to argue that this was included in response to the argument advanced by Sherwin’s *A World Destroyed*, published in 1975, that no one ever really questioned that the bomb would be used if it became available.

Whatever the case about the addition of Roosevelt’s opinion, the following passage was clearly added in response to Alperovitz’s revisionist argument in *Atomic Diplomacy*.

Some of the President’s advisers, Secretary of State Byrnes particularly, believed that the use of the bomb would enhance the American position in negotiations with the Soviet Union. For Truman, that possibility was at most a secondary consideration, though he did decide neither to consult Stalin about the bomb nor to offer him, any more than Roosevelt had, any broad scientific information about the nature of the weapon. Primarily Truman was moved by his interpretation of Japanese political and military conditions.<sup>114</sup>

Although Alperovitz’s influence did not appear in the 1968 edition of *The National Experience*, it is clear from this edition that Alperovitz’s opinions were popular enough to require Blum to present this information to his readers. While he did not dismiss the possibility that Truman was influenced by the motives Alperovitz attributed to him, Blum would not accept these as Truman’s primary motives. Of course, as chapter one mentioned, few scholars agreed with Alperovitz’s assessment. But even though Blum did not agree with Alperovitz, he gave his readers a chance to consider this possibility by including it in the text. As in the previous edition, Blum concluded his text with a look at the arguments made by the “thoughtful observers” with whom he appeared to sympathize.<sup>115</sup>

In contrast to the balanced discussion carried out in Blum’s textbook, Bernard Bailyn’s

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<sup>113</sup> John M. Blum, et al. *The National Experience: A History of the United States*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1977), 706.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 707.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 707.

*The Great Republic: A History of the American People* published in 1977 ignored the debate surrounding the atomic bomb. For Bailyn, the process was simple and free of controversy. “A new, inexperienced President, Harry Truman, sat in the White House. An array of military and civilian advisers counseled the President to use the new weapon against Japan, and Truman agreed.”<sup>116</sup> In his description of the bomb, Bailyn refers to it as “a technically practical military device,” as opposed to the terrible weapon that many authors above had labeled it.<sup>117</sup> Bailyn seemed to have no qualms with the atomic bomb and obviously did not feel the need to explain that some people might not have held the same opinion. At this point in time, that type of minimal detail seemed to suffice in this textbook, but chapter three later shows how that would change.

*America: Past and Present*, written in 1984 by a team of historians headed by Robert A. Divine, also avoided all of the debate and controversy surrounding the atomic bomb. The way Divine saw history play out, the U.S. had three ways to proceed as they attempted to secure victory in the Pacific war. According to Divine, “the military favored a full-scale invasion and estimated that they would suffer hundreds of thousands of casualties.”<sup>118</sup> Again, Stimson’s high estimates for casualties were cited. The phrasing of the sentence is unique though, claiming that the military favored an invasion. Whether this is intentional or not, the wording creates a sense of pressure against Truman that has yet to appear in other texts. Not only was it the primary plan, it was what the military wanted to do. Secondly, Divine mentioned the desire from diplomats for the U.S. to modify their policy of unconditional surrender. However, he did not express the strength of anyone’s desire to follow this course of action. According to Divine, using the atomic

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<sup>116</sup> Bernard Bailyn, et al. *The Great Republic: A History of the American People*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977), 1178.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 1178.

<sup>118</sup> Robert A. Divine, et al. *America: Past and Present*. Brief ed. (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1984), 457.

bomb was only the third option, which Truman authorized only after it was successfully tested.

Divine explained Truman's decision with a reliance upon Stimson's role in the process and the arguments he made for the bomb later:

He followed the recommendations of a committee headed by Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson to drop the bomb on a Japanese city without any prior warning. Both Truman and Stimson viewed the decision as a legitimate wartime measure, one designed to save the hundreds of thousands of American and Japanese lives that would be lost in a full-scale invasion.<sup>119</sup>

In this passage, Divine echoes Stimson's sentiments that the bomb was a "legitimate" weapon to be used in the war and that it ultimately saved lives by preventing an invasion of Japan. While his use of the word "legitimate" may reflect the need to defend the decision to use the bomb, Divine provided no other hints that this decision had proven to be a controversial one.

