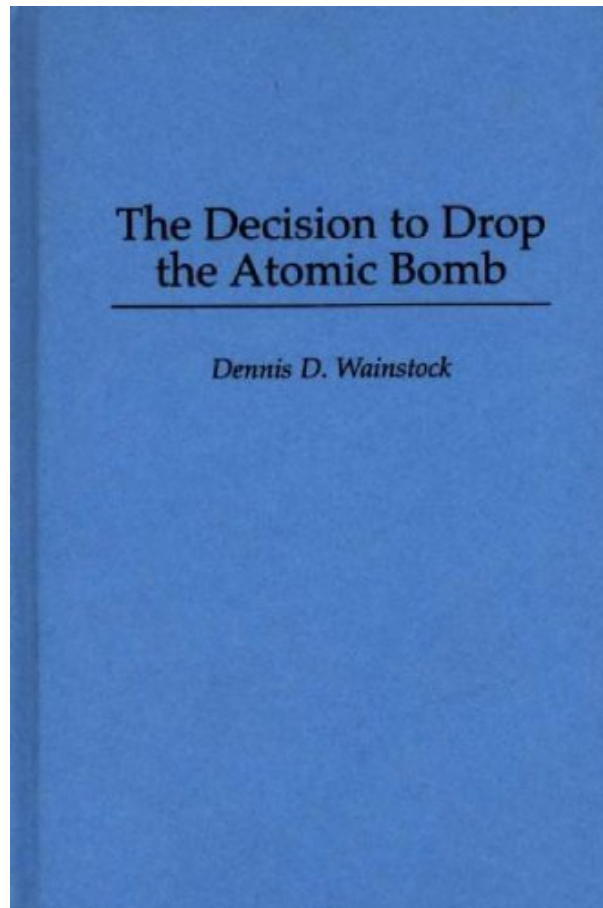


THE DECISION TO DROP THE ATOMIC BOMB BY DENNIS D. WAINSTOCK



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The Decision to Drop the Atomic Bomb

Dennis D. Wainstock

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Review

?Readers will be indebted to Wainstock for his use of US Strategic Bombing Survey interrogations of Japanese leaders as well as material from the Kido Family Documents at the National Diet Library in Tokyo....Wainstock makes an honest effort to examine all sides of the subject.?-Parameters

About the Author

DENNIS D. WAINSTOCK is an Associate Professor of History at Salem-Teikyo University in Salem, West Virginia. He is the author of *The Turning Point: The 1968 Presidential Campaign*.

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This book is a balanced account of the political, diplomatic, and military currents that influenced Japan's attempts to surrender and the United States's decision to drop the atomic bombs. Based on extensive research in both the United States and Japan, this book allows the reader to follow the parallel decision-making in Tokyo and Washington that contributed to lost opportunities that might have allowed a less brutal conclusion to the war. Topics discussed and analyzed include Japan's desperate military situation; its decision to look to the Soviet Union to mediate the conflict; the Manhattan Project; the debates within Truman's Administration and the armed forces as to whether to modify unconditional surrender terms to include retention of Emperor Hirohito and whether to plan for the invasion of Japan's home islands or to rely instead on blockade and bombing to force the surrender.

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Most helpful customer reviews

7 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

A Balanced Account

By Jerry G.

In a topic that is commonly infused with rhetoric and distortion it's refreshing to read something that doesn't resort to any cheap tricks. This book is simply a balanced account of the situation that resulted in the use of atomic weapons at the end of World War II. Instead of pointing fingers and manufacturing conspiracy theories, as many books on this subject do, it's "just the facts, ma'am". Japanese peace feelers are discussed, as is the reality that these efforts were not endorsed by the militarists who ran the country. Efforts to assure

the Japanese that their emperor would not be removed, which some believed would hasten the end of the war, are detailed. In addition, the viewpoints of those who favored a more strict interpretation of the unconditional surrender doctrine are explained. The revisionists who argue that the use of the bomb was unnecessary go through this story with a cleaver and chop out the parts that don't fit in with their preconceived notions. Fears about Soviet expansion in Asia are emphasized while the battle of Okinawa with its massive U.S. casualties is ignored, for example, giving the impression that the bomb was dropped as a warning to the Russians. In fact, you could go through this book with a pair of scissors ala William Burroughs's cutup method and only keep certain parts of certain sentences, paste those parts together and voila - you've got yourself a standard issue anti-bomb dropping diatribe.

The most interesting part of the book to me dealt with the Japanese "peace party". There were some who wanted to avoid the war altogether and tried to arrange a meeting with Roosevelt to defuse tensions. Even in 1942 there were a few clear sighted individuals who knew the war could not be won and wanted to start negotiations with the U.S. This tale only shows how fully the militarists were in control. Overall, however, the writing style here is dry and academic. The details that bring history to life are occasionally present but can't overcome the less than riveting presentation. This isn't something to bring to the beach. You'll have to have a serious interest in the topic in order to like it.

The author appropriately confines his personal views to the back of the book where they belong. He says repeatedly that the allied policy of unconditional surrender was "a policy of revenge". This is flat wrong and betrays a deep lack of knowledge about the wider period in time surrounding the narrowly focused events he describes. Unconditional surrender was a response to the lessons of World War I as well as the policies of appeasement that resulted in the Second World War. Its aim was to end the war without laying the seeds of future conflict. The fact that Germany and Japan have not been a threat to world peace since 1945 proves the value of this policy. Wainstock tells us that if we had only been willing to negotiate with the likes of Hitler and his pals we could have ended the war earlier and saved a lot of lives. I'm sure he hopes our government will take this approach the next time we're confronted with two powerful dictatorships bent on conquest. Let's head to the negotiating table and work out a deal - they'll be reasonable. Hey, everybody's got the right to second guess the decisions taken a half-century ago during the largest war the world has ever seen. At least the line between opinion and fact remains solid in this book.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Rivetting

By Bruno Séoul

This is a profoundly interesting book on what led the US to drop the bomb. Obviously, the author thinks that it could have been avoided (Japan was already ready to negotiate its surrender even months before the first atomic bomb was tested), and he makes it clear at some point in the book, but that does not hinder him to take an unbiased approach to the subject, as he presents diverse views on it by the different actors at the time and offer facts, not his opinions throughout.

I think the reviewer talking about a "deep lack of knowledge about the wider period in time surrounding the narrowly focused events he (ie. the author) describes", is clearly exaggerating or out of his mind. Given the research necessary to produce this book, I don't need to give the author the benefit of the doubt in terms of his knowledge of the "wider period" mentioned. You can't write such an exceptional book if you know only the "narrowly focused events" that appear in the research.

Also, despite the subject, I think it is very easily read and offers many insights into one of the most controversial decision of the 20th century (of all times?).

Whatever one can say, the US is still the only country on the planet to have used atomic bombs on human beings (and Japan the only country to have been at the receiving end of it). A fact that some (of course (?))

only Americans) take with pride, but which has to be accompanied with tremendous guilt and questioning for having unleashed such a terribly destructive power on defenseless civilians. Still a huge ethical issue nowadays, in my opinion.

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

Great single volume history of Truman and the bomb

By A Customer

This was an amazing book. My father is a history teacher and there were things in this book that not even he knew. Wainstock adeptly guides you through the Japanese situation in 1945, history about the bomb and the scientists who made it, the Potsdam Conference and Declaration and Truman's final decision. Packed with quotes from both the American and the Japanese this book is an unbiased account of the atomic bomb.

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