

Alex Wellerstein, "The Kyoto Misconception: What Truman Knew, and Didn't Know, About Hiroshima," in Michael D. Gordin and G. John Ikenberry, eds., *The Age of Hiroshima* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2020)

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The Kyoto Misconception

WHAT TRUMAN KNEW, AND DIDN'T
KNOW, ABOUT HIROSHIMA

Alex Wellerstein

IT IS NO UNDERSTATEMENT to say that the final days of World War II, and the atomic bombings of Japan in particular, are an archival corpse that historians have picked to the bones. For over seven decades, these events and their protagonists have been dissected, scrutinized, and interpreted. Arguments as to their meaning have come into and gone out of favor, and while the flames of controversy in the field today burn several degrees cooler when compared to the situation ten or fifteen years ago, the events of August 1945 still command our attention and can provoke acrimonious debate.¹

Despite all this scholarly attention, there are still some mysteries. Separate from the apparently eternal questions (Did the atomic bombings end the war? Were they necessary?), there is at least one major archival puzzle that several historians have noted in passing, without a complete resolution: *How can we explain President Harry Truman's vastly disparate recorded reactions to the atomic bomb?* The most notable puzzler is Truman's Potsdam journal entry of July 25, 1945, in which he noted that the atomic bomb's first target was a "purely military one" so that "soldiers and sailors," and "not women and children," would be the victims.² This is obviously at odds with the facts: while Hiroshima contained a Japanese Army headquarters, it was clearly a city populated mainly by civilians, and likely fewer than 10 percent of the dead were soldiers. While one might quibble over who Truman believed the *intended* victims of the bombing of Hiroshima might have been, calling Hiroshima a "purely military" target is by any standard incorrect.³

It is also at odds with Truman's own later statements, despite his generally adopting a resolute postwar position with respect to the necessity and propriety of the bombings. After getting news of the success of the weapon, he described it as "the greatest thing in history,"⁴ but a day after the attack on Nagasaki, he put a stop to atomic bombing, claiming that he didn't like the idea of killing "all those kids."⁵ In December 1945, in a speech entirely of his own writing, he described the atomic bomb as "the most terrible of all destructive forces for the wholesale slaughter of human beings."⁶ On the day he left office, he wrote privately that the atomic bomb "affects the civilian population and murders them by the wholesale."⁷ And yet he never expressed explicit regret at the atomic bombings, and in fact he took on a far larger burden of the responsibility than the historical record shows him to perhaps deserve, in the sense that he was actually quite peripheral to most of the decisions that led to the use of the weapons.⁸

Scholars have noted these apparent discrepancies, and they have provided fodder for divergent interpretations. For example, Truman's July 25 journal entry, which notes that the target will be "purely military," has been variously described as Truman's "self-deception in order to block out troubling facts,"⁹ or indicative of a "schizophrenic"¹⁰ attitude toward the targeting of noncombatants, or even "writing with an eye to 'history'"—which is to say, doctoring the record.¹¹ Either Truman was deceiving himself or he is deceiving history.

In this chapter, I suggest another possibility, one that seems more straightforward and can, despite its apparent counterintuitiveness, be shown as fitting with other aspects of the archival record. It is a relatively simple idea, but one that has far-reaching implications: that Truman's diary is an *accurate representation* of his understanding at the time, but *he was himself in error*. That is, it may be possible that Truman thought Hiroshima was, in fact, a "purely military" target and that he did not understand that it was a city full of noncombatants. The broader context of the July 25 journal entry, which concerns targeting discussions about the city of Kyoto, gives a plausible narrative for how this confusion might have occurred.

My argument is easily summarized. As historians have long known, Truman's connection to the practical planning of the atomic bombing operations was minimal. The one decision he actually made on the matter concerned the sparing of Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan. In discussions with his secretary of war, Henry Stimson, about the Kyoto question, Truman may have become confused as to the nature of Hiroshima as a target. If true, this gives us a profoundly different interpretation of his actions not only in the days immediately prior to and after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but

also with regard to the atomic weapons policies he undertook during the rest of his presidency.

Methodologically, I call explicit attention to the available evidence and the types of interpretations that might be plausible. This may sound like a shifting of the epistemic status of the argument, from “what is true” to “what is plausible,” but it is not clear to me that we can do much better (if we are being honest) when engaging in an endeavor as essentially quixotic as trying to uncover what another human being, long dead, actually had within his or her mind. Of course, there may be several plausible interpretations. In the end, I think we also need to more explicitly acknowledge what we get out of adopting one interpretation over another. I do not suggest that this reading of the archival record is the only *allowable* one, but I do hazard that it may be a *productive* one: it “fits the facts,” and its explanatory power can be more impressive than the other possible interpretations, especially for the postwar.

In our focus on the final days of World War II, we often overlook Truman’s policies toward atomic weapons in the postwar. Truman was not only the first president to use an atomic bomb in war—he was also the *last* president (so far) to have done so. Truman’s role in the establishment of the so-called nuclear taboo, the *belief* that nuclear weapons should not be used again, has been noted in discussions about American nuclear strategy.¹² Truman’s postwar attitudes toward nuclear weapons are important but understudied, and I believe that with a deep look at his mindset just before and after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, one can see the roots of this aversion.

Further, Truman’s postwar policies were crucial in the development of the modern American approach to nuclear command and control, which in principle has a strict separation of military and civilian authorities. During Truman’s terms, this separation was physically enforced: Truman repeatedly refused to authorize the military to have access to complete nuclear weapons, making *physical* what in later administrations was a primarily *legal* differentiation. Truman furthermore established that the use decision for nuclear weapons was vested exclusively in the presidency, something that has continued to this day. I believe Truman’s postwar attitudes toward the military and the bomb can also be better understood with a closer reading of his wartime experience.

Last, I should say something explicit about my approach, which might be described as “epistemological.” Historians of science, like myself, use the term in a variety of ways. In this instance, I invoke it to frame my interests in what was known, what was not known, and when these various knowledges changed over time. It is a banal observation to point out that there are many types and ways of “knowing,” beyond a simple dichotomy of salience and ignorance.

There are things not fully understood, and there are things misunderstood, and there are places where the knower may not realize his or her ignorance. They often involve, explicitly or implicitly, questions of a counterfactual nature: What mattered and what did not, what choices were real choices and which were not? (As Francis Gavin’s chapter 17 in this volume indicates, these are questions hardly limited to the wartime years.) Limited as our sources are, and being appropriately mistrustful of later recollections, we latter-day analysts are always going to face gaps in what we can say about these things. However, this approach can lead to fruitful observations and new insights, as evidenced by a number of important recent pieces on early nuclear history by historians of science.¹³

Decisions to Use the Bomb

As essentially all serious historians of the bomb have acknowledged in recent decades, there was no single “decision” to use the atomic bomb. By streamlining numerous, cumulative, and often subtle decisions into a single life-or-death moment in postwar depictions of their wartime experiences, the historical actors sought to make their wartime activities seem more reasoned, rational, and carefully weighed than they appear to have been, whether to deflect criticism or to secure what they felt was the appropriate legacy for their wartime contributions.¹⁴ This narrative was explicitly created to bias judgment in favor of the bombings: if the only alternatives offered were “use two atomic bombs, on cities, within three days of each other” versus “a full land invasion,” then it becomes very easy to accept the former. (While casualty estimates of the land invasion vary dramatically, even the low estimates that were shown to Truman in 1945 would certainly have struck him, and present-day readers, as unpleasantly high.)¹⁵

In reality, the decision-making process was broken into a large number of parallel committees and conversations and telegrams, the future was unknown, and the many uncertainties involved in the atomic bomb’s development, much less the end of the war, meant that top-down, overly strategic planning was difficult. The results of the many contingent choices were difficult for the historical actors to anticipate; to ascribe too much prescience or rationality to many of these choices is to fall into a trap of memory.¹⁶

That the atomic bombs would be used in some way (if successfully developed in time for use in the war, which was not a sure thing until the spring of 1945) was taken for granted by most top-level administrators or officials who knew about them;¹⁷ the exact manner of their use was a more complicated issue.¹⁸ The most relevant parts for our purposes are that while there were some vague discussions of targeting early in the Manhattan Project, actual,

concrete planning for targets did not begin in earnest until the spring of 1945, when the schedule for the deployment of the bomb had become much more solidified.

Two secret committees within the War Department and Manhattan Project infrastructure were largely responsible for finalizing the idea that cities would be the targets of the first atomic bomb. The Interim Committee was created at the behest of Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, who was the highest-level official in the Truman administration with sustained participation in the bomb project.¹⁹ The committee's name referred to its handling of "interim" matters that would need to at least be planned, if not settled, between the use of the bomb and the creation of a postwar organization to take over the nation-spanning wartime nuclear complex. This proved to be a massively expansive remit, including, importantly, questions relating to the use of the weapons themselves. The Interim Committee wrestled with whether the bombs should be "demonstrated" first (rejected), whether Japan should be warned (no explicit warning was issued), and the nature of the targets (cities containing some kind of military or industrial infrastructure).²⁰

The other committee, the Target Committee, concerned itself with mostly operational matters, such as the specific target cities and technical aspects of the bombs' use. Matters relevant to policy were, to be sure, discussed—for example, it confirmed that a psychological impact was of primary importance, and that the weapon should explicitly be used against cities—but its meetings were about specifics, not broad political questions.²¹ Several of these meetings were heavily attended by scientists, and, as Sean Malloy has argued, many of the options for how to use the first atomic bombs were determined by technological choices made earlier by weapons designers who were far removed from the strategic discussions. Cities were targeted, in part, because the bombs that were built were not very good at doing much else.²²

Thus there were precious few decisions reserved for the commander in chief. We should not be surprised by this: the bomb was developed in a military context and was being treated as a military weapon. It was Stimson's heavy involvement that was unusual. He did not intervene so personally in any other weapon developments or military tactics. Stimson was even absent from decisions on many broad matters of wartime strategy, like the switch from precision bombing to area bombing in the Pacific theater. In one case, it is clear he learned about a firebombing campaign's results from the newspapers, like everyone else (to his anger).²³ While there were high-level consultations on certain major war policy matters, such as the question of authorizing the invasion of Japan in June 1945, during World War II the military generally operated with considerable autonomy with respect to operational details.²⁴

Truman did make one important decision with regard to the use of the bomb while at Potsdam. It wasn't *whether* to use it at all: his role on this, as General Leslie R. Groves, the military head of the Manhattan Project, put it later, was "one of noninterference—basically, a decision not to upset the existing plans."²⁵ But he did make himself the final authority on *where* it would be used: he made a positive assertion in favor of Hiroshima rather than Kyoto as the target of the first bomb. The Kyoto decision has largely been relegated to a footnote to the existing bomb literature but should be more closely scrutinized.

