

# [The pacific war in history and memory: nuclear bombings essay](https://assignbuster.com/the-pacific-war-in-history-and-memory-nuclear-bombings-essay/)

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## The Pacific War in History and Memory

Nuclear bombings
The atomic bombings of 6th and 9th August 1945 at Hiroshima and Nagasaki remain among the most significant historical events of all time. The event is of special significance to Japan being the only nation that has ever experienced the effects of nuclear destruction in war. As stated by Dower, “ The cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are a symbol of the tragic absurdity that war can bring to a nation.” Although Hiroshima’s physical location is in Japan, its experience of the atomic bomb has been transformed into a transnational and international incident that is discussed by all nations. This essay is a discussion on the Hiroshima bombing, its impact and significance to Japan and the international community.
The purpose of history is to give a truthful reconstruction of past events through a collection of facts and data. The challenge with data collection and historical compositions is that though historians are supposed to collect facts and data for interpretation, they may be prone to misrepresentation owing to their social, political, and ideological inclinations. This process of selection and interpretation of facts and data can be further complicated especially when representing the recollections and experiences of victims in major atrocities such as the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
The war between the Japanese and the Allies brought collective suffering to Japanese citizens and left a deep and lasting imprint on their lives. The atomic bombings in particular left very devastating effects on the Japanese civilians who occupied the towns of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Hiroshima Bombing is a historical incident shrouded in ethical, political, and epistemological controversies. It remains an emotive issue that is debated with great passion. In an effort to reveal the truth, politicians, scholars and ordinary persons have held different opinions on the facts that led to the bombing. While some decry of the atrocity and demand for an apology, there are those who dismiss event as a necessary evil that had to be done for the greater good of the many.
The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is a struggle for memory as two sides give their account of events. It is a story that is told differently depending on the narrator. There are radical differences between what is told in America and the survivor’s account of the tragedy. In the American rendition of the story, it is a case of triumph in technology and war. It is a perspective of those who dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. A vast majority of United States citizens came to understand the creation and deployment of the bomb as an extraordinary technological feat that bore the most powerful war weapon. This perspective argues that the atomic bombs were the only reason for Japanese defeat and the end of World War II.
The 1995 cancellation of the original planned display of the Enola Gay, the plane that dropped the Hiroshima bomb showed how significant such a memory was in the history of war. The display, abandoned for political reasons was one that would have aroused a lot of emotions both at a national and international level. The initial pressure to cancel the exhibition is believed to have come from veteran associations, social critics, political commentators and politicians. These groups argued that the script prepared for the exhibition dishonored the war veterans as it questioned the motive of dropping the atomic bombs on Japan. They further believed that the script sympathized too much with the Japanese victims and as such supported the Japanese more than it did those who were involved in the war.
Hiroshima holds a significant place in Japanese national memory. The horrendous event left the people with a feeling of collective cultural trauma. This trauma combined with a feeling of nationalism has helped the country come together in the promotion of peace as a global activity. It is a representation of a national identity in Japan that disavows war as a sovereign right. At the annual Peace Memorial Ceremony held in Hiroshima every August, over 1 million people always gather in support of this cause as they visit the Peace Memorial Park. The Japanese and indeed the international media often term the Memorial park as the Mecca of Peace.
The bombings had both physical and psychological effects on the victims at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Dower states, “ The destruction by the atomic bombs was so awesome that a majority of Japanese initially regarded the incident as though it were a natural disaster.” It was only after the man made nature of the disaster sank into their minds that they realized the magnitude of what science and technology had done to them. While the physical damage was evident at the time, the social and psychological damage suffered by the victims were not as direct. These effects continue to haunt the survivors to this date. As Shuntaro indicates, “ The atomic bomb damage comprised of not only physical and human loss but also psychological damage, social disintegration and spiritual shock.”
The Hiroshima bombing transformed into a nationwide nonpartisan effort that originated the notion of Japanese nuclear victimhood and later culminated in the 1955 World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs. Every memorial for the bombing is a constant reminder to the victims of the horrors that the Japanese faced during the incident. The exacerbation of their radiation injuries compounded by a constant feeling of anxiety faced every day inflicts a huge amount of stress on the victims and their families. These social, physical, and psychological handicaps continue to afflict persistent pressures on their lives that often lead to jobs losses, family disintegration and individual mental breakdowns.