In *Longman History of the United States of America*, published in 1985, author Hugh Brogan highlighted both the positives and negatives of the bomb. In his chapter about the war, as Brogan examined the making of the atomic bomb, he called the bomb "the biggest threat to man's future ever yet evolved, indeed the force which was going to dominate the future."<sup>120</sup> While this statement is foreboding, Brogan dedicated his discussion of the Manhattan Project to showing the benefits brought to Americans by the bomb. For him, the ability to produce the bomb should be viewed as a source of pride. As Brogan put it, "it was the colossal industrial power and skill of America that enabled her to do what none of the other belligerents could contrive: to build practical atomic weapons in time for use in the war."<sup>121</sup> While some authors saw the bomb as calling into question the moral integrity of the United States, Brogan perceived the bomb as the prime example of the United States' superiority. Brogan went on to discuss the

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 457-458.

<sup>120</sup> Hugh Brogan, *Longman History of the United States of America*. (Longman: New York, 1985), 588.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 588.

economic benefits provided by the bomb. By making the bomb, the United States “created a whole new industry that by 1950 would be the biggest in the country.”<sup>122</sup> At the time, jobs were what the United States needed. From Brogan’s presentation of the bomb thus far, the readers would not see the bomb as a source of moral quandary but as one of the better solutions to the unemployment which had plagued Americans since the Great Depression.

As Brogan continued his discussion of the atomic bomb in his chapter about the Cold War, he critiqued Truman but ultimately seemed to accept his decision. He opened his discussion with the admission that “no Presidential decision in history has been more disputed than the decision to drop the bomb.”<sup>123</sup> Although he believed that this decision seemed straightforward to Truman at the time, he criticized Truman for seeing everything as straightforward.<sup>124</sup> However, Brogan presented the decision to drop the bomb as the best option at the time. Like many authors, Brogan presented the Japanese as overly stubborn and the Americans as wary of the casualties caused by Japan’s last ditch efforts. As he put it, “the mere certainty of ultimate defeat was not allowed to demoralize a warrior people.”<sup>125</sup> Considering the effectiveness of the kamikaze pilots and the expected stubborn resistance to an invasion which seemed necessary to win the war, Brogan found no fault with the United States for using the bomb. He, too, mentioned the idea of doing a demonstration of the bomb, but saw no feasibility or practicality in this plan.

As Brogan looked back on the decision to drop the bomb, he did admit that Truman might have hesitated had he “fully grasped what he was doing.”<sup>126</sup> He clarified that Truman did not want to target women and children in the dropping of the bomb, but did not seem to realize

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 588.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 603.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 603.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 603.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 603.

that the only targets remaining that had any military resources worthy of attacking were cities containing large numbers of innocent people. When Brogan agreed with Truman's assessment of the bomb as "the most terrible bomb in the history of the world,"<sup>127</sup> he acknowledged the terrible nature of the event. However, he did not judge Truman for his decision. In fact, he found Truman's "ineffective squeamishness [to be] rather puzzling: large-scale destruction of cities and civilians had been a characteristic tactic of the Second World War from its beginning..."<sup>128</sup> Like Stimson, Brogan saw no difference between the atomic bombs and the fire raids on Tokyo. Brogan admitted that the bomb would go on to cause unforeseen nuclear radiation problems, but he believed that Truman would have probably still dropped the bomb with this knowledge because of the prospect of ending the war quickly.

Ultimately, Brogan implicitly signed off on the decision to drop the bomb, but he did so after addressing some of the major questions surrounding it. In his mind, the major concern of the bomb would be its future role in warfare and politics. After the war, "it soon became evident that the very existence of the human race, and perhaps all of terrestrial life, was at risk..."<sup>129</sup> Despite this strong statement of concern, Brogan did not seem to see the bomb as something that should continuously be questioned. However, through his critique of Truman, Brogan did at least open up the possibility that Truman had made mistakes. While his text did not contain as much of an obvious debate as Blum's text, for example, did, Brogan still addressed many of the issues that had been raised about the bomb.

*A History of the United States*, written in 1986 by Daniel J. Boorstin and Brooks Mather Kelley, largely ignored the controversy surrounding the atomic bomb. In fact, Boorstin and

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 603. (Brogan, Hugh. *Longman History of the United States of America*. (Longman: New York, 1985))

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 603. (Brogan, Hugh. *Longman History of the United States of America*. (Longman: New York, 1985))

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 604.