Choosing Hiroshima—and Not Kyoto

At its second meeting the Target Committee produced a shortlist of targets, ranked by priority: Kyoto, Hiroshima, Yokohama, and Kokura.²⁶ On May 15 three cities—Kyoto, Hiroshima, and Niigata—were placed on a list of "Reserved Areas" not to be bombed by the massive incendiary raids that were being waged against Japan by the U.S. Army Air Forces; Kokura was added to the list in late June.²⁷ Nagasaki was not considered as a serious atomic target until much later and was never placed on the "reserved" list.²⁸

The question of whether Kyoto would be targeted, as the Target Committee desired most of all, became a site for contestation on two fronts. One was the surface issue about the morality and justification in targeting civilian populations. Underlying this, however, was another concern: whether that decision was one for military decision makers or for civilian policy makers. In a story that is often briefly mentioned in histories of the atomic bombing, Kyoto went from being the first-priority target for the atomic bomb to a spared city owing to the personal intervention of Secretary of War Stimson.²⁹ Stimson had visited Kyoto in the 1920s, when he was secretary of state for President Herbert Hoover, and knew it as a great center of Japanese culture.³⁰ For reasons known only to him, he adopted its survival of the war as a personal crusade: not only would Kyoto be spared the atomic bomb, it avoided virtually *all* bombing, the only Japanese city of appreciable size (with a wartime population of a million) to do so.³¹

On May 29, 1945, Stimson and Chief of Staff George Marshall discussed the nature of the bombing campaign; the question of the morality of the firebombing of Tokyo appears to have become relevant to Stimson's thinking about the targeting of the atomic bombs. The next day he called Groves to his office to discuss targeting. Groves had not intended to get the secretary's approval of his targets—he planned to submit them directly to Marshall for action. A showdown of sorts occurred, where Stimson, the top civilian authority on the handling of the war, demanded to know what targets were being

considered from a military general who essentially asserted that this was not a civilian matter. "This is a question I am settling myself," Groves much later recounted Stimson declaring, "Marshall is not making that decision."³² In a later interview, Groves would say that Kyoto was the only time in which Stimson "interfered with a military matter that I know of."³³ Stimson carried the day . . . for the moment.

Two days after his meeting with Groves, Stimson met with General Henry "Hap" Arnold, the head of the Army Air Forces and architect of U.S. strategic bombing policy, to discuss the progress of the war in the Pacific.³⁴ He confronted Arnold on the bombing of Tokyo—he thought he had received a guarantee that the Army Air Forces would limit itself to precision bombing, and that "the press yesterday had indicated a bombing of Tokyo which was very far from that."³⁵ Stimson was likely referring to a statement by General Curtis E. LeMay about the success of the bombing campaign, in which he bragged that 46 percent of Tokyo had been burned.³⁶ Arnold told Stimson that the policy had arisen out of tactical considerations owing to Japanese dispersal of industrial facilities among civilian areas; Stimson recorded in his diary that Arnold had told him "it was practically impossible to destroy the war output of Japan without doing more damage to civilians connected with the output than in Europe." Arnold gave Stimson an assurance of restraint, and in response Stimson asserted that "there was one city that they must not bomb without my permission and that was Kyoto."³⁷ Stimson again drew the line at Kyoto, and drawing a line at all seems an important power play for civilian authority over military tactics.

Stimson had been trying to convince Truman since at least mid-May that they ought to conduct only "precision" bombing over Japan in order to preserve the "reputation of the United States for fair play and humanitarianism." He felt the "rule of sparing the civilian population should be applied as far as possible to the use of any new weapons"—certainly a reference to the atomic bomb.³⁸ On June 6 Stimson met with Truman to report on his unease about the strategic bombing campaigns. This passage in Stimson's diary is worth quoting in its entirety:

I told him I was anxious about this feature of the war for two reasons: first, because I did not want to have the United States get the reputation of out-doing Hitler in atrocities; and second, I was a little fearful that before we could get ready the Air Force might have Japan so thoroughly bombed out that the new weapon would not have a fair background to show its strength. He laughed and said he understood. Owing to the shortness of time I did not get through any further matters on my agenda.³⁹

Stimson appears to have been trying to play both sides, appealing first to Truman's humanitarianism (or, at least, his legacy and reputation), and second to the more tactical question of being able to "demonstrate" the power of the atomic bomb when it was ready. Truman's laughter is a curious response, presumably acknowledging the irony of preserving cities in order to later destroy them, rather than the suggestion that the actions of his military might get him compared to Hitler.

Truman saying he "understood" did not end the discussion. In mid-June Groves received information on the proposed targets, including a map of Kyoto. In the copy in Groves's files, someone has drawn an asterisk on the Kyoto roundhouse, a prominent railroad structure, and a circle with a radius of around 1.5 miles has been drawn around it, which corresponds well with their rough understanding of the area of maximum damage for a 15-kiloton bomb.⁴⁰ On July 2 Groves received more information on the value of Kyoto as a military target, information that identified a large number of strategic industries, including plants to produce machine tools, ordnance and aircraft parts, explosives manufacture, and a new aircraft engine factory that was judged to be the second-largest in Japan, able to produce four hundred units monthly.⁴¹ This framing of Kyoto appears to have been a deliberate move toward accommodating the moral framing that Stimson was giving it: showing that Kyoto was a worthy military or industrial target. One can compare this with the original justification given by the Target Committee in May:

Kyoto—This target is an urban industrial area with a population of 1,000,000. It is the former capital of Japan and many people and industries are now being moved there as other areas are being destroyed. From the psychological point of view there is the advantage that Kyoto is an intellectual center for Japan and the people there are more apt to appreciate the significance of such a weapon as the gadget.⁴²

After the Trinity test, while Stimson was at Potsdam, Groves sent several messages to confirm the final target list. On July 21 Stimson received word from an assistant back in Washington that the military advisers still "favored your pet city and would like to feel free to use it as first choice if those on ride select it out of 4 possible spots in the light of local conditions at the time."⁴³ Stimson soon replied: "Aware of no factors that change my decision. On the contrary, new factors confirm it."⁴⁴ The new factors may have included the fact that the Soviets were being intransigent allies. Stimson had begun to think that the crew in Washington "may have been thinking in a vacuum," assuming that the postwar situation with the Soviets could be managed on trust.⁴⁵

Stimson met with Truman on July 22. They spoke of the Soviet situation and news from Washington that the bomb would be ready sooner than anticipated. Stimson recorded in his diary that Truman was “immensely pleased.” He then noted: “As to the matter of the special target which I had refused to permit, he strongly confirmed my view and said he felt the same way.”⁴⁶ The next day, Stimson also met with General Arnold and discussed the matter with him, recording in his diary that Arnold had voiced agreement “about the target which I had struck off the program.”⁴⁷ Thus fortified, Stimson cabled Washington with a request to “give name of place or alternate places, always excluding the particular place against which I have decided.” He concluded: “My decision has been confirmed by highest authority.”⁴⁸

Note Stimson’s repetition and vehemence. He appears to have felt that the Kyoto decision was still reversible despite his apparent victory on the matter. On July 23 he received the news that the new target list was “Hiroshima, Kokura, Niigata in order of choice here,”⁴⁹ and yet he still instigated a discussion with Truman about the matter on July 24. Stimson recorded the exchange in his diary as follows:

We had a few words more about the S-1 program, and I again gave him my reasons for eliminating one of the proposed targets. He again reiterated with the utmost emphasis his own concurring belief on that subject, and he was particularly emphatic in agreeing with my suggestion that if elimination was not done, the bitterness which would be caused by such a wanton act might make it impossible during the long post-war period to reconcile the Japanese to us in that area rather than to the Russians. It might thus, I pointed out, be the means of preventing what our policy demanded, namely a sympathetic Japan to the United States in case there should be any aggression by Russia in Manchuria.⁵⁰

In his diaries, Stimson repeatedly portrayed Truman as a complete convert to his way of thinking, in which Stimson had transmuted a moral problem into a political one: the nonbombing of Kyoto was, in this framing, as much about the Soviets as it was about the citizens of Japan. It is worth emphasizing that Groves would have challenged Stimson’s portrayal of Kyoto as a “civilian” target had Groves been in the room at Potsdam. He clearly thought Kyoto was at least as legitimate a target as any other on the list. Stimson’s distinction between Hiroshima and Kyoto was, from the perspective of a military planner, nonobvious. Both were cities, one with a military base and the other with weapon factories. Choosing the former over the latter is an ambiguous resolution to the moral hazard of targeting noncombatants—at the very least, one must admit it is a fairly subtle distinction.⁵¹

It may have been too subtle for Truman. This is not meant as an insult; Truman’s activities at Potsdam were dominated by many other matters relating to the Soviet Union, the Potsdam Declaration, and internal disagreements among his staff. (Stimson was not even explicitly invited to attend, in an effort by others, notably James Byrnes, to monopolize the president; Stimson showed up on his own initiative.) Truman was still relatively new to the job, and as many have noted before (and as he noted himself) he was in considerably over his head, helped in no way by the fact that his predecessor had never brought him into his circles of trust.⁵² Compare Truman’s account of the same July 24 meeting with Stimson, as written in a journal he kept at Potsdam:

I have told the Sec. of War, Mr. Stimson, to use it so that military objectives and soldiers and sailors are the target and not women and children. Even if the Japs are savages, ruthless, merciless and fanatic, we as the leader of the world for the common welfare cannot drop that terrible bomb on the old capital or the new. He and I are in accord. The target will be a purely military one and we will issue a warning statement asking the Japs to surrender and save lives. I’m sure they will not do that, but we will have given them the chance.⁵³

The apparent contradiction of this passage with the truth has often been noted. None of the cities on the target list fit the definition of “purely military” in the sense that “women and children” would not make up the bulk of the casualties. “Purely” is a peculiarly strong modifier. Did Truman really believe that this was the case? Was he deceiving himself, was he creating a doctored historical record, or was it something else?

In fact, he could have been genuinely confused, and specifically *confused by the discussions involved in the Kyoto decision*. Stimson went to Truman repeatedly with arguments he thought would persuade him. These included appeals to morality, to national reputation, and to postwar politics. All centered on the notion that Kyoto was a wholly “civilian” target, whereas any other target chosen, such as Hiroshima, was implicitly “military” by contrast. Stimson was trying to split a pretty fine moral line. It seems entirely possible (and to be sure, this is an interpretive leap) that he portrayed the contrast between targets as much starker than it was in reality: that Kyoto was a “city” and that Hiroshima, the other primary target under discussion, was a “military base.”

