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978-0-521-73536-0 - The Most Controversial Decision: Truman, the Atomic Bombs, and the Defeat of Japan

Wilson D. Miscamble

Frontmatter

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The Most Controversial Decision

Truman, the Atomic Bombs, and the Defeat of Japan

This book explores the American use of atomic bombs and the role these weapons played in the defeat of the Japanese Empire in World War II. It focuses on President Harry S. Truman's decision making regarding this most controversial of all his decisions. The book relies on notable archival research and the best and most recent scholarship on the subject to fashion an incisive overview that is fair and forceful in its judgments. This study addresses a subject that has been much debated among historians, and it confronts head-on the highly disputed claim that the Truman administration practiced "atomic diplomacy." The book goes beyond its central historical analysis to ask whether it was morally right for the United States to use these terrible weapons against Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It also provides a balanced evaluation of the relationship between atomic weapons and the origins of the Cold War.

The Reverend Wilson D. Miscamble, C.S.C., joined the permanent faculty at Notre Dame in 1988. A native of Australia, he was educated at the University of Queensland, from which he graduated in 1973, and obtained a master's degree three years later. In 1976, he came to Notre Dame to pursue graduate studies in history. He received his doctoral degree in 1980. He then served for two years as North American analyst in the Office of National Assessments, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra, Australia. In August 1982, he returned to Notre Dame and entered the priestly formation program of the Congregation of Holy Cross. He was ordained a priest on April 9, 1988. His primary research interest is American foreign policy since World War II. He is the author of *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy, 1947–1950*, and *Keeping the Faith, Making a Difference*. He has edited *American Political History: Essays on the State of the Discipline* and *Go Forth and Do Good: Memorable Notre Dame Commencement Addresses*. His most recent book, *From Roosevelt to Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima, and the Cold War*, was published in 2007 and received the Harry S. Truman Book Award in 2008.

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Advance Praise for *The Most Controversial Decision*

“This is truly a bravura performance. Wilson Miscamble, in concise, lively, and bare-fisted prose, captures the essence of President Harry S. Truman’s decision making regarding the American use of atomic bombs and the roles these weapons played in the defeat of Imperial Japan in World War II. In particular, Professor Miscamble takes aim at the cottage industry of Truman critics who argue that the president employed ‘atomic diplomacy’ to put the brakes on Soviet ambitions in eastern and central Europe, or lacked insight into the events unfolding around him. Common sense, together with an easy command of the extant documents, leads Miscamble to another conclusion: had Truman ‘not authorized the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki thousands of American and Allied soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen would have been added to the lists of those killed in World War II.’ The question he raises has had few takers: ‘Could an American president have survived politically and personally knowing that he might have used a weapon that could have avoided their slaughter?’ Miscamble’s treatment of Truman and the bomb should be the first port of call when scholars want to revisit the most controversial decision taken by a twentieth-century president. This is an ideal text for undergraduate and graduate students alike.”

– Joseph M. Siracusa, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology,
coauthor of *America and the Cold War, 1941–1991:
A Realist Interpretation*

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University of Notre Dame



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To

My Mentor and Treasured Friend

VINCENT P. DE SANTIS

Captain, U.S. Army (19th Regiment, 24th Infantry Division),

who fought in the Pacific War

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Acknowledgments

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This book develops from my earlier study on the implications for American foreign policy of the transition from Franklin Roosevelt to Harry S. Truman, and I remain grateful to all those individuals and institutions who supported me on that project. Let me make special mention of my gratitude to the staff of the Harry S. Truman Library, especially Michael Divine, Sam Rushay, Randy Sowell, Liz Safty, and Lisa Sullivan. Pauline Testerman of the Truman Library staff arranged for the photos used in this book. My friends Steve Brady and Stephen Koeth, C.S.C.,

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I began work on this book during a most enjoyable year on sabbatical as a visiting Fellow at the International Security Studies Center at Yale University. I didn't finish the book that year, and that might have been caused partly by the wonderful hospitality of John Gaddis and Toni Dorfman, Sun-Joo Shin and Henry Smith, my confrere John Young, C.S.C., and Reverend Daniel Sullivan and all the good folk at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish in Hamden, Connecticut. Their kindness already has me looking forward to my next sabbatical there!

