



Critical Thinking and Writing



Recognizing Points of View

The majority of American and Allies agreed with President Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan. Yet some people disagreed with the decision. The pairs of quotations below express opposing views about the use of the atomic bomb. Read each pair of quotations. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.

Lord Louis Mountbatten

Supreme Allied Commander in Southeast Asia during World War II

The dropping of the bombs resulted in the colossal saving of human lives. As many Japanese had been killed defending the small island of Okinawa as at Hiroshima. Imagine what the invasion of the Japanese mainland in 1946 would have led to! . . . They would blow themselves up rather than surrender. Millions more would have been killed.

William D. Leahy

Member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during World War II

The use of this barbaric weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender because of the effective sea blockade and successful bombing with conventional weapons.

1. Why did Lord Mountbatten support the decision to use the atomic bomb?
2. Why did William Leahy oppose the decision to use the bomb?
3. Review the information in Section 5 of Chapter 27 about the war with Japan and the surrender of the Japanese. In view of the facts presented, whose arguments—Mountbatten's or Leahy's—do you think are stronger? Why?

John Haynes Holmes

Noted clergyman

The dropping of the atomic bomb was the supreme atrocity of the ages . . . a crime which we would instantly have recognized as such had Germany and not our own country been guilty of the act.

Hidehiro Sonoda

Research Assistant, Kyoto University

Death is still death, no matter whether it is brought about by a sword or by an atomic bomb. . . . [The] difference between a sword and the atomic bomb is not really one of kind. It is rather a difference of scale, of their power to kill people and of their efficiency as weapons.

4. Why did John Haynes Holmes consider the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan the "supreme atrocity of the ages"?
5. (a) What is the main issue that John Holmes and Hidehiro Sonoda disagree about?
(b) How is this issue different from the issue discussed by Leahy and Mountbatten?