It seems unlikely that Stimson would have tried to *intentionally* deceive Truman. Stimson appears to have believed that the distinction was real and important, and indeed in later years, including when he worked in 1946 to develop his famous article on the decision to use the atomic bomb, he

repeated many of the same distinctions—to the frustration of some of his early readers connected to the armed forces, who convinced him to acknowledge that Kyoto also had a military nature.⁵⁴ There is no indication that anyone *other than* Truman was truly confused over the status of Hiroshima.

Truman never accused Stimson of having misled him or made himself out to be anything but in control of the situation. This is fully compatible with my interpretation: Truman clearly thought in the postwar that the story to tell about the bombings was one of his total control, of being the ultimate deliberator. To admit his own errors in understanding would strongly undermine the moral and political argument he felt the bomb deserved, and to displace responsibility for the decision onto subordinates would go against his “the buck stops here” philosophy of presidential responsibility.

We might pose an opposite question: Is there any positive evidence that Truman *did* understand that Hiroshima was a city? Hiroshima was not a household name in America during the war (Nagasaki was better known, both because of its prominence on the southwestern end of Kyushu and because of its long history as an international port); it almost never appeared in newspapers prior to the atomic bombings. There is only one document that was verifiably taken to Potsdam that, to an alert reader, would have indicated its status: a report on the targets developed by Colonel John N. Stone at the request of Groves, sent to General Arnold, which became the basis for the final bombing strike order. The Stone memo, sent on July 24, describes Hiroshima as follows: “Hiroshima (population 350,000) is an ‘Army’ city; a major POE [point of embarkation]; has large QM [quartermaster] and supply depots; has considerable industry and several small shipyards.”⁵⁵ Though it emphasizes its strategic value, the report makes clear that Hiroshima is a city of considerable size. All four of the targets under consideration (Hiroshima, Kokura, Niigata, and Nagasaki, the latter having been added to the list of targets just that day), are at one point in the memo listed as “cities.”

Did Truman read and understand this memo? The archival record on its travel and provenance, while unusually detailed, does not conclusively answer the question. It was not cabled to Potsdam; it was sent as an original copy along with other materials and arrived only on July 26. Stimson had already left Potsdam and was making his way first through Germany and then back to the United States. Generals Marshall and Arnold determined that there was nothing in the materials that needed to be immediately forwarded to Stimson.⁵⁶ The next day two telegrams were received in Washington from a colonel who was handling the transmitted material: one said that “the booklet and the original of Stone’s Memorandum to General Arnold have been turned over to the President” while the next, sent two hours later, noted that the memo was “recovered from the President and burned.”⁵⁷

How long did Truman actually have the memo? Did he read it? Did he comprehend it? If he had a mistaken view of the targets, would he have noticed material that had contradicted it? As someone notoriously uninterested in detailed reports, would he have, barring a compelling reason, paid it any attention in the two hours it might have been available to him, having already made his “decision”? There appears to be no archival confirmation either way. The day before, Truman had been traveling and quite busy; according to the log of his Potsdam trip, the only notation for July 27 is that “the President worked on his mail during the forenoon” and then had meetings during the rest of the day.⁵⁸

When Would Truman Have Learned That Hiroshima Was a City?

Other than the Stone memo, there is no other indication that these targets were discussed as “cities.” There are, however, other indications that Truman may have misunderstood them to be something else: “purely” military bases. This same language was initially part of the drafts of Truman’s August 10 address to the nation about the Potsdam Conference, which, unlike the press release sent out after the Hiroshima bombing (which was largely written by Stimson’s friend, Arthur Page, vice president for public relations for AT&T), Truman had a direct hand in creating.⁵⁹ The published version of Truman’s radio address contained a brief note about the atomic bombs:

The world will note that the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, a military base. That was because we wished in this first attack to avoid, insofar as possible, the killing of civilians. But that attack is only a warning of things to come. If Japan does not surrender, bombs will have to be dropped on her war industries and, unfortunately, thousands of civilian lives will be lost. I urge Japanese civilians to leave industrial cities immediately, and save themselves from destruction.⁶⁰

These passages have been frequently criticized as misleading. It is even more interesting, however, to consider that in the first draft of this speech, the atomic bomb was scarcely mentioned, perhaps indicating that the speech was drafted prior to the Hiroshima attack.⁶¹ On the original copy in the holdings of the Truman Library, someone has handwritten “why we dropped bomb on Hiroshima” on part of the first draft, and language very similar to the final version was added to the next draft at that spot:

The world will note that the first atomic *bombs* were dropped on Hiroshima which is *purely* a military base. That was because we did not want to

destroy the lives of women and children and innocent civilians in this first attack. But it is only a warning of things to come. If Japan does not surrender, bombs will have to be dropped on war industries and thousands of civilian lives will be lost. I urge the Japanese civilians to leave industrial cities and save themselves from destruction. [Emphasis added.]⁶²

Several language changes from the final version are worth noting. First is a pluralizing of atomic bombs. This was rectified by the next draft of the speech but shows a remarkable lack of specificity about the operation it is describing. Second and third are the assertion that Hiroshima was “purely” a military base, and language about “killing civilians” that was far more florid (“destroy the lives of women and children and innocent civilians”). Both mirror very closely the kind of language Truman used in his July 25 journal entry (“purely a military one . . . not women and children”). This suggests that perhaps the journal entry was used in the process of crafting this language, or Truman himself provided it. It seems too close to his own, peculiar wording to be purely coincidental.

So when, exactly, would Truman have definitively learned that Hiroshima was not “purely” a military target and thus changed the language? We can put a definitive date and even time on the final point at which Truman could have no longer been ignorant about the nature of Hiroshima: August 8, 1945, when Truman had a meeting with Stimson at the White House in the midmorning, in which they discussed the consequences of the attack. As Stimson wrote in his diary:

I showed the President the teletype report from Guam showing the extent of the damage; also, the Wire Service bulletin showing the damage as reported by Tokyo at nine A.M. August 8th. I showed him the photograph showing the total destruction and also the radius of damage which Dr. Lovett had brought me from the Air Corps just before I went. He mentioned the terrible responsibility that such destruction placed upon us here and himself.⁶³

Newspaper front pages on the same day were similarly concerned with damage: Hiroshima, clearly named as a “city,” was reported to have been 60 percent destroyed.⁶⁴ By the next day, huge numbers of casualties were being reported in the same papers: “200,000 Believed Dead in Inferno That Vaporized City of Hiroshima.”⁶⁵ The issue was acute enough from a propaganda standpoint that “high authorities” in the War Department apparently urged the Office of War Information to stress that the targets possessed “sufficient military character to justify attack under the rules of civilized warfare.”⁶⁶ To be sure, nobody involved in the planning, even those who knew that Hiro-

shima was a city, would have known in advance exactly the number of dead from the attack. Arthur Compton would later recall that J. Robert Oppenheimer had believed that only twenty thousand would die in the first attack, which is a large number though several multiples smaller than reality. Stimson would have heard this number at the Interim Committee meeting of May 31; there is no indication that other detailed estimates were made. There is no indication whatsoever that any such estimates made it to Truman’s ears.⁶⁷

If my interpretation is correct, one might expect August 8 to be an important demarcation in how Truman spoke about the bomb. And indeed, in the drafts of his Potsdam address, August 8 is the date at which the language on the atomic bomb started getting a considerable overhaul. Assistant Secretary of State Archibald MacLeish sent Samuel Rosenman, the speechwriter tasked with editing the statement, several paragraphs on the atomic bomb that were integrated into the final draft, specifically the first language making a strong justification for the use of the weapon: “Its production and its use were not lightly undertaken by this Government. . . . Only the certainty that the terrible destructiveness of this would will shorten the agony of the war and will save American lives has persuaded us to use it against our enemies.”⁶⁸ These were integrated into a fifth and near-final version of the speech, along with language reinforcing the idea that the atomic bomb was a carefully considered, deliberative action designed to save American lives: “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.”⁶⁹ Before Truman delivered it, and without any record in Rosenman’s papers, the “purely” language and the phrase about women and children being spared were both removed.

Let us also look at one other piece of evidence often used to assess Truman’s mindset from this period, a letter written to Senator Richard B. Russell. Russell had sent Truman a telegram on August 7 advocating a brutal path:

Permit me to respectfully suggest that we cease our efforts to cajole Japan into surrendering in accordance with the Potsdam Declaration. Let us carry the war to them until they beg us to accept the unconditional surrender. . . . If we do not have available a sufficient number of atomic bombs with which to finish the job immediately, let us carry on with TNT and fire bombs until we can produce them. . . . We should cease our appeals to Japan to sue for peace. The next plea for peace should come from an utterly destroyed Tokyo.⁷⁰

Truman’s response, dated August 9, contains characteristic language:

I know that Japan is a terribly cruel and uncivilized nation in warfare but I can’t bring myself to believe that, because they are beasts, we should

ourselves act in the same manner. For myself, I certainly regret the necessity of wiping out whole populations because of the “pigheadedness” of the leaders of a nation and, for your information, I am not going to do it unless it is absolutely necessary. It is my opinion that after the Russians enter into war the Japanese will very shortly fold up. My object is to save as many American lives as possible but I also have a humane feeling for the women and children of Japan.⁷¹

The reference to the Soviet Union having not yet entered into the war against Japan implies that the letter was written prior to August 9,⁷² either sometime late on August 7 (after Truman had returned to the White House from the USS *Augusta*) or August 8 prior to 3 p.m. (when he announced the USSR had entered the war). This leaves open two interesting possibilities: the letter was either written prior to or after his meeting with Stimson about the damage done to Hiroshima.⁷³ It is interesting to consider how each of these situations would change our interpretation of the letter. If he wrote about it in ignorance of the damage done to the “women and children” of Japan, then it might be further evidence of his confusion. If he wrote it shortly after learning about the damage to Japan, it might be read in a more rueful tone: a “humane feeling” toward those whom he recently learned were dead. Either way, it is an interesting response: a rejection of slaughter for its own sake, and a refrain about “women and children” that was already then becoming a common phrase of his for talking about the atomic bombs.