Kelley's story-telling approach to the bomb is somewhat shallow and cavalier. The first lines of the section entitled "Splitting the atom" are as follows:

Upon the death of President Roosevelt in April 1945, the tremendous task of finishing the war and planning the peace suddenly fell to the courageous, peppery new President Harry S Truman. He was a man of decision, destined to make some of the most fateful decisions in modern history. And he was prepared for great decisions. Ever since he was a young man, he had been reading books of history...<sup>130</sup>

One of the 'great decisions' referred to above would obviously be the decision to drop the atomic bomb. However, the text contained very little information about the decision itself and what made it difficult. Instead of dealing with the controversy, Boorstin and Kelley spent an entire page of text describing how the bomb came about: the origin of the word 'atom', the 'Who's Who' team of scientists that created the bomb, and even the theoretical dilemmas confronting the scientists. While they addressed some of the concerns raised, they did so in a way which removed the controversy from the decision. They asked "Should the United States use the atomic bomb?" and then promptly answered that "President Truman alone had to decide."<sup>131</sup> While the inclusion of the question does at least make the reader think about it, the quick answer seems to stifle those thoughts.

With their description of Truman's thought processes, Boorstin and Kelley presented a normal account with a slight twist. "If the war dragged on and Americans had to invade Japan, it might cost a million lives. The atomic bomb, President Truman knew, might kill hundreds of thousands of innocent Japanese. But life for life, the odds were that it would cost less."<sup>132</sup> Again, Stimson's disputed estimate of one million lives is used. However, this version of the story

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<sup>130</sup> Daniel J. Boorstin and Brooks Mather Kelly, *A History of the United States*. (Lexington: Ginn and Company, 1986), 574-575.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 576

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 576.

added a new element to the equation, claiming that Truman was aware that the atomic bombs could kill hundreds of thousands of innocent Japanese. This admission does not occur in the other textbooks explored in this thesis, and it is one that Truman probably did not make himself. Most books that mention the type of targets selected say that Truman insisted upon military targets, although the labeling of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as “military targets” has been questioned by many. Instead of questioning the morality of this act, like other scholars were at this time, Boorstin and Kelley skimmed over the controversy. However, in only a few short years, it seems that textbooks authors were no longer able to gloss over the controversy surrounding the atomic bomb.

### Chapter 3: The Atomic Bomb is Here to Stay

As the Cold War came to a close in the early 1990s, authors began to spend more time in the textbooks examining the event which many scholars marked as the beginning of the Cold War—the dropping of the atomic bomb. Not only did they dedicate more time and pages of text to the subject, they demonstrated a whole new level of critical analysis in their coverage of the decision to use the atomic bomb. Authors could no longer present the dropping of the bomb as a mere sequence of events. Now, they had to address the various factors that contributed to the United States dropping the atomic bomb on Japan and assess whether these factors were right or wrong. Maybe the decline of the Cold War provided authors the opportunity to truly step back and assess the atomic bomb in a new light—one that was removed from the tensions that had existed since the end of World War II. Maybe the authors were influenced by the trend among historians to write social histories which tried to capture a little bit of everyone’s story. Whatever



the case, the controversy that had been discussed for years by scholars outside of the textbook now solidified its place inside the textbook. Like Stimson's arguments about the bomb, the controversy was here to stay.

Published in 1990, *A People and A Nation: A History of the United States*, written by a team of authors headed by Mary Beth Norton, reflected a shift in tone, presentation, and content of the textbooks that had not been seen in previous texts. First, Norton showed no reservations about exposing the gruesome details. Before she even mentioned the atomic bomb, Norton emphasized the horror of the fire bombings of Tokyo: "observers described the ghastly scene as a mass burning."<sup>133</sup> Clearly, she would not have agreed with Stimson brushing away the atomic bomb as any other weapon of war. Like Todd and Curti before her, Norton painted a picture of what happened when the bomb was dropped. By focusing on the bomb as a singular event and not a part of a larger chain of events and by looking at it on such a small scale, Norton showed the horror of the bomb which other authors had only mentioned. After the *Enola Gay* dropped the bomb,

A flash of dazzling light shot across the sky; then a huge purplish mushroom cloud boiled forty thousand feet into the atmosphere. Dense smoke, swirling fires, and suffocating dust soon engulfed the ground for miles. Much of the city was leveled almost instantly. Approximately 130,000 people were killed; tens of thousands more suffered painful burns and nuclear poisoning.<sup>134</sup>

This strong language forces the reader to think about the pain and suffering the atomic bomb victims went through. To further demonstrate the horrors of the bomb and make her readers consider the Japanese point of view, Norton juxtaposed the circumstances in the United States and Japan: "As Hiroshima suffered its unique nightmare, Washington, D.C. celebrated its

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<sup>133</sup> Mary Beth Norton, et al. *A People & A Nation: A History of the United States*. (Houghton Mifflin: Boston, 1990), 794.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 795.

military and scientific triumph. 'This is the greatest thing in history,' exclaimed President Truman on hearing of the successful mission."<sup>135</sup>

