

The Atomic Bomb

Scientists at the beginning of the twentieth century discovered that atoms contained an enormous amount of energy. The discovery gave rise to the idea that releasing this energy by splitting the atom might create a devastating weapon.

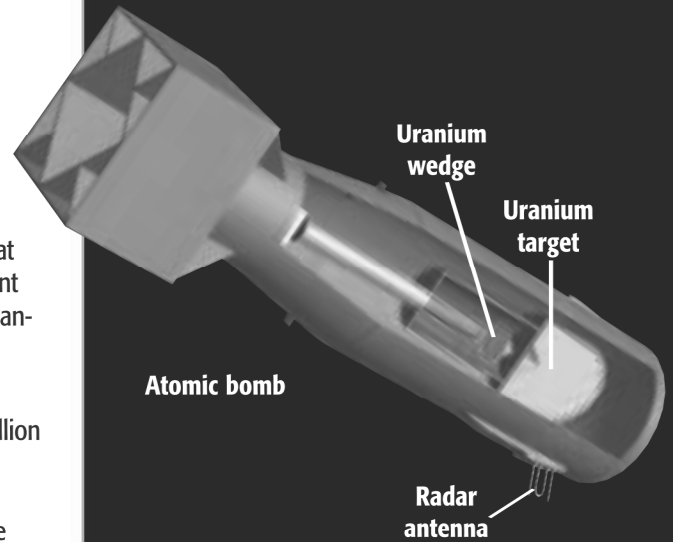
The idea was not taken seriously until World War II. Then, the fear that the Germans might make an atomic bomb convinced the U.S. government to try to develop one first. In 1942, the United States set in motion the Manhattan Project.

The Manhattan Project was a code name for the enormous industrial and technical enterprise that produced the first atomic bomb. It cost 2 billion dollars and employed the efforts of 600,000 people. U.S. Army Brigadier General Leslie Groves had overall supervision. The physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer was director of the Los Alamos, New Mexico, center where the bomb was actually built.

A successful test explosion on July 16, 1945, near Alamogordo, New Mexico, meant that the bomb was ready. The war in Europe had ended, but the bomb could be used against the Japanese. A committee had already chosen the city of Hiroshima as the first target.

The bomb was dropped on August 6, 1945, by a U.S. B-29 bomber nicknamed *Enola Gay*. The destruction was incredible. An area of about 5 square miles (13 sq km) was turned to ashes. Of the 76,000 buildings in Hiroshima, 70,000 were flattened. Of the city's 350,000 inhabitants, 140,000 had died by the end of 1945. By the end of 1950, another 50,000 had died from the effects of radiation. A second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki on August 9. The world had entered the Nuclear Age.

Evaluating *Was the decision to use the atomic bomb in Japan any different from Allied decisions to bomb civilian population centers in Europe? Why or why not?*



Hiroshima after atomic bomb dropped, August 1945