A Tale of Two Cities [1]

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In 1946, the U.S. War Department produced a twelve-minute film about the atomic bomb, called *A Tale of Two Cities*. The two cities were, of course, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. (The War Department, by the way, ran the Army and the Army Air Force. It was merged with the Department of the Navy in 1947 to become today's Department of Defense.)

[2] The film [2] begins with the Trinity test in the New Mexico desert in July 1945, noting that on that day, "the atomic age was born." It then takes you on a tour of the ruins of the two devastated cities.

Questions to Consider

1. How would you describe the tone of the script and the narrator? Do you think it is appropriate to the topic?
2. How would you describe the music? Why might it have been chosen? Do you think it is appropriate?
3. The narrator says that there were 20,000 Japanese military personnel in Hiroshima, who are "among the missing." Why would they be considered "missing"?
4. The priest who witnessed the destruction of Hiroshima says that the "deadly rain" that followed the bombing was just a rumor. By this time, though, the effects of nuclear fallout -- radiation spread by the explosion -- were well known to the army, and thousands of Japanese people had died from "atomic sickness." Why does the film not mention this?
5. Does the film portray the atomic bomb as "just" a bigger bomb, or as an entirely new kind of weapon?
6. Why would the War Department have made a film like this?
7. What can you tell from this film about the way most Americans felt about Japan and the Japanese people by the war's end?
8. If you have watched the documentary of the Battle of Midway [3], compare this film with that one. How are they similar? How are they different?
9. How do you imagine this film would have been received in 1946?
10. How does the film make you feel today?

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