There appears to be sufficient documentary evidence to support the plausibility of the idea that Truman legitimately did not understand, prior to August 8, that the atomic bombs were in fact being dropped on cities and that their primary casualties would be civilians. If he did have such a misunderstanding, there is a very likely explanation for it: his discussion of the nontargeting of Kyoto with Stimson, his primary engagement with the use of atomic bomb while at Potsdam. To be sure, there is evidence for variable depths of Truman’s confusion, ranging from total ignorance (truly believing the target to be “purely a military base”) to something more mixed and self-deceptive (“lying to himself”). This is not the only interpretation made possible by the evidence, but it suggests that, if we have other reasons to think this interpretation is useful, then it is worthy of serious consideration.

Truman’s Atomic Trajectory

If Truman was genuinely confused as to the nature of the target of the first atomic bombing, then his Potsdam journal entry, and his apparent contributions to his radio announcement after Potsdam, would reflect this confusion

and not deception (self- or otherwise). Let us now imagine Truman on August 8, when he learns, for sure, that the bomb has done damage to a *city*, killing the “women and children” he thought would be largely spared. Reports from the Japanese, on August 8 and 9, further emphasized the civilian toll, to the point of overstatement. Truman’s initial feelings of elation, his initial reaction that the atomic bomb was “the greatest thing in history,” might now become more ambiguous. It is in this context that Truman and others started to talk about the need to justify the atomic bombs: to contrast the lives saved to those lost, to talk about them as a Faustian bargain, as a matter of ends (which had not yet materialized) justifying means.

The day after Truman definitively learned of Hiroshima’s true nature and fate, another atomic bomb was dropped on another city—Nagasaki. This was within the language of the original strike order but would have been a surprise to Truman if he were not aware that another bomb would be ready so soon. Would Truman have known about the pending second strike? Nothing in his journals or press statements indicates that he conceptualized the atomic bomb as anything more than a singular entity.⁷⁴ The actual schedule of both atomic bombs was determined on the island of Tinian in any event, a consequence of the weather, which moved the Hiroshima attack later than it had been projected, and the Nagasaki attack earlier.⁷⁵ In any case, in marked contrast to the Hiroshima strike, neither Stimson nor Truman was forewarned about Nagasaki.⁷⁶ Its bombing may have come as a rude shock to Truman, only three days following the Hiroshima attack and just after the Soviet invasion of Manchuria. Nagasaki was as much of a city as Hiroshima, if not more so: it was not a military base that was hit but a dense urban area with military factories on the fringes of the damage area.⁷⁷

Truman was a president out of the loop, shouldering political burdens imposed by a military operating with its own priorities and agenda, with little civilian oversight on their day-to-day operations. The possibility of the Soviets staying out of the Pacific theater was dashed as Stalin moved his invasion operation schedule up, but, more positively, on August 10 Japan sent a note of a preliminary willingness to surrender, one that provoked considerable discussion over its reserved role for the emperor.⁷⁸

In this context, Groves sent a message to General Marshall on August 10, indicating that another atomic bomb might be ready for use “on the first suitable weather after 17 or 18 August.” The response was immediate and decisive: General Marshall replied back that the next bomb “is not to be released over Japan without express authority from the President.”⁷⁹ At a cabinet meeting that morning, Truman took credit for the action, saying “he had given orders to stop atomic bombing.” Henry Wallace, the former vice president and then secretary of commerce, recorded in his diary that Truman had professed that

“the thought of wiping out another 100,000 people was too horrible. He didn’t like the idea of killing, as he said, ‘all those kids.’”⁸⁰

Truman did so, in part, because the discussions with the Japanese were getting delicate. There are several diary accounts of the cabinet meeting of August 10, and few of them put much attention on the atomic bomb; the issue of the day was what to do about the Japanese conditional surrender offer. James Forrestal noted that it was Stimson who initially raised the question of halting the bombing: “The Secretary of War made the suggestion that should now cease sending our bombers over Japan; he cited the growing feeling of apprehension and misgivings as to the effect of the atomic bomb even in our own country.” Toward the end of the meeting, Forrestal related: “The President observed that we would keep up the war in its present intensity until the Japanese agreed to these terms, with the limitation however that there would be no further dropping of the atomic bombs.”⁸¹

Framing the matter, as did Wallace, in terms of killing innocents makes for a strong contrast with Truman’s earlier statements, which seemed to deny consequences for noncombatants. By August 10 Truman appeared to be reclaiming his authority over any future use. This is not to suggest that he would definitely not have used the third bomb had the war continued. On August 14, in a midmorning meeting with British officials, he “remarked sadly” that since unconditional Japanese surrender had not yet been achieved, “he had no alternative but to order an atomic bomb be dropped on Tokyo.”⁸² Whether he would have actually done so is unknown, but in any event it would have been *his* choice, rather than being delegated.⁸³

If Truman had been ignorant of the likely noncombatant casualties for the atomic bomb, and ignorant about the fact that two were to be dropped in rapid succession, what psychological effect would this have produced? Truman’s actions might fit into this rough psychological interpretation: a rapid movement from elation to something more ambivalent, and then a feeling of lack of control of the situation, accompanied by a rapid assertion of authority to regain that sense of control.⁸⁴ His attitudes toward the atomic bombings, in general, became more intricate and less unambiguously positive. He simultaneously took on responsibility for the use of the bomb (above and beyond his actual, literal role) and was, for a time, willing to acknowledge its horrors even as he unequivocally defended its use.

Thus Truman’s letter of August 11 to Samuel Cavert of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, in which he claimed that while “nobody is more disturbed over the use of the Atomic bombs” than he was, the Japanese behavior toward POWs and at Pearl Harbor warranted bombardment: “When you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him as a beast. It is most regrettable but nevertheless true.”⁸⁵ Or, for example, his handwritten notes

from his Gridiron Dinner speech of December 1945, in which an early version of the “decision” narrative was coalescing:

You know the most terrible decision a man ever had to make was made by me at Potsdam. It had nothing to do with Russia or Britain or Germany. It was a decision to loose the most terrible of all destructive forces for the wholesale slaughter of human beings. The Secretary of War, Mr. Stimson, and I weighed that decision most prayerfully. But the President had to decide. It occurred to me that a quarter of a million of the flower of our young manhood was worth a couple of Japanese cities, and I still think that they were and are. But I couldn’t help but think of the necessity of blotting out women and children and non-combatants. We gave them fair warning and asked them to quit. We picked a couple of cities where war work was the principle [*sic*] industry, and dropped bombs. Russia hurried in and the war ended.⁸⁶

This passage is remarkable for several reasons: the acknowledgment of the “necessity of blotting out women and children and non-combatants,” the honest assessment of the bomb’s use as “the wholesale slaughter of human beings” even while veering back between these horrors and an inflated “decision” narrative, exaggerated casualty estimates (well beyond those being discussed by the military commanders at the time), the misleading statement about the Potsdam Declaration being a “fair warning” (it was an ultimatum, not an actionable warning), the noting of the targets as “a couple of cities,” and the sidelining of the issue of Soviet entry into the Pacific War. It has the germ of the later decision narrative that Stimson, Truman, and others would develop in the face of mounting criticism of the bombings, but in a rawer, less clinical, less strictly “rational” presentation.⁸⁷ It also places much of the “decision” around the question of his meetings with Stimson—which as we have seen largely revolved around the question of Kyoto versus Hiroshima. That Truman himself (and not a speechwriter) clearly wrote these words—they are handwritten, and have all the hallmarks of his characteristic phrasing—adds additional weight to them as evidence of his internal state.

One counterpoint that can be raised is that if Truman really was disturbed about the killing of noncombatants, why didn’t he question the firebombing campaign? As far as can be determined, Truman never attempted to intervene with the military with regard to any of its conventional campaigns: either they did not bother him, or he did not want to micromanage a conventional military campaign that had been ongoing since before he became president.⁸⁸ That Truman, and many others, considered there to be political and moral differences between the firebombing and the atomic bombings seems evident: while not *all* parties saw them as being different, both Stimson and Truman

did seem to consider the atomic bombs to have a “special” nature that made deliberations about them of a different quality from those on conventional attacks.⁸⁹ One can speculate as to *why* that was the case (e.g., by the time Truman was president, firebombing raids had become common practice), but Truman plainly did not see them as equivalent and never felt the need to justify or explain the firebombings in the way he did the atomic bombings.

Would Truman have done anything *differently* if he had completely understood the nature and timing of the two bombings? There are several possible outcomes. The least likely is that he would have called off the atomic bombing. Perhaps he would have looked into alternative targets or strategy, or the timing of the attacks. One can wonder, as Campbell Craig does in chapter 2 of this volume about Roosevelt, about whether some less “brutal” option might have been found if the full brutality of the choice were known to Truman, but I find it hard to believe, given the brutality of the time and Truman’s (arguably mistaken) belief that the decision to use the atomic bomb was a continuation of past policy. He would have simply found a justification for it, as many of his advisers clearly had done. At the very least, it seems he would not have been quite so unprepared for the news of the casualties and would not have had such a jarring difference in his pre- and postdamage assessment narratives.

When considering Truman and the atomic bomb, discussions (including mine) largely center on the events of 1945. Truman’s atomic legacy after the war is arguably more important. The years 1945–1953 saw immensely consequential decisions: domestic and international control of atomic energy, the custody dispute over the atomic bomb, the nonuse of nuclear weapons in the Korean War, and the development of thermonuclear weapons.⁹⁰ Truman’s stances on these matters were not always consistent, but certain themes emerge.