Norton continued to utilize quotes from the President and a strong tone to criticize Truman's actions. After the U.S. dropped the bomb on Nagasaki, "a sobered President Truman suspended the further atomic bombing of Japan. He had belated qualms about killing 'all those kids.'"<sup>136</sup> The use of the word "sobered" implies that Truman had been making bad choices until this point. Now, he was aware of what was truly happening. Instead of making Truman look like a sympathetic character, Norton's use of his own words makes him look clueless and insincere. Four days later, "the Japanese, who had been sending out peace feelers since June, surrendered."<sup>137</sup> Again, Norton showed the U.S. to be unaware of the situation. The Japanese had been looking for a way to surrender since June, but the U.S. had not been able to make peace until after the bombs were dropped.

Although Norton conceded that "most Americans agreed with President Truman that the atomic bombing of two Japanese cities had been necessary to end the war as quickly as possible and to save American lives," she clearly saw more motivating factors at play than the ones Stimson described.<sup>138</sup> Norton listed the alternatives that had been discussed at the highest levels and explained why they were dismissed. However, she concluded that thought with these two sentences: "Then, too, memories of Pearl Harbor played a part. 'When you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him like a beast,' Truman said."<sup>139</sup> Yet again, Norton incriminated Truman with his own words. The context of Truman's quote is not given, but the context in

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 795.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 795.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 795.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 795.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 795.

which Norton used it made Truman appear to have ulterior motives.

In the following passage, Norton attributed to the United States' leaders the motives that Alperovitz had described like they were clearly facts.

Diplomatic considerations also sped the decision to use the bomb. Leaders envisioned the real and psychological power the bomb would bestow on the United States. It might serve as a deterrent against aggression; it might intimidate Russia into making concessions in Eastern Europe; it might end the war in the Pacific before Russia could claim a role in the management of Asia.<sup>140</sup>

Norton not only listed all of these benefits of using the bomb, she then transitioned immediately into a quote by Truman to prove her point. "If it explodes, as I think it will...I'll certainly have a hammer on those boys' (the Russians)."<sup>141</sup> Although Walker claimed that many scholars since the 1970s had accepted secondary motives for the use of the bomb, Norton is only one of a couple of authors mentioned in this thesis who asserted this claim. Of course, she did this with a much firmer tone than any of the other textbooks examined above. By including so many quotes from Truman, which taken out of context do not paint a good picture of the president, and by writing with a rather critical, borderline sarcastic, tone, Norton clearly questioned the decision to use of the bomb.

The fourth edition of Bernard Bailyn's *The Great Republic: A History of the American People*, published in 1992, clearly demonstrated the increased presence of the controversy in the textbooks with a few key additions and edits. In this new edition, Bailyn wrote: "An array of military and civilian advisers counseled the president to use the new weapon against Japan, explaining that it might eliminate the need for an invasion of the Japanese home islands, which

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<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 795.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 795.

*everyone expected to produce heavy American casualties.*"<sup>142</sup> In the prior edition, examined above, Bailyn had instead simply written: "and Truman agreed." Despite Bailyn's minimalist style in the previous text, this would no longer suffice. Although this new line essentially repeated Stimson's argument about the bomb, it showed him making a claim about the bomb when he had not made one before. As chapter one shows, many scholars, Barton Bernstein in particular, would disagree with the claim that "everyone" expected an invasion of Japan to inflict heavy American casualties.

The fourth edition, with the addition of the following three new sentences, shows how the complicated nature of the atomic bomb had become solidified in the textbook.

Although the terrifying dimensions of atomic and nuclear weaponry became crystal clear only after World War II, at the time the weapon impressed many American military and government leaders as essentially a more efficient way of using air power to terrorize the enemy. It was also assumed that FDR would have used the weapon and that, so much tax money having been spent in developing the bomb, Congress and the public would expect the expenditures to be justified by dropping it. Finally, some American military and political leaders felt using the bomb would serve postwar peace by intimidating the Soviets.<sup>143</sup>

While the arguments do not bring anything new to the table, they are important because they bring something new to this textbook. Many of the authors above described the bomb with words like "terrifying" and admitted to the benefit of hindsight. While the second sentence focuses a little bit more on the expenditure side of the bomb than the other textbooks, it basically combines Sherwin's argument that FDR had always planned to use the weapon when it was ready and Stimson's argument that there was no reason to avoid using the bomb. However, the last sentence demonstrates how Alperovitz's argument had become ingrained in the text.

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<sup>142</sup> Bernard Bailyn, et al. *The Great Republic: A History of the American People*. Vol. 2. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1992), 435. The italics denote the text added in this edition.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 435.

