On August 6, of 1945 the United States of America dropped an atomic bomb, Little Boy over Hiroshima, two days later a second bomb, Fat Man was dropped on Nagasaki. World War Two left global devastation but the dropping of the bombs signaled a turning point in the political world and international conflict. Japan was left devastated and in the opinion of many was a victim of the merciless action taken by the United States. On the opposite side there are those who justified this decision by saying it was only payback for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Opinions may be opinions but the truth is that after the dropping of the atomic bombs over Japan the United States of America became the bully, the world super power. Politics around the world also changed, economies went bankrupt, and people had a new view of life. History has been recorded in books but the earliest depiction of humanity, as we know it goes back to simple illustrations made by man on cave walls. Art the tool that has taught and represented civilization for thousands of years, took an unprecedented turn after World War Two.

The United States took center stage after World War Two. The use of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was viewed from two ends of a telescope. After Japan attacked Pearl Harbor Americans felt betrayed and wanted Japan to pay. The easiest way for the United States to do this was with the use of the Atomic Bomb. On the other hand, fear took over the people,
once the possible construction of a nuclear weapon took shape. In *Science News Letter* the possible realization of such a weapon was discussed, and only produced fear among the people. At one point the letter positions the possible consequences if wrong decisions are taken with regards to the construction of nuclear weapons, “it may mean the destruction of our cities, horrible death for millions of our people, and possibly the end of our nation.” As was expected people where scared for the possible outcomes of the war and this fear was represented in the work of artists after the war.

Economic devastation took over the world after World War Two. For this reason Paris the art capital of the world could not sustain such a demand. In 1945 the first unprecedented event in the art world took place, New York became the new art capital. Unlike Paris, the United States had a stable economy after the war and was capable of upholding such a demand. Prior to the war the art movement known as Modernism was at the forefront. Modernism emphasized the visual elements or the appearance rather than the subject matter. Like Kleiner and Mamiya authors of *Gardner’s Art Through The Ages* explained, “with the changing demands and historical events taking place new movements started to develop, movements that focused on the events around the artist, the people.” No longer were artists trying to make pretty pictures but rather make statements on humanity, statements on their views of the world around them. The two predominant art movements that were truly a result of the destructive force of the atomic bombs are Existentialism and Abstract Expressionism.

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Norberto Bobbio identifies existentialism as the theoretical expression and affirmation of a certain spiritual attitude also known as "Decadentism." According to Bobbio the liberation from authority has marked history, if this process is carried to extremes (as it was in World War Two) a "spiritual crisis develops," (spiritual crisis like the refusal to believe in god), as a result of the effect of disordered exuberance and unrestricted vitality. Now this can be beneficial by leading to further progress or it can also be possible for man to cling to this crisis and eventually lead to an acceptance of "anarchy as a destiny," refusal to believe in a god. This is what happened to artist after the devastation caused by World War Two, in particular the use of nuclear weapons. Bobbio goes further by explaining that,

"Existentialist delight in anguish, in the contemplation of man’s disaster and nothingness, their incoherence of thought, their amorality, their hatred of ordinary and normal, their worship of the singular... , their retreat from the world of social aims and tasks into that of the self-enclosed individual."

This is not to say that all existentialist enjoyed pain and wanted everyone dead. In fact “pain” is the very reason that artist where attracted to this movement. No longer were there beautiful German landscapes to paint, or villas to hang romantic paintings. Reality was not a perfect picture; life was dark, and in pain. People were to blame for humanities own destructiveness. The questioning of god begins when extreme situations present themselves. In Existentialism, atheism is encouraged and god is taken out of the picture. One example of Existentialism is Painting 1946 (image pg. 7) a piece by Francis Bacon.

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3 Francis Bacon, _Painting_, 1946
Two in 1946 this painting reveals the slaughter and characterization of the war. Drenched in reds the imagery of the painting conveys a scene of terror and dismay. A figure representing Neville Chamberlain a political figure who misjudged Hitler and in one way or another was responsible for many deaths, takes center stage. His mouth is covered in red as if he was in the process of eating the raw meat that surrounded him, or taking the lives of the innocent who were killed in the war. In the background a hanging crucified carcass is asking, “where god was god at during the war?” In an interview, Bacon stated that he did not intend to make the painting the way it came out. He was actually painting a landscape but subconsciously the brutality of the war came out through his painting. People who experienced extreme circumstances are physiologically affected, one example are soldiers who have a high possibility of becoming traumatized from their experiences in the battle field. On one instance Bacon also stated, “Hope is good breakfast, but it is bad for supper” This further elaborates on the ideas that were carried by Existentialist that hope is good to have but one can not count on it.

The second art movement influenced by the use of the atomic bombs is Abstract Expressionism. Abstract Expressionism would set the world’s attention on the new art capital of the world, New York. Like Existentialism this movement focused more on the individual, on personal interpretations rather than “telling” perfect stories. As Robert Motherwell, one of the leaders of Abstract expressionism said, “Painting in the European tradition was painting the mask. Modern art rejects all that. Our subject matter is the person behind the mask.” This art form is about expressing the artist state of mind, in an intent to strike emotional chords in the viewer. In this case the process is just as important, if not more as the result. One example is

Jackson Pollack's  

Musical imagery conveys emotions with no need of explanation. It is also important to point out that when looking at Abstract Expressionism art the purpose or meaning of the artwork is easier to identify when the artist is examined as well. From this point and on artist and people in general worried more about the individual.

Surviving the devastating years during World War II had psychological effects not only on soldiers but also on the public. Those who believed in the actions of the United States were also evident in the art world. Robert Rauschenberg a prominent artist during the 1950's was a strong nationalist and he represented the love for his country in his paintings. One of these pieces is "Canyon" done in 1959. Even though, this collage was done during the Pop Art movement the influence of nuclear bombs and their consequences had an evident influence in this piece. At first instance the black bird hovering over a black box takes center stage. On the lower right corner of the piece a round object hangs by a string while a neutral background is darkened by abstract images. The one thing that signaled the connection with this piece and the nuclear bombs used in World War II was the equation at the top right corner. This equation by no means has a direct connection with nuclear energy, but the idea of this equation in this obscure environment makes atomic bombs the very presence of the piece. If to this, one adds the black bird or what could represent a plane sitting over a black box or possibly the unknown devastation that awaited the Japanese people, the connection to that tragic day of 1945 can easily be made.

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8 Jackson Pollock, *Number 1*, 1950
9 Robert Rauschenberg, *Canyon*, 1959
If the United States was at fault when the atomic bombs were used why is it that so many people followed this country and its artwork? It is not ironic that the world’s attention went to the United States after World War Two, but why would Japanese artist follow American footsteps. After the war Japanese people were limited on the materials available especially people like artist. Before long Japanese artist overcame the harsh times after the war and started to develop their own art movements with American inspiration. Maintaining a cultural perspective and influence has always been a characteristic of Japanese art work though history. Today, Japan rivals most other modern nations in its contributions to modern art, fashion and architecture, with creations of a truly modern, global, and multi-cultural level.

The United States involvement in the bombing of Japan will always be debated but, in order to understand many of the effects of the bombing one needs to examine art. Abstract Expressionism and Existentialism present direct points of view from the publics’ perspective. This art illustrates the information distributed in newspapers and television, the feelings towards government towards humanity. It might be ironic that a dictator like Napoleon would be quoted on the consequences of World War Two in the art world but he put it the best way possible, “a picture is worth one thousand words.”

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Francis Bacon, *Painting*, 1950

Jackson Pollock, *Number 1*, 1950
Robert Rauschenberg, *Canyon*, 1959
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