Throughout Truman’s presidency, he and his advisers framed the question of domestic control as being about the appropriate balance between military and civilian oversight. Truman emphasized that division, in particular in ways that reduced the capacities of the military, along stronger lines than any president afterward. For example, over the course of his presidency, while the American stockpile of atomic bombs climbed from dozens to hundreds to thousands, he explicitly rejected calls from the military to give them physical possession of the weapons (the “custody dispute”). Under Truman, the United States did not even have any formal policy on the employment of nuclear weapons until September 1948, when the National Security Council, upon recognizing that there was no policy, finally created a determination that reinforced what Truman had established as the status quo: “The decision as to the employment of atomic weapons in the event of war is to be made by the Chief Executive when he considers such decision to be required.”⁹¹ Toward the end

of his administration, in 1951, he eventually allowed the military to have nine completed nuclear bombs (around 1 percent of the arsenal), to be stationed in Guam; this is in marked contrast to his successor, Dwight D. Eisenhower, who gave the military control over 90 percent of the ever more massive stockpile, and whose successors made this transfer of weapons from civilian to military possession automatic.⁹²

Which is to say, Truman went out of his way, contrary to the recommendations of his military advisers, to ensure that in the United States nuclear weapons were a matter of exclusively presidential authority for use; he made sure that legal control was enforced through a strict physical division of the weapons. In 1948, at a meeting with Truman and several military and civilian officials, David Lilienthal, chairman of the civilian Atomic Energy Commission, recorded a telling interaction. The discussion was on the custody dispute, and military representatives were explaining that they required physical possession of the weapons. Secretary of the Air Force W. Stuart Symington had just related, with an air of skepticism, that some of the scientists at Los Alamos had remarked that the military ought not have the bombs, and not be able to use them. As Lilienthal recorded:

The President was giving this line of irrelevant talk a very fishy eye; at this point he said, poker-face, “I don’t either. I don’t think we ought to use this thing unless we absolutely have to. It is a terrible thing to order the use of something that” (here he looked down at his desk, rather reflectively) “that is so terribly destructive, destructive beyond anything we have ever had. You have got to understand that this isn’t a military weapon.” (I shall never forget this particular expression.) “It is used to wipe out women and children and unarmed people, and not for military uses. So we have got to treat it differently from rifles and cannons and ordinary things like that.”⁹³

This Truman sounds like the same man we’ve seen since the end of the war—ambivalence about the weapon with a frank admission that it is something that can “wipe out women and children and unarmed people.” The language echoes a refrain that goes back to the journal entry of July 25, 1945, when he asserted that the atomic bomb would *not* target “women and children,” or his regret of killing “all those kids,” expressed the day after Nagasaki. This is a Truman dedicated to a level of control that he had not exhibited during the war.

Truman did, of course, make one more major, individual decision in 1945 when it came to the atomic bomb: the decision to *halt* atomic bombing. That transformed the Nagasaki attack from the *second* use of the atomic bomb in war to the *final* use of the atomic bomb in war (so far).⁹⁴ During his presidency, there were several instances to reconsider, such as the Berlin Crisis of 1948 or the Korean War. Truman’s attitude toward the bomb, that it was “not

for military uses,” played a role in keeping the weapon out of the latter conflict. As Nina Tannenwald has argued: “If Eisenhower had been president before Truman, or if nuclear weapons had been used in the Korean War, the development of the nuclear taboo might have proceeded quite differently, or not at all.”⁹⁵ There are other examples (Truman’s role in the Atomic Energy Act of 1946, his endorsement of the H-bomb program), but the two consistent themes in Truman’s postwar atomic policies are being suspicious about the military intentions and the insistence that the weapons were not meant to be used.

It seems clear that Truman, despite his public protestations, harbored some regrets about the use of nuclear weapons during the war.⁹⁶ I posit that some of this regret came out of a fundamental misunderstanding (on the nature of the targets) and a subsequent feeling of loss of control (exemplified by the second bombing). Truman’s later actions can be seen as an about-face on both matters: after World War II, he never again ceded control over nuclear matters to his military advisers, and he never again admitted the weapon was anything other than a slaughterer of noncombatants. Both of these were not at all what one might expect given someone of his position. While Truman always took responsibility, even blame, for the use of the weapons and never expressed any regrets over the use of the bombs during the war, his actions speak of someone who realized, after the fact, that weighty decisions were made in his midst that came with serious consequences.

I will conclude with the reasons why this interpretation appeals to me as an interpreter of the past, despite the fact that, as I have acknowledged, it is not the only interpretation allowed by the evidence and it does require some care in making the evidence “fit.” First, it strikes me as being very “in character” with the Truman who has emerged out of the historiography of the past several decades. I see Truman neither as a truly steely strategist nor as a self-deceiver. I see him as someone out of his league in the early presidency and overly dependent on advisers lobbying for their positions. That this lobbying confused Truman on several important points seems quite possible given Truman’s own inattentiveness to many of these details and the fact that his advisers generally presented him with the final products of processes that had taken them weeks if not months or years to develop. For Truman to have an incomplete understanding of Stimson’s views on Kyoto, for example, would be understandable.

Second, I think that this interpretation better grasps Truman’s atomic trajectory. This is the criterion that most appeals to me in discerning between rival interpretations that are equally plausible: What *else* do they inform us on? Truman’s later pushes for civilian control and the establishment of the nuclear taboo point to deeply held responses to the bombings of Japan that are specifi-

cally rooted in feelings of a lack of control and a lack of understanding about the civilian consequences of nuclear attacks. It strikes me as intuitively plausible that such feelings could be rooted in an early ignorance and sudden revelation, a stark misunderstanding made brutally clear over a very stressful period.

Ultimately, there seems to be considerable evidence to suggest that Truman’s understanding of the nature of the atomic bomb’s first targets was flawed and incomplete. Truman would certainly have agreed that this did not absolve him of responsibility—he was the commander in chief. But it changes our view of him, and our sense of the meaning of the atomic bombs and their implications for what came next (as Francis Gavin explores in chapter 17). Truman the man, and the president, had many flaws. Perhaps he should have been more invested in these decisions. While no one would begrudge him for sparing Kyoto, to do so while dooming Hiroshima without understanding the consequences until several days after the fact is more problematic. Truman’s decision after Nagasaki to *stop* the bombing, and his decisions in the postwar to keep atomic bombs from becoming regular weapons of war, are perhaps even more important to our understanding of his presidency and its legacy than the decisions made about the use of the bombs themselves.

19. Daniel Deudney, in *Bounding Power*, argues that the size of viable states is defined by the destructive scope of extant military technology: with the advent of nuclear weapons, this size becomes planetary.
20. See Rhodes, *Making of the Atomic Bomb*.
21. Michael Gordin, *Five Days in August: How World War II Became a Nuclear War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 40.
22. On FDR's determination to avoid Wilson's mistakes, see John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972); and Kimball, *Forged in War*, 332–33.
23. Mark Stoler, *Allies in War: Britain and America against the Axis Powers, 1940–45* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005).
24. On FDR's vision, see Kimball, *The Juggler*; and Lloyd C. Gardner, *Spheres of Influence: The Great Powers Partition Europe, from Munich to Yalta* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 1993). For a recent treatment sympathetic to Roosevelt, Susan Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin, Portrait of a Partnership* (New York: Vintage, 2015), especially chap. 10.
25. On the veto, see Craig and Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb*; and Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 296–97.
26. See Kimball, *The Juggler*, 100–101.
27. See Mary E. Glantz, *FDR and the Soviet Union: The President's Battles over Foreign Policy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005); and Wilson Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima, and the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), esp. chap. 2.
28. For an overview of FDR foreign policy historiography, see Stoler, "Half-Century of Conflict."
29. Glantz, *FDR and the Soviet Union*.
30. On this point, see Gaddis, *Origins of the Cold War*.
31. Craig and Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb*, esp. chaps. 4 and 6.
32. On the Hyde Park memorandum, see Sherwin, *World Destroyed*; Rhodes, *Making of the Atomic Bomb*; and Craig and Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb*. Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 314–15, argues that FDR agreed to reject international control simply as a result of being bullied by Churchill. This is an odd interpretation, as FDR had little reason to accede to any of Churchill's demands at this point, hosted the secret conference at his home, told none of his advisers about the decision, and adhered to the agreement until his death.
33. See Kimball, *The Juggler*; and Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin*, 318.
34. See Rhodes *Making of the Atomic Bomb*; Craig and Radchenko *The Atomic Bomb*; and Miscamble, *Roosevelt to Truman*.
35. On Anglo-American conflict over the atomic question in 1943, see Stoler, *Allies in War*; and Craig and Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb*.
36. Quotation from Craig and Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb*, 23.
37. See Kimball, *Forged in War*, 328.
38. The literature on Yalta is vast. For a recent argument highly critical of FDR, see Miscamble, *Roosevelt to Truman*.
39. As Alexander George puts it, Poland threatened to jeopardize "his postwar plans right from the beginning." Quoted in Miscamble, *Roosevelt to Truman*, 60.

40. See Sean Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy: Henry Stimson and the Decision to Use the Bomb against Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), esp. chap. 4; and Craig and Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb*, 113–15.

41. See Gordin, *Five Days in August*, esp. chap. 3.

Chapter 3. The Kyoto Misconception: What Truman Knew, and Didn't Know, about Hiroshima

For their comments and discussions as this article evolved over time, I would like to thank in particular Ellen Bales, Barton J. Bernstein, William Burr, Michael D. Gordin, Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, John Horgan, G. John Ikenberry, Sean Malloy, Patrick McCray, Robert S. Norris, Benoît Pelopidas, Nina Tannenwald, J. Samuel Walker, Nasser Zakariya, and the participants of the conferences in Princeton and Hiroshima that led to this volume.

1. For brevity, I will simply point to two excellent historiographical essays by J. Samuel Walker that survey the literature quite well: J. Samuel Walker, "The Decision to Use the Bomb: A Historiographical Update," *Diplomatic History* 14, no. 1 (January 1990): 97–114; and J. Samuel Walker, "Recent Literature on the Atomic Bomb: A Search for a Middle Ground," *Diplomatic History* 29, no. 2 (April 2005): 311–34. Some of the questions and topics in this chapter were initially explored by the late Stanley Goldberg. Barton J. Bernstein deservedly critiqued Goldberg's conclusions, sources, and methods in a series of papers. Here, I have approached these questions from a somewhat different and, I hope, more careful perspective. For Goldberg's approach, see Stanley Goldberg, "What Did Truman Know and When Did He Know It?," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (May/June 1998): 18–19. For Bernstein's critique, see Barton Bernstein, "Reconsidering the 'Atomic General': Leslie R. Groves," *Journal of Military History* 67, no. 3 (July 2003): 889–920, esp. 884–86.

2. "Notes by Harry S. Truman on the Potsdam Conference," July 25, 1945 (hereafter cited as "Truman journal"), Harry S. Truman Library and Museum. https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/bomb/large/documents/pdfs/63.pdf.

3. Bernstein, "Reconsidering the 'Atomic General,'" 904–5.

4. "Log of the President's Trip to the Berlin Conference, 6 July to 7 August 1945," 50, copy in the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum (hereafter cited as *HST*), https://www.trumanlibrary.org/calendar/travel_log/documents/index.php?pagenumber=96&documentid=17&documentdate=1945-08-06&studycollectionid=TL&nav=ok.

5. Henry A. Wallace diary entry of August 10, 1945, in Henry A. Wallace, *The Diary of Henry Agard Wallace, January 18, 1935–September 19, 1946* (Glen Rock, NJ: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1977), 162.