Although secondary motives had been accepted by many scholars in the 1970s, Bailyn's text, along with the other texts explored in this chapter, show that it was not until the 1990s that this argument became a consistent presence in the textbook.

In *American History: A Survey*, published in 1995, Alan Brinkley basically highlighted the entire scholarly discussion that is presented in the first chapter of this thesis. Immediately acknowledging the controversy surrounding the bomb before he even described the actual act of dropping the bombs, Brinkley is the first author in this thesis to actually use the word "controversy," which further demonstrates how the 1990s witnessed a broadening of the discussion about the atomic bomb. According to Brinkley, "controversy has raged for decades over whether Truman's decision to use the bomb was justified and what his motives were."<sup>144</sup> After this statement, Brinkley dove right into the debate. "Some have argued that the atomic attack was unnecessary, that had the United States agreed to the survival of the emperor (which it ultimately did agree to in any case), or waited only a few more weeks, the Japanese would have surrendered."<sup>145</sup> In this quote, Brinkley represented the arguments of Baldwin, Feis, and Sherry, as well as the conclusion of the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey. With the addition of the parenthetical comment, Brinkley subtly throws some of his weight behind this argument. Brinkley continued: "others argue that nothing less than the atomic bombs could have persuaded the Japanese to surrender without a costly American invasion."<sup>146</sup> Of course, this is the argument that Stimson put forward in his *Harper's* article.

Brinkley then added an element to the list of objections that was absent in the other textbooks examined in this thesis:

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<sup>144</sup> Alan Brinkley, *American History: A Survey*. 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1995), 763.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 763

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 763.

Some critics of the decision, including some of the scientists involved in the Manhattan Project, have argued that whatever Japanese intentions, the United States, as a matter of morality, should not have used the terrible new weapon. One horrified scientist wrote the president shortly before the attack: 'This thing must not be permitted to exist on this earth. We must not be the most hated and feared people in the world.'<sup>147</sup>

While other textbooks had included general objections from scientists and others, Brinkley explicitly mentions the word "morality," which would make just about any reader think critically about the decision to use the bomb. Including the strong opinion of the scientist reinforces a critical perspective of the bomb.

While Brinkley examined the type of argument put forth by Alperovitz, he did so in a manner that again forced the reader to think critically about the use of the bomb.

Still more controversy has existed over whether there were other motives at work in Truman's decision. With the Soviet Union poised to enter the war in the Pacific, did the United States want to end the conflict quickly to forestall an expanded communist presence in Asia? Did Truman use the bomb as a weapon to intimidate Stalin, with whom he was engaged in difficult negotiations, so the Soviet leader would accept American demands?<sup>148</sup>

Through his questions, Brinkley encourages the readers to consider these questions. These were the very same questions that scholars had been asking themselves since Alperovitz's *Atomic Diplomacy* was published in 1965. However, it was not until the 1990s that these types of questions became a staple of the textbook. Brinkley concludes that "little direct evidence is available to support (or definitively refute) either of these accusations."<sup>149</sup> Although this sentence makes it seem like Brinkley disagreed with Alperovitz's argument, he left the question open-ended with the parenthetical qualification that no one could "definitively refute" these claims.

Even Brinkley's account of the bombing of Nagasaki seems critical through his repetition of the word 'another.' "The United States sent *another* American plane to drop *another* atomic weapon—this time on the city of Nagasaki—inflicting horrible damage and over 100,000 deaths

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 763-764.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 764.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 764.

on *another* unfortunate community.”<sup>150</sup> Using the same word three times in such close proximity seems to be no accident. While Brinkley may have used this word to represent the resolve of the United States, his use of the word “unfortunate” expresses sympathy for the Japanese. While Brinkley’s text did not contain the same openly critical tone of Norton’s text, it is clear that Brinkley was not afraid of bringing up the controversy and negativity surrounding the bomb.

In *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People* published in 1996, Paul Boyer seemed to have a response to every criticism raised against the atomic bomb; however, his extremely thorough analysis of the controversy shows that the debate about the bomb had solidified its place in the textbooks. Early on in the text, Boyer utilizes Stimson’s casualty estimates, claiming that the Joint Chiefs of Staff “expected the invasion of Japan to cost a million American casualties.”<sup>151</sup> Even in 1996, about a decade after scholars like Bernstein labeled these high estimates as myth, Stimson’s numbers were still quoted. Many arguments advanced by Stimson in his 1947 *Harper’s* article had proven durable, but the estimates of hundreds of thousands of casualties from an invasion of Japan seemed to be the most durable.