Ideally, some historians argue that the magnitude of destruction caused by the atomic bomb is not one that can be dismissed as just a mere hazard of war. The hazard has been termed as genocide and to some extent ecocide, sociocide, and biocide due to its extreme negation of the existence of humanity. Statistically, there are currently over 370, 000 victims who live in Japan. All these victims all share psychological traits that include persistent fears, emotional breakdowns and social trauma.
The delayed effects of exposure to radiation are a constant threat to the health of the survivors. In some cases, the effects are transferred to children born into affected families, a situation that further complicates the already delicate emotional status of these parents. The fear of having unhealthy or deformed children has discouraged many from starting their own families. The worry over medical expenses, economic instability due to their inability to seek meaningful employment and discrimination by non-victims are issues they have to live with in their day to day lives. Some of the victims have sought spiritual help to cope with the experience while others have dedicated their lives to fight for the rejection of nuclear weapons.
The traumatic event at Hiroshima played a significant role in the development of a collective memory and identity among the Japanese people. It violently disrupted and shook the entire essence of existence among the Japanese people. The memory of Hiroshima became an icon of Japanese suffering and tragedy. The Japanese were for long identified as oppressors but the atomic bombing gave them a new identity; that of victims. Dower argues that it was used to blot out the recollection of oppression by the Japanese of other nations. It became a way to forget atrocities such as Nanjing, Burma-Siam, Bataan and Manila.
The cultural trauma of the event still portrays its side effects in modern day Japanese society. Victim consciousness can still be seen to date. The Hiroshima bombing lives in the collective memory of the Japanese people through various means. One such means is the 1957 nationalization of memories of the bombing through provision of medical care to the A-bomb survivors who were living testimonials of the event by the government. This act spawned a sense of nationalism as it was recognition of the existence of survivors by the government.
In the context of this horrific situation, the A-bomb survivors got elevated to a new status which the Japanese government referred to as a “ totem.” This became a sacred representation of Japanese unity amidst the crisi that befell them. The atomic bomb survivors became the symbol of Unity within the Japanese community and the scope of atomic victimhood. Shuntaro states, “ Political-socialization literature shows that citizens develop their national identity by identifying with symbolic figures within the state.” In the case of the Japanese, the atomic bomb survivors were their symbolic figures.
There was also a structural shift from a feeling of pity to sympathy. The shift became a crucial aspect for nationalizing the Hiroshima atomic bomb trauma. The national trauma status of Hiroshima emerged as a result of the shift. Civilians who did not have direct exposure to the traumatic event joined the victims in constructing their national identity as active participants and no longer as spectators whose only contribution was a show of sympathy to the victims. They joined in the reconstruction and shared in the national trauma.
The shift also made the Hiroshima tragedy a permanent incident in the mind of the Japanese albeit to remind them of their past and the value of peace. It urged members to take action and campaign against nuclear weapons. There were anti-nuclear rallies and campaigns that collected signatures for the cause. The rallies also helped to facilitate and disseminate feelings towards Hiroshima among the Japanese. The rallies amplified the nationalistic feeling among the people and fostered national cohesiveness. They also reinforced the emotional attachment of the people to atomic bomb survivors as symbols of nationalism and strengthened the solidarity among the people.
The Diet has also used the Hiroshima bombing to foster unity and political stability in the country. In the development of its new constitution, the Diet saw it fit to combine its Peace Constitution with the atomic bomb experience. In the constitution, it renounces war as a sovereign right. In doing so, the Diet sought to promote Japan in a new image as a peace-loving country. The Peace Memorial Ceremony is held as a commemorative function that not only remembers victims of the bombing, but also makes peace declarations. It is a function that helps the Japanese people to leave the past behind and focus on the future.
While a majority of Americans may choose to view the event as one that saved the lives of up to a million US soldiers, it is also viewed by other as one that lead to the death of many innocent civilians. The need for using the bombs as a means to end the war is a question that is still highly debatable among historians and scholars. On the global platform, there has been a shift of feeling toward the event from that of pity to sympathy. For a majority of the Japanese, the war with their fellow Asians was a different and more regrettable war than that with the United States. This difference is greatly accounted for by Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

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