At Notre Dame I benefit from supportive colleagues and from the notable help of Myrtle Doaks, my coworker in the vineyard, in the History Department office. I am appreciative to be a member of the Moreau Seminary Community at Notre Dame, although I must apologize to my confreres there if the topic of this book has entered too often into my conversation. I am grateful for the support of my various family members in Australia, especially my dear parents and my sister and brother, and for their combined counsel that I "just finish" the book.

This book is dedicated to my mentor and treasured friend, Vincent P. DeSantis, Professor Emeritus of History at Notre Dame, as a mere token of my gratitude to him. I came to Notre Dame to work under his direction thirty-five years ago, and ever since he has been a constant source of encouragement to me in all my endeavors. I want also to pay tribute here to his courageous service in the Pacific War as an officer in the 19th Regiment of the 24th Infantry Division. Vincent occasionally has told mutual friends that he was "in Australia before Bill was." I am glad of this and want to record in print my appreciation of his efforts and those of so many young Americans like him who defended Australia during its darkest hours, and went on to play their part in securing victory in the war against Japan.

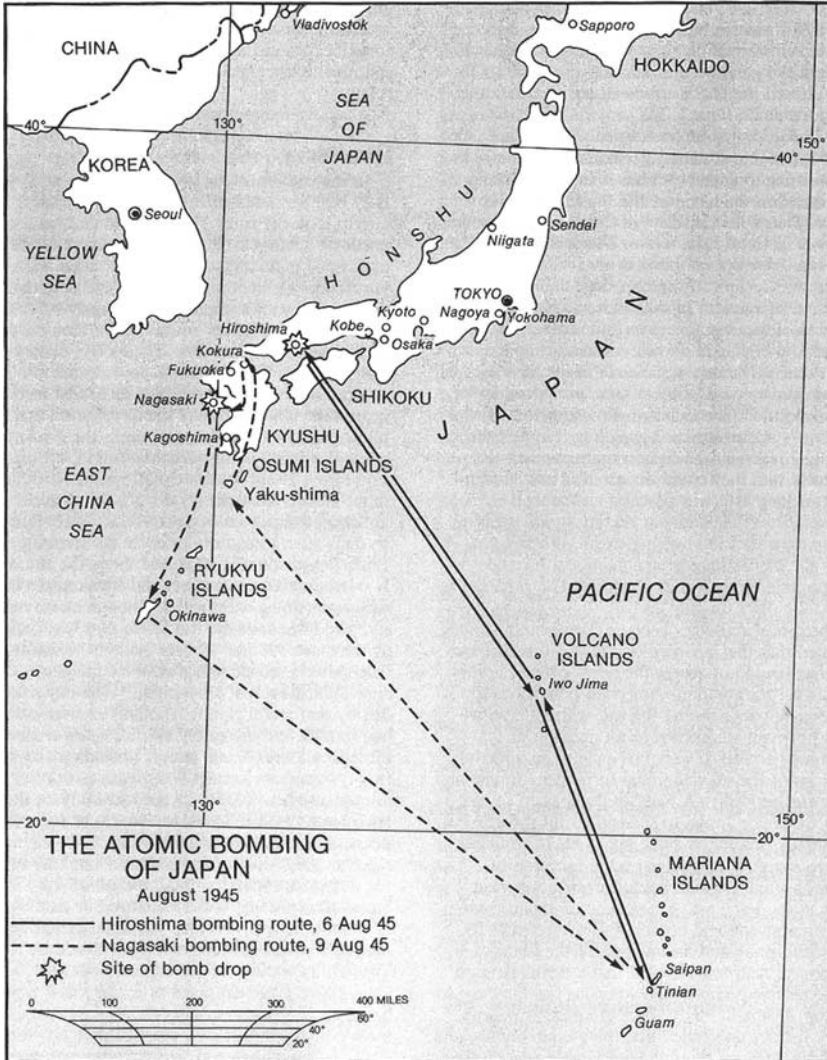
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