In reference to the fighting at Okinawa and Iwo Jima, Boyer further supported one of Stimson’s arguments. Boyer asked, “If the capture of these small islands had brought such bloodshed, officials wondered, what would the assault on the Japanese home islands be like?”<sup>152</sup> This question echoes Stimson’s thoughts, but none of the other textbooks in this thesis put these thoughts into question form. While this may just reflect a new style of textbook writing, this question seems to serve the purpose of making the reader see Stimson and Truman’s side of the argument. In many of the textbooks published before the 1990s, readers would have probably

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 764. Italics added by me.

<sup>151</sup> Paul S. Boyer, et al. *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1996), 893.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 895.

struggled to see the merits of the arguments made by those who questioned the decision to drop the bomb. Now, it seems that Boyer needed to make the readers see the side of those who decided to use the bomb. Again, Boyer turns to Stimson to answer his question: “The successful detonation of an atomic blast at Alamogordo in mid-July, however, gave Truman an alternative to the costly planned invasion.”<sup>153</sup>

While he seemed to support the arguments for using the bomb, Boyer, like Norton, did not shy away from the gruesome details.

On August 6 a B-29 named the *Enola Gay* took off from the Marianas island of Tinian and dropped a uranium bomb on Hiroshima, plunging the city into what Japanese novelist Masuji Ibuse termed ‘a hell of unspeakable torments.’ The three thousand degrees centigrade fireball incinerated houses and pulverized people. More than seventy thousand died in the searing flash of heat, and many of the additional seventy thousand injured later died of radiation poisoning.<sup>154</sup>

Words and phrases like “plunging,” “hell of unspeakable torments,” “fireball,” “incinerated,” “pulverized,” and “searing” paint a horrific picture of the bombing of Hiroshima. However, as previous textbooks have demonstrated, describing the horrors of the bomb did not necessarily equate to questioning the decision to use the bomb.

After his discussion of the conclusion of the war, Boyer carried out what read like a debate about the atomic bomb. After raising objections to the bomb, and sometimes showing evidence for those claims, Boyer responded. Boyer begins: “Many have questioned whether the fighting had to end with the United States resorting to the dreaded new atomic weapons. Some believe that racist American attitudes toward the Japanese motivated the decision to drop the bombs.”<sup>155</sup> Boyer included a derisive statement made by a war correspondent about the Japanese, which would back up this claim, but he countered that the bomb was originally designed to be

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 896.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 896

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 896.



used against the Germans.<sup>156</sup> Boyer continued: “Others contend that demonstrating the bomb’s terrible destructiveness on an uninhabited island would have moved Japan to surrender.”<sup>157</sup> He admitted that “we will never know for sure.”<sup>158</sup> He then countered with the argument that Stimson made against a demonstration: policy makers feared that the bomb might not work and could not spare one of the only two bombs in their possession. Boyer continued: “Still others argue that Japan was ready to surrender and that an invasion of the home islands was unnecessary. Again, we cannot know for sure.”<sup>159</sup> Again, Boyer admitted uncertainty but countered: “All that is certain is that as late as July 28, 1945, Japan flatly rejected a demand for surrender, and not until after the bombing of Hiroshima did the Japanese government discuss acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration.”<sup>160</sup> Although Boyer has a counter argument to all of the objections, he still included all of these objections in his text, which shows how the opposition had sealed its place in the text.

In his response to the types of charges made by Alperovitz, Boyer carried out an even more in-depth discussion. Boyer began with the admission that “the rapid worsening of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, moreover, strengthened the conviction of some that Truman ordered the use of the atomic bombs primarily to intimidate Stalin.”<sup>161</sup> According to Boyer, Truman and his advisers were aware of the benefits that the bomb would bring in with relation to interactions with the Soviets in Japan and Eastern Europe.<sup>162</sup> Boyer then included the following quotes from top American officials as the evidence for why people would have come to these conclusions:

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<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 896.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 896.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 896.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 896.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 896.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 896.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 896.

