

Consequences of the Atomic Bomb

Scientists first split the uranium atom in 1938, spurring on the development of atomic bombs. But besides their destructive force, very little was known about the impact of nuclear weaponry on a city. After the war, scientists studied the after effects in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, shaping scientific and public opinion on the new weaponry.

Burn

The initial flash instantly incinerated everything (and everyone) at ground zero. In the immediate blast zone, tens of thousands more died from the atom bomb's inescapable heat and resulting fires.

Blast

A shockwave followed the flash, with a force that flattened nearly everything within a mile radius. Few survived in the surrounding areas.

Radiation

Thermal radiation accompanied the flash, resulting in severe burns and eye injuries. Ionizing radiation caused wide-sweeping sickness that appeared weeks after the initial bombing.

American Response to the Bomb in 1945

The American public's reaction to the use of atomic bombs in 1945 may surprise you. World War II resulted in unprecedented numbers of casualties, including the persecution of large groups of people. When it abruptly ended, the public reacted with joy and relief. Two studies were conducted right after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, showing that 85 percent of people approved of the government's use of these two nuclear weapons.

In years following, opinions have shifted about the role of atomic weaponry in World War II. The public began to question whether they were truly necessary, or ethical. Still, there remains a strong view that the bombings actually saved lives—on both sides—by ending the war far sooner than it would have otherwise.

U.S. Reasons for:

- Demonstrate and emphasize U.S. military strength to the Soviet Union.
- End the war without a U.S. invasion of Japan, saving numerous American and Japanese lives.
- Force the Japanese into unconditional surrender, when firebombing and negotiations had failed.
- Avenge American casualties at Pearl Harbor and elsewhere.
- End the war before the Soviet Union could invade (and keep) a substantial part of Japan.

U.S. Reasons Against:

- Unnecessary—Japan was already extremely weakened.
- Unpredictable and devastating effects on the target cities.
- Serve American interests by demonstrating U.S. military might, rather than end the war.
- Possibly undermine America's moral position in the world.