6. Harry S. Truman, "Draft of the Gridiron Dinner Speech," December 15, 1945, *HST*, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/201508>.

7. Quoted in Barton Bernstein, "Truman and the A-Bomb: Targeting Noncombatants, Using the Bomb, and His Defending 'the Decision,'" *Journal of Military History* 62, no. 3 (July 1998): 562.

8. For an evenhanded discussion of Truman's role in the bombing, see especially J. Samuel Walker, *Prompt and Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of the Atomic Bombs against Japan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

9. Barton Bernstein, "Eclipsed by Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Early Thinking about Tactical Nuclear Weapons," *International Security* 15, no. 4 (Spring 1991): 159–60.
10. Sean L. Malloy, "The Rules of Civilized Warfare: Scientists, Soldiers, Civilians, and American Nuclear Targeting, 1940–1945," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no. 3 (2007): 501–5.
11. Gar Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb and the Architecture of an American Myth* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 527.
12. Nina Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 67. I prefer Tannenwald's sense of the taboo as an emotional/moral response, as opposed to a merely calculating "tradition of nonuse," but either one can work for my interpretation. On the tradition of nonuse, see T. V. Paul, *The Tradition of Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).
13. Examples of what I label as epistemological approaches to the history of the atomic bomb include Michael D. Gordin, *Five Days in August: How World War II Became a Nuclear War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Michael D. Gordin, *Red Cloud at Dawn: Truman, Stalin, and the End of the Atomic Monopoly* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009); Sean Malloy, "A Very Pleasant Way To Die: Radiation Effects and the Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb against Japan," *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 3 (June 2012): 515–45; and Rebecca Press Schwartz, "The Making of the History of the Atomic Bomb: Henry DeWolf Smyth and the Historiography of the Manhattan Project" (PhD diss., Princeton University, September 2008). One might also include Barton J. Bernstein, "Reconsidering Truman's Claim of 'Half a Million American Lives' Saved by the Atomic Bomb: The Construction and Deconstruction of a Myth," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 22, no. 1 (1995): 54–95.
14. See, for example, the discussion by Walker, *Prompt and Utter Destruction*, 1–6. On the development of the "decision" narrative and its political implications, see especially Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb*. Alperovitz's overall argument about the motivations behind the use of the atomic bombs remains controversial; his final chapters, which are focused on how the "orthodox" narrative about the justifications for the atomic bombings were developed and disseminated in the postwar, hold up much better, and merit attention even from historians who do not accept his arguments about the motivations for the use of the bombs.
15. See Barton J. Bernstein, "Understanding the Atomic Bomb and the Japanese Surrender: Missed Opportunities, Little-Known Near Disasters, and Modern Memory," *Diplomatic History* 19, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 227–73; and Bernstein, "Reconsidering Truman's Claim."
16. See especially Gordin, *Five Days in August*, for discussions about this methodological difficulty.
17. Bernstein, "Truman and the A-Bomb," 549–50.
18. Malloy, "The Rules of Civilized Warfare," contains an excellent survey and interpretation of the targeting discussion.
19. Indeed, it was Stimson (via Marshall), and not Truman, who formally approved the specific order to use the first nuclear weapons. See George Marshall to Thomas Handy, TERMINAL cable VICTORY 281 [CM-IN-24908], July 25, 1945, in *Correspondence ("Top Secret") of the Manhattan Engineer District, 1942–1946*, microfilm publication M1109 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1980) (hereafter cited as CTS), Roll 1, Target 6, Folder 5E, "TERMINAL Cables."

20. See Bernstein, "Truman and the A-Bomb"; and R. Gordon Arneson, "Notes of the Interim Committee Meeting, Thursday, 31 May 1945," copy in *Harrison-Bundy Files Relating to the Development of the Atomic Bomb, 1942–1946*, microfilm publication M1108 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1980) (hereafter cited as H-B), Roll 8, Target 14, Folder 100, "Interim Committee—Minutes of Meetings."
21. "Notes on the Initial Meeting of the Target Committee [held on 27 April 1945]," May 2, 1945, and Maj. John A. Derry and Norman F. Ramsey to Leslie R. Groves, "Summary of Target Committee Meetings on 10 and 11 May 1945," and "Minutes of Third Target Committee Meeting" (May 28, 1945), all in CTS, Roll 1, Target 6, Folder 5D, "Selection of Targets."
22. Malloy, "The Rules of Civilized Warfare."
23. Henry L. Stimson diary, June 1, 1945, in *The Henry Lewis Stimson Diaries*, microfilm edition retrieved from the Center for Research Libraries, original from Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT (hereafter cited as "Stimson diary").
24. "Minutes of meeting held at the White House on Monday, 18 June," June 20, 1945, HST, https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/bomb/large/documents/pdfs/21.pdf.
25. Leslie Groves, *Now It Can Be Told: The Story of the Manhattan Project* (New York: Harper, 1962), 265.
26. Derry and Ramsey to Groves, "Summary of Target Committee Meetings on 10 and 11 May 1945."
27. "Reserved Areas," June 27, 1945, CTS, Roll 3, Target 8, Folder 25, "Documents Removed from Groves' Locked Box." Why Niigata replaced Kokura in the initial list is not clear, and neither is why Yokohama was not placed on this list. Yokohama was subjected to an incendiary raid by over 450 B-29s on May 29, which removed it from further consideration. Kit C. Carter and Robert Mueller, *U.S. Army Air Forces in World War II: Combat Chronology 1941–1945* (Washington, DC: Center for Air Force History, 1991).
28. According to Carter and Mueller, *U.S. Army Air Forces in World War II*, Nagasaki itself was conventionally bombed at least four times prior to the atomic bombing, the last involving fifty B-24s attacking the dock and harbor area on August 1, 1945.
29. On Stimson's role, see Otis Cary, "The Sparing of Kyoto—Mr. Stimson's Pet City," *Japan Quarterly* 22 (October–December 1975): 337–47; on interpreting the morality question, see Bernstein, "Truman and the A-Bomb." See also Jason M. Kelly, "Why Did Henry Stimson Spare Kyoto from the Bomb?: Confusion in Postwar Historiography," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 19 (2012): 183–203; and Robert S. Norris, *Racing for the Bomb: General Leslie R. Groves, the Manhattan Project's Indispensable Man* (South Royalton, VT: Steerforth Press, 2002), 386–88.
30. Stimson diary, March 3, 1929.
31. See also Sean Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy: Henry L. Stimson and the Decision to Use the Bomb against Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 105–109; and Cary, "Atomic Bomb Targeting." There does not seem to be much evidence behind the oft-told story that Stimson had spent his honeymoon in Kyoto; Cary's article goes perhaps as far as one might want to in exploring the possibilities of Stimson's motivation, attributing Stimson's fascination with the place as being rooted, potentially, in the interest of a young ward of his, Henry Loomis. In a letter from 1950, Stimson commented that "I have had the pleasure of visiting many cities in

Japan, but the city of Kyoto was always my favorite. I knew its beauties, and that it was the center of Japanese art and culture. I, therefore, intervened and prevented the bombing of the city." Henry L. Stimson to Gyokujo Masuda, May 11, 1950, in *The Papers of Henry Lewis Stimson*, microfilm edition retrieved from the Center for Research Libraries, original from Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, New Haven, Connecticut (hereafter cited as "Stimson papers"), Reel 123, Series 1.

32. Groves, *Now It Can Be Told*, 273. See also Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy*, 107–8.

33. Interview of Leslie R. Groves by Stephane Groueff, part 9, January 7, 1965, transcribed at Atomic Heritage Foundation, *Voices of the Manhattan Project*, <http://www.manhattanprojectvoices.org/oral-histories/general-leslie-groves-interview-part-9>.

34. On the evolution of the firebombing strategy, see Thomas R. Searle, "It Made a Lot of Sense to Kill Workers': The Firebombing of Tokyo in March 1945," *Journal of Military History* 66, no. 1 (January 2002): 103–33.

35. Stimson diary, June 1, 1945.

36. LeMay stated: "We have destroyed all the target area we set out to burn. . . . You cannot go in with a few tons and expect an entire city to burn. . . . I now promise they will have nothing more to look forward to than complete destruction of their cities." John Beaufort, "Air over Japan," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 31, 1945.

37. Stimson diary, June 1, 1945.

38. Stimson diary, May 16, 1945, with attached memo from Stimson to Truman, May 16, 1945. If Stimson had these feelings when the incendiary tactics started in March 1945, the death of Roosevelt in April and the overall difficulties of the transition to a new president may have delayed him until May.

39. Stimson diary, June 6, 1945.

40. "Pictures," June 15, 1945, CTS, Roll 3, Target 8, Folder 25, "Documents Removed from Groves' Locked Box." The folder contains maps and photographs of Kyoto, Kokura, and Niigata. The Kyoto roundhouse still exists—it is the Umekoji Steam Locomotive Museum. At this time, scientists did not know the exact power of the Fat Man design (and would not until Trinity) and estimated it would be much smaller, on the order of 5 kilotons, if the implosion lenses were successful. Fifteen kilotons was still considered a likely maximum value for the Little Boy design—evidence, if any were needed, that they intended to bomb Kyoto *first* with what they were still considering the "big" bomb.

41. "Kyoto," July 2, 1945, CTS, Roll 1, Target 6, Folder 5D, "Selection of Targets."

42. Derry and Ramsey to Groves, "Summary of Target Committee Meetings on 10 and 11 May 1945."

43. George Harrison to Henry Stimson [WAR 35987], July 21, 1945, CTS, Roll 1, Target 6, Folder 5E, "TERMINAL Cables."

44. Henry Stimson to George Harrison [VICTORY 189], July 21, 1945, CTS, Roll 1, Target 6, Folder 5E, "TERMINAL Cables"; Stimson diary, July 21, 1945.

45. Stimson diary, July 19, 1945.

46. Stimson diary, July 22, 1945.

47. Stimson diary, July 23, 1945.

48. Henry Stimson to George Harrison [VICTORY 218], July 23, 1945, CTS, Roll 1, Target 6, Folder 5E: "TERMINAL Cables."

49. George Harrison to Henry Stimson, TERMINAL cable WAR 36791, July 23, 1945, CTS, Roll 1, Target 6, Folder 5E: "TERMINAL Cables."

50. Stimson diary, July 24, 1945.

51. For comparison, see Barton J. Bernstein, "The Atomic Bombings Reconsidered," *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 1 (January/February 1995): 135–52, esp. 144.

