

Department of History  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
College of Letters and Science

**History 500**  
**The Atomic Bomb in American and Japanese History**

Spring 2021 Wed 1:20-3:15

Professor Louise Young  
OH Mondays 1-3 and by appointment  
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**Course description**

When the U.S. dropped two atomic bombs on Japan in August 1945, the world entered the nuclear age. This affected every country on the planet, but the atom bomb holds special meaning for Japan and the United States. This course will explore the history of this special relationship with the bomb, and through the bomb with each other.

I have divided the course into three parts, each dealing with a separate dimension of the atomic bomb. Part One examines the decision to drop the bomb, both the real time context that led up to August 6 and 9, 1945; and the debate over the ethics and necessity of this decision that broke out in the immediate aftermath and continues to the present day. Part Two looks at the atomic bomb in culture and memory, comparing the construction of meaning around the bomb in the United States and Japan. Part Three focuses on the larger legacies of the bomb for international politics and security, touching on issues such as nuclear proliferation, the peace movement, nuclear terror, nuclear diplomacy and other aspects of our “atomic age”.

**Learning Outcomes**

- Develop empathy towards the experience of others by learning about and comparing American and Japanese views of the atom bomb
- Learn to see a policy issue such as the use of atomic weapons from multiple perspectives
- Become informed and engaged public citizens around an issue of historical and contemporary significance
- Make effective presentations
- Foster discussion and “think out loud”
- Peer review & constructive criticism—both giving and receiving
- Use primary materials to construct historical arguments
- Write compelling and coherent essays
- Develop effective reading strategies to synthesize complex historical material

**Disabilities**

If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please let me know so that such accommodations may be arranged. For additional assistance, please contact the McBurney Disability Resource Center: [mcburney.wisc.edu](http://mcburney.wisc.edu), 608-263-2741 (phone), or 608-225-7956 (text).

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is taking credit for someone else’s work whether deliberately or unintentionally. This includes but is not limited to turning in all or part of an essay written by someone other than yourself

(a friend, an internet source, etc.) and claiming it as your own, and including information or ideas from research material without citing the source. Avoid plagiarism by carefully and correctly citing your sources whenever you use someone else's words, equations, graphics, or ideas. If you are unsure of something and are worried you may be plagiarizing, come see the instructor. Cite sources carefully, completely, and meticulously; when in doubt, cite. For additional help, see <https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QuotingSources.html> <http://www.library.wisc.edu/journalism/research-help/plagiarism-resources/>

### **Assignments and Evaluation**

- attendance and participation 28 points/15%
- discussion board 28 points/15%
- lead class discussion 30 points/15%
- high school collaboration 20 points/10%
- short essay #1 30 points/15%
- short essay #2 30 points/15%
- video presentation 30 points/15%
- History Lab extra credit 15 points

### **Attendance and Participation**

Promptness and regular attendance is crucial for the success of this class—not just for your own success, but also for the success of your classmates and instructor. Please be respectful and responsible to all of us by arriving on time, and preparing for class.

28 possible points. You will receive an attendance and participation grade each week: 1 for attendance and 1 points for active participation.

### **Discussion board**

Our discussion board will be our forum for interacting asynchronously. Students will make weekly posts and responses in order to prepare for the synchronous class meetings. Everyone should post a response to the weekly discussion questions (DQ) by Sunday evening at 11:59 pm. By Tuesday evening at 11:59 pm, please respond proactively to at least 2 of your classmates posts.

28 possible points. You will receive 2 points each week you post to the class discussion board.

### **Lead class discussion**

Starting in week 5, students will lead discussion in teams of 2. You will meet with me two weeks in advance (having read ahead) to come up with the discussion questions for that week. Students will have the opportunity to lead discussion twice.

30 possible points.

### **Essay #1 & #2**

You have two required short essays for this class, 4-6 pp (1200-1800 words) each.

#1: Was the bomb justified? Using the assigned readings and preparation for our in-class workshop, make your case. Due March 10.