Referring to the Soviets, President Truman noted just before the atomic test at Alamogordo, 'if it explodes, as I think it will, I'll certainly have a hammer on those boys.' Secretary of War Henry Stimson contended that the bomb was 'a badly needed equalizer' in the struggle with the Soviet Union and that it emboldened the president to 'get tough with the Russians.' And Truman's new secretary of state, James Byrnes, thought that the bomb would make 'Russia more manageable' and would 'put us in a position to dictate our own terms at the end of the war.'<sup>163</sup>

However, as he had done with the previous arguments, Boyer quickly countered the opposition. Like Sherwin and Bernstein, Boyer accepted that Truman recognized the benefits the bomb would bring to U.S. relations with the Soviets, but claimed that this was not "the foremost reason why the bombs were dropped."<sup>164</sup> Boyer responded with pride in America's superiority: "As throughout the war, American leaders in August 1945 relied on production and technology to win the war with the minimum loss of American life."<sup>165</sup>

In another demonstration of the durability of Stimson's argument, Boyer claimed that "every new weapon was put to use; the concept of 'total war' easily accommodated the terror bombings of masses of civilians; and the atomic bomb was simply one more item in an awesome arsenal that had already wreaked enormous destruction on the Axis."<sup>166</sup> Like Stimson, Dower, Schaffer, and Sherry, Boyer saw the bomb as a legitimate, progression of weaponry in the context of World War II. Boyer again borrowed directly from Stimson's argument, claiming that "no *responsible* official counseled that the United States should accept the deaths of thousands of Americans while not using a weapon developed with 2 billion taxpayer dollars."<sup>167</sup> In other words, how could Truman or Stimson justify not using it? Boyer also articulated Stimson's argument through the person of Winston Churchill: "Indeed, to the vast majority of Americans,

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<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 896.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 896.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 896.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 896.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 896. Italics added by me.

the atomic bomb was, in Churchill's words, 'a miracle of deliverance' that shortened the war and saved lives."<sup>168</sup> To reinforce this point, Boyer concluded the discussion of the bomb by featuring a quote from a 21-year-old second lieutenant describing how happy he and his men were to learn that the bombs had been dropped and that they would not have to invade Japan: "We were going to grow up to adulthood after all."<sup>169</sup>

While Boyer's reliance upon Stimson's argument may suggest that textbooks had not changed much in fifty years, one must not forget that authors were still presenting the other side of the debate. Whether they agreed with Alperovitz and company did not matter; they still included them in their texts. Although the author's style of writing usually allowed the reader to see how the author interpreted the situation, this did not prevent the reader from forming his/her own opinions about the decision to drop the atomic bomb. Boyer answered his own questions and countered the main points of those who opposed the use of the bomb, but these questions were thought-provoking nonetheless. The textbooks of the 1990s opened the door to controversy and left it open.

### Conclusion

According to Brinkley, "controversy has raged for decades over whether Truman's decision to use the bomb was justified and what his motives were."<sup>170</sup> However, as this thesis demonstrates, it took until the 1990s for this controversy to come to the forefront in textbooks. Why is this the case? Quite possibly, this is simply due to the nature of the textbook.

Dana Lindaman and Kyle Ward, authors of the book *History Lessons: How Textbooks from Around the World Portray U.S. History*, provide a unique perspective on this question.

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<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 896-897.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 897.

<sup>170</sup> Alan Brinkley, *American History: A Survey*. 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1995), 763.

According to Lindaman and Ward, textbooks reveal the priorities and values of the nation, but this national perspective often hinders one's ability to recognize the United States' presence in global affairs.<sup>171</sup> This point seems especially relevant to the discussion of the atomic bomb. The United States came to prominence in a global context, becoming a superpower as a result of World War II, but Lindaman and Ward believe that textbooks have become isolationist in their presentation of history. While the textbooks examined in the third chapter of this thesis do seem to consider the bigger picture, it seems that many of the textbooks examined in this thesis had a rather short-sighted view of the consequences of the atomic bomb.

As Mary Beth Norton, author of *A People & A Nation* admits in her "Reflections of a Longtime Textbook Author; or, History Revised, Revised—and Revised Again," there are many restraints inherent in the process which keep textbooks relatively standard.<sup>172</sup> For starters, textbooks have to be able to sell. According to Norton, "the market for a basic college textbook consists of the instructors teaching the survey course, and we try to be responsive to what those instructors tell us they want."<sup>173</sup> Norton may think, for instance, that the dropping of the atomic bomb was the most horrible blunder of American history, but she would not be able to say that it in the textbook. Few teachers would want to buy a textbook that was so openly critical of the United States. However, as her book shows, she was still able to express her criticism of the bomb without saying anything explicit.

While this restriction may help to explain why some authors aren't as critical as they might want to be, it does not explain the tremendous lag in some textbooks between the appearance of the debate in scholarship and the appearance of the debate in the textbook.

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<sup>171</sup> Dana Lindaman and Kyle Ward. *History Lessons: How Textbooks from Around the World Portray U.S. History*. (New York: New Press, 2004), xix.