52. See, for example, Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 61, 130; Walker, *Prompt and Utter Destruction*, 7–10; John J. McCloy diary entry, July 20, 1945, from John J. McCloy Papers, Box DY1, folders 16–19, Archives and Special Collections, Amherst College Library, https://www.amherst.edu/media/view/390254/original/McCloy_diary_1945.pdf.

53. Truman journal, July 25, 1945. We might also look at a postwar but pre-*Memoirs* Truman statement on this meeting, which came in a letter to Stimson sent on December 31, 1946, urging Stimson to write an article setting forth the deliberations about the bomb in the face of criticism. In it, Truman admitted he had forgotten a lot of the details but noted: "If you will remember our conversation in Potsdam, we came to the conclusion that the bomb should be dropped on a town which was engaged almost exclusively in war work. Hiroshima was the town picked out and then Nagasaki was the second one." The unreliability of this is clear from the inclusion of Nagasaki, which was only added to the target list that day. Harry Truman to Henry Stimson, December 31, 1946, Stimson papers, Reel 116, Series 1.

54. In an early draft of his *Harper's* piece, Stimson described Kyoto as a "predominantly non-military target," and he was criticized by at least one person he consulted for editorial views. The final version of the article described Kyoto as "a target of considerable military importance." Henry L. Stimson, "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," *Harper's Magazine* 194, no. 1161 (February 1947): 105. See also the late draft in *H-B*, Reel 4, Target 2, File 56, "Winant-Stimson Correspondence." For the criticism, see Rudolf A. Winnacker to McGeorge Bundy, December 13, 1946, Stimson papers, Reel 116, Series 1. Winnacker, who worked for the Office of Strategic Services during World War II, objected to the original characterization that "a Mitsubishi factory for aircraft engine valves was in a suburb, and with dispersion of Japanese industry starting in the fall of 1944 much work important to the Japanese war effort, was moved to Kyoto to take advantage of the skilled labor in this city."

55. John N. Stone to Henry H. Arnold, July 24, 1945, copy in the Nuclear Testing Archive, Las Vegas, NV (hereafter cited as NTA), accession number NV01379877. Copy also available in William Burr, "The Atomic Bomb and the end of World War II," *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 162*, August 4, 2014, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB162>.

56. Col. Frank McCarthy (personal aide to Marshall) to Scott and Col. Hansell M. Pasco, TERMINAL cable VICTORY 350 [CM-IN-26711], July 26, 1945, *H-B*, Roll 4, Target 10, Folder 64, "Interim Committee—Potsdam Cables."

57. Col. Hansell M. Pasco to Leslie R. Groves, July 27, 1945, CTS, Roll 1, Target 6, Folder 5, "Events Preceding and Following the Dropping of the First Atomic Bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki," Subfile 5B, "Directives, Memorandums, etc., to and from the Chief of Staff, Secretary of War, etc." In Truman's *Memoirs*, he claimed that "before the selected targets [Hiroshima, Kokura, Niigata, and Nagasaki] were approved as proper for military purposes, I personally went over them in detail with Stimson, Marshall, and Arnold, and we discussed the matter of timing and the final choice of the first target." Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, *Year of Decisions*

(New York: Doubleday, 1955), 463. Yet the Stone memo, which as far as the record indicates was the only information that was transmitted about these targets, was not available at Potsdam until after Stimson had left, and after the target order had been issued. It is easy to reconstruct that Stimson, Marshall, and Arnold each discussed targeting questions—what is harder to substantiate is that they discussed them with Truman. On Stimson and Arnold, for example, see John W. Huston, ed., *American Airpower Comes of Age: General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold's World War II Diaries*, vol. 2 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, January 2002), entries for 1945, especially July 22 ("Secretary of War had me for hour before lunch on Super bombing, where, why and what effects. I told him I would get up a recommendation. Am sending Stone back to US to see Spaatz and Groves to prepare recommendation"), July 23 ("conference with Secretary of War re ultra bombing effort") on p. 379, and July 24 ("Secretary of War came to see me re ultra Super Bombing; I told him to wait until I heard from Spaatz") on p. 380. On July 25 (pp. 380–81), Arnold describes a series of meetings, including one with Stimson and Marshall in the morning, and then later one with Marshall and other generals. He also mentions Marshall meeting with Truman but does not indicate if he himself met with Truman that morning. Stimson's diary for July 25, 1945, does not indicate any meetings with Truman or Arnold; it is largely concerned with a meeting Stimson had with Stalin and his preparations to leave Potsdam. The July 25, 1945, cable that approved the bombing order is timestamped 6:45 a.m. (UTC), which is to say, 10:45 a.m. Berlin time (CEMT), which puts serious limitations on how much discussion could have taken place prior to the order being approved. George Marshall to Thomas Handy, TERMINAL cable VICTORY 281 [CM-IN-24908], July 25, 1945, CTS, Roll 1, Target 6, Folder 5E, "TERMINAL Cables."

58. Lt. William M. Rigdon, *Log of the President's Trip to the Berlin Conference (6 July to 7 August 1945)*, HST, https://www.trumanlibrary.org/calendar/travel_log/key1947/berlintrip_toc.htm.

59. As Truman wrote after the fact in a note dated August 10 (which matches the "offered to surrender" piece) but clearly corresponds with Truman's schedule of August 9: "While all this has been going on, I've been trying to get ready a radio address to the nation on the Berlin conference. Made the first draft on the ship coming back. Discussed it with Byrnes, Rosenman, Ben Cohen, Leahy and Charlie Ross. Rewrote it four times and then the Japs offered to surrender and it had to be done again." Longhand note of Harry S. Truman, August 9 or 10, 1945, transcript and copy available in HST, https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/trumanpapers/psf/longhand/index.php?documentid=hst-psf_na1d735229-01&documentYear=1945&documentVersion=both&pagenumber=1. Truman's schedule can be compared on another page on the Truman Library website: <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/calendar/main.php?currYear=1945&currMonth=8&currDay=9>.

60. Harry S. Truman, "Radio Report to the American People on the Potsdam Conference," August 9, 1945, HST, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/?pid=104>.

61. The only line referencing it is, "Since then they have seen what our atomic bomb can do. They can foresee what it will do." "Draft of a Speech by President Truman on Berlin Conference" (n.d., first draft), Papers of Samuel I. Rosenman, HST, "Report to the Nation (Potsdam)." (This collection is hereafter cited as SR.)

62. "Draft of a Speech by President Truman on Berlin Conference" (n.d., second draft), SR.

63. "Memorandum of Conference with the President," August 8, 1945, attached to Stimson diary, August 8, 1945.

64. Representative coverage from the Associated Press is "Atom Bomb Destroyed 60% of Hiroshima; Pictures Show 4 Square Miles of City Gone; B-29 Dropped New Explosive by Parachute," *New York Herald Tribune*, August 8, 1945.

65. "200,000 Believed Dead in Inferno That Vaporized City of Hiroshima," *Boston Globe*, August 9, 1945. This number is considerably higher than most Hiroshima fatality estimates, which generally range from 60,000 to 100,000, and appears to be a rough application of the figure of 60 percent (the area of the city damaged) with the listed prewar population of Hiroshima.

66. Paul M. A. Linebarger, "Memorandum for Colonel Buttles: Identification of atomic bomb targets as being military in character," August 9, 1945, Paul M. A. Linebarger Papers Prepared during World War II, vol. 5, Hoover Institution Archives on War, Peace and Revolution, Stanford, CA. I am grateful to Sean Malloy for providing me with a copy of this document. In General Groves's office diary, at 1:35 p.m. on August 8, it is noted that Buttles, who was part of Propaganda G-2, was trying to make an appointment with Stimson and other members of the Office of War Information, and Harrison thought that Groves would want to be included. This gives some hint of how "high" the authorities likely were. Office diary of Leslie R. Groves, August 11–14, 1945, National Archives and Records Administration, RG 200, Papers of Leslie Richard Groves, Entry 7530G, Boxes 1–4, courtesy of Robert S. Norris.

67. Arthur H. Compton, *Atomic Quest: A Personal Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 236–37, and 237n.7. Oppenheimer himself appeared to consider the difference in magnitude important in his later security clearance hearing. "Q. You knew, did you not, that the dropping of that atomic bomb on the target you had selected will [sic] kill or injure thousands of civilians, is that correct? A. Not as many as turned out. Q. How many were killed or injured? A. 70,000. Q. Did you have moral scruples about that? A. Terrible ones." Testimony of J. Robert Oppenheimer, *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1954), 235.

68. Archibald MacLeish to Samuel I. Rosenman, August 8, 1945, SR.

69. "Draft of a Speech by President Truman on Berlin Conference" (n.d., fifth draft), SR. The third draft made minor changes to the second draft (for example, "first bombs" was changed to "first bomb"), and there were no relevant differences between the third and fourth drafts.

70. Richard B. Russell to Harry S. Truman, August 7, 1945, HST, https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/bomb/large/documents/index.php?documentid=8&pagenumber=1.

71. Harry S. Truman to Richard B. Russell, August 9, 1945, HST, https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/bomb/large/documents/index.php?documentid=1945-08-09&documentid=9&pagenumber=1.

72. A point Barton Bernstein noted. Bernstein, "Perils and Politics of Surrender," 15n.55; and Bernstein, "Truman and the A-bomb," 577.

73. The Russell telegram is time-stamped as received by the White House at 9:05 p.m. Truman returned to the White House at 10:45 p.m. on August 7 and had no scheduled meetings on August 8 until 10:15 a.m. He met with Stimson about the effects of the bomb at 10:45 a.m. and

had a busy schedule (he signed the United Nations Charter, among other things) until his 1:00 p.m. lunch. Nothing else was on his schedule until 3:00 p.m., when he announced Soviet entry into the war. This suggests that he drafted the response to Russell on the morning of August 8. On his schedule, see the Harry S. Truman Library website, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/calendar/main.php?currYear=1945&currMonth=8&currDay=8>.

74. At Potsdam, Truman inquired about the schedule of the bombings. Stimson apparently gave him a telegram that described only the schedule of the “tested-type” (implosion design) that suggested a bomb would be ready around August 6 and another around August 24. If Truman did not internalize that there were two types of bombs, he may not have realized two would be ready at the beginning of August. George Harrison to Henry Stimson, TERMINAL cable WAR 37350, July 24, 1945, CTS, Roll 1, Target 6, Folder 5E, “TERMINAL Cables.”