#2: analyze a primary source in context. Pick a novel, film, memoir, testimonial, exhibition or other primary source and provide a historical interpretation of your source. I will provide a list of possible sources or you may choose your own, subject to my approval. Due April 14.

30 possible points for each essay. 10 points for argument and organization; 10 points for evidence and substance; 10 points for style and documentation.

### **Collaboration with the American School in Japan (ASIJ)**

We will be meeting synchronously four times over the semester with a Japanese history course taught at ASIJ, a private school in Tokyo for English speakers. You will be broken into 3 small groups (2 UW students paired with 7 ASIJ students). Because of the time difference, the virtual meetings will be scheduled for 6:45 pm Madison time/ 9:45 am Tokyo time on a Tokyo weekday for one hour. Please let me know asap of any time conflicts Sundays through Thursdays 6:45-7:45 pm. These will meet once each in weeks 4, 8 and 14.

20 possible points. 6.5 points for each meeting; document with a brief (1-2 paragraph) report.

### **Video Presentation**

One of the learning outcomes of this class is to improve public speaking. Throughout the semester there will be multiple opportunities to make short formal presentations, and receive peer feedback. The class will culminate in a video-taped 10-minute presentation intended for a high school social studies class. Your video presentation should focus on one aspect of the atomic bomb, and aim to raise issues and provoke questions for discussion. I suggest you use zoom to video record yourself with a powerpoint presentation. (If you do not have a working camera, an audio recording over powerpoint is also acceptable.)

We will be coordinating with the American School in Japan for our final workshop session, where each of you will work with a small group of students. You will present your video and lead discussion. Due April 28.

30 possible points. 10 points for content/substance; 10 points for organization; 10 points for performance.

### **History Lab**

I strongly encourage you to make use of the History Lab to help you with your essays and to prepare your video presentation. The History Lab is a fantastic resource for moving your writing skills to the next level. The Lab is a resource where expert history PhD students work with you and your history projects 1-on-1. No matter your stage in the writing process—choosing a topic, conducting research, composing a thesis, outlining your argument, revising your drafts—the History Lab staff will help you sharpen your skills and become a more successful writer. Visit the History Lab website <http://go.wisc.edu/HLAB> to schedule an appointment with a Lab TA or to find writing tips, guides, and resources.

15 possible extra credit points; 5 points per meeting; maximum three meetings. Document your meeting by reporting the date and name of TA you met with, as well as what you accomplished.

## Class schedule

Week 1

27 January *introduction and course orientation*

**Discussion board:** self-introductions; how did you learn about the bomb? Write a paragraph detailing your first memory of learning about the existence of atomic bombs or the use of atomic weapons against Japan. Was it through a movie or a book? Fiction/non-fiction? School? Family? How did this shape your attitude toward the bomb? Due January 27 by 8 pm.

Sign up for your small group of two for ASIJ collaboration by January 29. At the same time sign up for two class sessions to lead discussion (possibilities are weeks 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12).

### PART 1: THE DECISION TO DROP THE BOMB

Week 2

3 February *the battlefield context*

**Read:**

John Dower, War Without Mercy, 1-73, 293-317, plus note (chapters 1-3, 11). Access online ebook from UW library.

**Discussion board:** Write a one page post answering at least two of the discussion questions (DQ):

1. What are three findings from the Dower book that surprised or shocked you?
2. Comment on the effectiveness of propaganda on both sides. How did propaganda rely on stereotypes of the enemy and stereotypes of the self?
3. How did the battlefield context produce new stereotypes? How did stereotypes produce the battlefield context?
4. What are the legacies of wartime racial stereotypes? How does Dower explain the rapid transition from enemies to allies, in spite of the intense race hates whipped up in the war? Do you find his argument persuasive?