<sup>172</sup> Mary Beth Norton, "Reflections of a Longtime Textbook Author; or, History Revised, Revised—and Revised Again," *Journal of American History* 91.4 (2005), par. 8.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 17.

According to Norton, she is obligated to publish a new edition of her textbook every four years that reflects trends in current scholarly literature. For Norton, this forces her, “even requires” her to “change [her] mind in print.”<sup>174</sup> In other words, publishers force textbooks to change over time. Yet, this process doesn’t seem to have affected the presentation of the atomic bomb as much as it should have. According to Walker, many scholars accepted the claim by the mid-70s that Truman had secondary motives behind his decision to use the atomic bomb. However, these motives did not appear in the textbooks consistently until the 1990s. Why were the textbooks of the 60s, 70s and 80s so different?

According to historian Frances FitzGerald, the 1960s marked a watershed in the history of textbook writing. In the atmosphere of the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, the sexual revolution, and everything else encompassed in the counter-culture of the 1960s, groups that had been marginalized throughout history were now able to tell their side of the story. Textbooks, FitzGerald claimed, lost their unified presentation of U.S. history when historians attempted to incorporate all of these different perspectives into the text. However, as this thesis shows, the story of the atomic bomb did not seem to be one of the topics affected by this shift that FitzGerald noted. Chapter one details the many scholars, which one might label as “revisionists,” who tried to make their stories heard. However, the account of the dropping of the atomic bombs and the decision to do so remained fairly consistent in the textbook until the 1990s. As authors focused on bringing marginalized members of society to the forefront, it appears that there was little room for the controversy of the bomb to come through.

In his article “Histories Taking Root: The Contexts and Patterns of Educational Historiography during the Twentieth Century,” Paul Ramsey spoke about the contextual

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<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*, par. 19.

limitations that historians have when they are writing.<sup>175</sup> Although his article covers the influence of culture and scholarship upon educational historiography in general, Ramsey's findings can easily be applied to textbooks more specifically. As Ramsey puts it, "histories are shaped by the cultural milieu in which they are written...Historians do not exist outside of their own historical and cultural contexts, and, therefore, the questions they raise are often shaped by the social currents of their times."<sup>176</sup> Progressive historians will write differently than consensus historians who will write differently than policy-oriented historians, but the acceptance of these histories will depend upon the social context in which these histories are released. Evidently, most historians were not quite ready to accept the revisionist argument made by Gar Alperovitz in *Atomic Diplomacy*.

As Ramsey notes, "there are seldom 'Great Historians' whose ideas are so profound that they single-handedly restructure the historiography."<sup>177</sup> While few would label Henry Stimson as a great historian, his argument in *Harper's Magazine* clearly shaped the historiography in the textbook. Why was this the case? Maybe it was because Stimson told people what they wanted to hear. No one likes the thought of killing innocent people. However, Stimson put the focus on the idea that the bomb *saved* lives. Although the bombs killed over one hundred thousand, innocent Japanese civilians, Stimson claimed that they prevented about a million American casualties. Some people had to die, but more were saved as a result of the bomb.

Walker claimed that scholars had agreed that estimated casualties would have maxed out around 50,000, but none of the textbooks examined above mentioned anything close to numbers this low. They all either used words denoting heavy losses or placed the numbers above one

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<sup>175</sup> Paul J. Ramsey, "Histories Taking Root: The Contexts and Patterns of Educational Historiography during the Twentieth Century," *American Educational History Journal* 34.2 (2007): 347-363.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

hundred thousand. Why would this aspect of the debate not make its way into the textbooks by the mid-90s? Yet again, it seems that people wanted to cling to the numbers which provided more justification for the use of such a terrifying weapon as the atomic bomb.

In his article, "History, Collective Memory, and the Decision to Use the Bomb," Walker criticizes many textbooks of the nineties for being "surprisingly dated, and in some cases, misleading and superficial."<sup>178</sup> Although he admits that some textbooks were better than others at incorporating current scholarship, his overall evaluation of the textbooks is negative. While he does make some valid points, especially in reference to the casualty estimates, Walker fails to see the progress that the textbooks had made from the 1960s until the textbooks he read in the 1990s. While the textbooks definitely leave room for improvement, it is hard to imagine a textbook being much more critical of the decision to drop the bomb and being more thorough in an examination of both sides of the debate than Norton's, Brinkley's and Boyer's texts. While they have their flaws, they allow the students to really think about the controversy of the decision to drop the atomic bomb. What more does an open-minded person with critical thinking skills need?

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<sup>178</sup> Walker, "History, Collective Memory, and the Decision to Use the Bomb," 194.