75. Norman F. Ramsey, “History of Project A,” September 27, 1945, copy in Coster-Mullen, *Atom Bombs*, “Documents.”

76. Groves, on the other hand, was given forewarning and appears to have passed it on in a limited fashion. On August 8 he sent a note to General Brehon B. Somervelle that “our second attempt is on. The first Fat Boy [sic] is on the way and by morning I hope he has done his job.” In the same letter, he indicated that he had also informed Lt. General LeRoy Lutes, Somervelle’s planner. There are no indications that he informed anyone else; Stimson’s diary makes it clear that he learned of the attack after the fact. Leslie R. Groves to Brehon B. Somervelle (August 8, 1945), CTS, Roll 1, Target 6, Folder 5B, “Directives, Memorandums, etc., to and from the Chief of Staff, Secretary of War, etc.”

77. The original target for the second strike, the Kokura Arsenal, was more in line with the Target Committee ethos of targeting a military facility surrounded by civilian houses, but clouds, or smoke, over the target had necessitated the choice of Nagasaki as the fallback target.

78. Stimson diary, August 10, 1945, captures the feeling of the day well.

79. Leslie R. Groves to George Marshall, August 10, 1945, copy in Burr, “The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II.”

80. Henry A. Wallace diary entry of August 10, 1945, in Henry A. Wallace, *The Diary of Henry Agard Wallace, January 18, 1935–September 19, 1946* (Glen Rock, NJ: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1977), 162.

81. James Forrestal diary entry for August 10, 1945, in *Diaries of James V. Forrestal, 1944–1949 Secretary of the Navy, 1944–1947, and First Secretary of Defense, 1947–1949: Complete and Unexpurgated Diaries from the Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University*, microfilm collection (Marlborough, UK: Adam Matthew, 2001). The United States did conduct several bombing raids in the interim; it should be noted, however, that no firebombing raids, even the most deadly ones, had mortality rates as high as the atomic bombs. The Tokyo raids, being unexpected, novel, and launched against one of the most populous cities in the world, were still less deadly per square mile destroyed than the atomic bombs by a significant factor. For a speculative exercise on the counterfactual question of what would have been the casualties had Tokyo been atomic bombed in March 1945, instead of firebombed, see Alex Wellerstein, “Tokyo vs. Hiroshima,” *Restricted Data: The Nuclear Secrecy Blog*, September 22, 2014, <http://blog.nuclearsecrecy.com/2014/09/22/tokyo-hiroshima/>.

82. John Balfour to Foreign Office, August 14, 1945, FO800/461, Public Record Office, Kew, United Kingdom, <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C4267560>.

83. There are reasons to think that, if the war had continued, that there would have been considerable pressure on Truman to authorize further strikes. General Groves’s office diary of August 11–14, 1945, makes it clear that many of those whom Groves spoke with thought that atomic bombings might soon resume. George Harrison, Stimson’s assistant, told Groves on August 13 that Stimson “approved Gen Marshall’s order on stoppage but today he walked with McCloy and thinks shipments [of bomb cores] should start again, and Harrison thought Groves might want to take it up with Marshall.” Office diary of Leslie R. Groves, August 11–14, 1945, National Archives and Records Administration, RG 200, Papers of Leslie Richard Groves, Entry 7530G, Boxes 1–4, courtesy of Robert S. Norris.

84. This fits well with the *hypercontrol*—an impulsive decisiveness exhibited under duress—described in Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: A Half Century of Denial* (New York: Avon Books, 1995), 126. Lifton and Mitchell argue that many of Truman’s apparent stress-related symptoms (he also told Wallace, at the same meeting on August 10, that he was suffering from headaches, both physical and figurative) were because of his internalizing the use decision.

85. Harry S. Truman to Samuel M. Calvert, August 11, 1945, HST, http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/bomb/large/documents/index.php?documentdate=1945-08-11&documentid=11&studycollectionid=abomb&pagenumber=1.

86. Truman, “Draft of the Gridiron Dinner Speech”; Bernstein, “Truman and the A-Bomb.” Per tradition, Gridiron speeches are not recorded, so we do not know exactly what he delivered.

87. See, for example, Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb*, book 2.

88. One of the few exceptions to this is that Truman authorized the invasion of Kyushu only in June 1945 and took a wait-and-see approach to the invasion of Honshu. This gives perhaps some sense of scale that was necessary to require presidential intervention. “Minutes of meeting held at the White House on Monday, 18 June,” June 20, 1945, HST, https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/bomb/large/documents/pdfs/21.pdf.

89. On the various forms of intellectual “work” that went into the construction of the atomic bomb as “special” and different from conventional bombing, see Gordin, *Five Days in August*. Gordin argues that the “specialness” of the bomb was not conclusive until after the surrender of Japan, but there were those who advocated for its special nature throughout the process of its development. Truman’s amazement at the Trinity test appears to highlight this.

90. See, for example, Richard G. Hewlett and Oscar E. Anderson, Jr., *The New World, 1939–1946* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1962); and Richard G. Hewlett and Francis Duncan, *Atomic Shield, 1947–1952* (Washington, DC: U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, 1969).

91. National Security Council, “United States Policy on Atomic Warfare (NSC-30),” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1948*, vol. 1, part 2 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1976), 624–31. It is clear from other correspondence that this issue was very much undecided at the time, and that there were alternative proposals being discussed (such as having the Joint Chiefs of Staff be more heavily involved in such a decision, or having

the use of nuclear weapons be “automatic” in the event of general war), which the presidential authority scheme was seen as opposing. For context, see Kenneth C. Royall, “United States Policy on Atomic Warfare” (May 19, 1948); and undated notes from the State Department on Kenneth C. Royall’s “United States Policy on Atomic Warfare” (May 19, 1948), both in the same *FRUS* volume, 570–73.

92. On the “custody dispute,” see especially L. Wainstein et al., “The Evolution of U.S. Strategic Command and Control and Warning, 1945–1972,” Institute for Defense Analysis Study S-467 (June 1975), part 1, chap. 3 (“Custody of the Atomic Bombs and the Authority to Use Them”), <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a331702.pdf>; Office of the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense (Atomic Energy), “History of the Custody and Deployment of Nuclear Weapons, July 1945 through September 1977,” February 1978, http://www.dod.mil/pubs/foi/Reading_Room/NCB/306.pdf.

93. Lilienthal diary, July 21, 1948, in David E. Lilienthal, *Journals of David E. Lilienthal*, vol. 2: *The Atomic Energy Years, 1945–1950* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 390–91.

94. Of course, nuclear weapons have arguably been “used” in peacetime and wartime many times since 1945, if “used” does not merely mean “dropped on enemies.” Nuclear testing, nuclear deterrence, nuclear blackmail, and so on all are forms of “use.” See Gordin and Ikenberry’s introduction to this volume in chapter 1.

95. Tannenwald, *Nuclear Taboo*, 67.

96. On this point, I find Lifton and Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America*, persuasive.

Chapter 4. “When You Have to Deal with a Beast”: Race, Ideology, and the Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb

1. Huey P. Newton, “Statement by Minister of Defense to the Black World,” *Black Panther*, May 15, 1967.

2. The best single-volume history of the party is Joseph Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013). On the party’s international connections, see Sean L. Malloy, *Out of Oakland: Black Panther Party Internationalism during the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017).

3. Quoted in Matthew Jones, *After Hiroshima: The United States, Race and Nuclear Weapons in Asia, 1945–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 19.

4. Vincent J. Intondi, *African Americans against the Bomb: Nuclear Weapons, Colonialism, and the Black Freedom Movement* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 14–18; Jones, *After Hiroshima*, 37.

5. On the black left and the bomb, see Intondi, *African Americans against the Bomb*, 21–28. The best study of the black left, anticolonialism, and the CPUSA is Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

6. Laura Hein and Mark Selden, “Commemoration and Silence: Fifty Years of Remembering the Bomb in America and Japan,” in *Living with the Bomb: American and Japanese Cultural Conflicts in the Nuclear Age*, ed. Laura Hein and Mark Selden (London: Routledge, 1997), 7; Sado Asada, “The Mushroom Cloud and National Psyches: Japanese and American Perceptions

of the Atomic-Bomb Decision, 1945–1995,” in Hein and Selden, *Living with the Bomb*, 175, 187. Also see Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1994), 98.

7. Barton J. Bernstein, “Seizing the Contested Terrain of Early Nuclear History: Stimson, Conant, and Their Allies Explain the Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb,” *Diplomatic History* 17, no. 1 (January 1993): 35–72.

8. John Dower, *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor/Hiroshima/9-11/Iraq* (New York: Norton, 2010), 225, 241.

9. Ronald Takaki, *Hiroshima: Why America Dropped the Atomic Bomb* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), 146.

10. Gar Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 655.

11. Robert P. Newman, “Hiroshima and the Trashing of Henry Stimson,” *New England Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (March 1998): 31.

12. Michael Kort, *The Columbia Guide to Hiroshima and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), xv. Also see Stephen E. Ambrose and Brian Loring Villa, “Racism, the Atomic Bomb, and the Transformation of Japanese-American Relations,” in *The Pacific War Revisited*, ed. Günter Bischof and Robert L. Dupont (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 181.

13. Dower, *Cultures of War*, 276.

14. Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (New York: Random House, 1999), 336. For similar sentiments, see Jones, *After Hiroshima*, 8, 22–23; and Dower, *Cultures of War*, 156, 161, 166.

15. Dower, *Cultures of War*, 156.

16. Leslie R. Groves, “Policy Meeting,” May 5, 1943, Correspondence (“Top Secret”) of the Manhattan Engineer District, 1942, microfilm publication M1109, file 23, National Archives (hereafter cited as Groves Papers). For a good summary of U.S. intelligence about the state of other nations’ progress toward the bomb, see Robert S. Norris, *Racing for the Bomb: General Leslie R. Groves, the Manhattan Project’s Indispensable Man* (South Royalton, VT: Steerforth Press, 2002), 281–311.

17. Jack Derry, “Summary of Target Committee Meetings on 10 and 11 May 1945,” Groves Papers, file 5D.

18. Takaki, *Hiroshima*, 94.

19. Harry S. Truman to Samuel McCrea Cavert, August 11, 1945, Harry S. Truman Papers, Official File, 692-A: Manhattan Project.

20. See, for example, Newman, “Hiroshima and the Trashing of Henry Stimson,” *New England Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (March 1998): 5–32. My own work on Stimson concluded that race was not an important factor in Stimson’s decision making about the bomb, a conclusion that I no longer believe to be correct. Sean L. Malloy, *Atomic Tragedy: Henry L. Stimson and the Decision to Use the Bomb Against Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 169.

21. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Four Statements on the Race Question* (Paris: UNESCO, 1969), 32.

22. Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965);