Week 3

10 February *air power and the a-bomb*

**Read:**

Ronald Schaffer Wings of Judgment 1-34, 107-176 (chapters 1-2, 6-8)

**Discussion board:** Write a one page post answering at least two of the discussion questions (DQ):

1. How did ideas of total war shape the development of aerial warfare doctrine? What kind of lines were drawn between military and civilian targets?
2. How did moral considerations come into the development of aerial warfare doctrine? Was there a difference between individualized moral judgments of men like Curtis LeMay, who orchestrated bombing campaigns, or moral

- considerations at a formalized policy level? Did the moral ground shift over the course of World War Two?
3. How did firebombing connect to atomic bombing?
  4. Based on Schaffer's book, do you think there was a racial aspect to the decision to drop the bomb on Japan?

Week 4

17 February *Why was the bomb used?*

**Read:**

The Choices Program, "Ending the War Against Japan Science, Morality, and the Atomic Bomb" (2005), 1-34;  
 Sean Malloy, "When You Have to Deal with a Beast"--Race, Ideology, and the Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb", in Age of Hiroshima, 56-70;  
 J Samuel Walker, "The Decision to Use the Bomb; a Historiographical Debate" in Hiroshima in History and Memory, 11-37.

**Discussion board:** Post your DQ for ASIJ virtual meetings

**Small groups for HS collaboration:** Prepare discussion questions for ASIJ virtual meeting

**ASIJ virtual meeting:** UW students lead discussion on the decision to drop the bomb

Week 5

24 February *Japan's struggle to surrender*

\*student-led discussion (1)  
 debrief ASIJ  
 roll out workshop instructions

**Read:**

T Hasegawa, Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan (269 pp), pp. TBA. Access UW e-book from library

**Discussion board:** DQ to be posted; reflect on ASIJ

Week 6

3 March *workshop session: Evaluating the use of the bomb*

**Read:** The Choices Program, "Ending the War Against Japan Science, Morality, and the Atomic Bomb" (2005), 35-43.

**Discussion board:**

1. Pick one of the 8 "issues raised by the atomic bomb" to focus on.
2. Prepare a group presentation where you (a) lay out the issue and its historical context and (b) your views of the ethical and interpretive questions this issue raises.



**Discussion board:** DQ to be posted; paragraph on video topic

Week 11

7 April

*workshop session: Primary material in context*

**Discussion board:** prep presentations

### PART 3: LEGACIES FOR OUR WORLD

Week 12

14 April

*Atomic diplomacy and its discontents*

\*student-led discussion (6)  
workshop video scripts

**Read:**

The Age of Hiroshima, 1-16 (Ch 1), 71-128 (ch 5-7), 144-163 (Ch 9), 201-220 (ch 12). Access e-book from UW library

**Discussion board:** DQ to be posted

**Essay #2 Due**

Week 13

21 April

*the atomic age in global context*

peer review of essay #2 (breakout groups)

**Read:**

“Resisting Nuclear Terror” in War and State Terrorism, 227-240;  
Age of Hiroshima, 221-313 (ch 13-17). Access e-book from UW library

**Discussion board:** peer review essay #2

Week 14

28 April

*workshop session: video presentations*

**Discussion board:** workshop video presentations

**Video Presentation Due in class**

**ASIJ virtual meeting:** video presentations & lead discussion

## University of Wisconsin, Madison/The American School in Japan Collaboration

3 groups will include 2-3 UW students; 7 ASIJ per group

Generally the times for meetings will be:

6:45 PM Madison/ 9:45 AM Tokyo

*\*\*\*\*All meetings will be recorded under ASIJ's SAFEGUARDING STANDARDS and for assessment purposes. ASIJ students will be responsible for setting up the google meets and recording.*

### **Week 4**

UW students lead discussion: the decision to drop the bomb

*UW: 2/15/2021*

*ASIJ 2/16/2021*

OR

*UW: 2/23/2021*

*ASIJ: 2/24/2021*

### **Week 8**

ASIJ students lead discussion: Purpose and Problems of National Narratives (Discussion Questions will be sent at least two days prior to the discussion.)

*UW: 3/15/2021*

*ASIJ: 3/16/2021*

OR

*UW: 3/17/2021*

*ASIJ: 3/18/2021*

### **Week 14**

UW students video presentations & discussion

*Date to be determined*