



Foundations of U.S. History

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Primary Source Activity: MacArthur/Hirohito Photograph (1945)

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1. Overview

On September 27, 1945, only weeks after Japan's surrender to the United States at the end of World War II, MacArthur and Hirohito appeared together for a photograph. Until shortly before this picture was taken, Japan and the United States viewed each other as enemies. The photograph—staged largely by General MacArthur with the purpose of promoting peace and democratization in Japan—was published in newspapers throughout Japan and the United States. In this exercise, teachers examine three images of U.S. General Douglas MacArthur and three images of Emperor Hirohito of Japan to assess which image of each man appeared in this historically significant photograph.

After discussing the images, teachers learn more about the historical context, and draw conclusions about the photographs and the published image. After completing the activity, teachers discuss classroom applications.

2. Source Analysis

- Distribute [Hirohito handout](http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/pdf/HirohitoHandout.pdf)
(<http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/pdf/HirohitoHandout.pdf>) and [MacArthur handout](http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/pdf/MacArthurHandout.pdf)
(<http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/pdf/MacArthurHandout.pdf>)
- Ask teachers to work in pairs and examine the images closely, and write down observations and questions about the images and the historical background.

3. Group Discussion

Write three columns onto the whiteboard: Notice, Questions, and Historical Background.

Use the following questions to guide discussion (details can be found on the MacArthur and Hirohito answer sheets):

- What did you notice about each image?
- What did you notice about the clothing in each photo?
- What did you notice about the pose in each photo?
- What kind of leader does each image portray?
- What is missing from this photograph? What can the photograph tell us and what can it not tell us about this time period?
- What questions do you have about the images or the time period?
- What do you already know about the photograph? About the time period in which it was created?

4. Historical Background

Present this historical background to enhance the group's knowledge of the time period, and as a basis for drawing conclusions in Step 5. Write the words in bold on the whiteboard, and use the rest of the text for guidance.

- **The time after World War II was a time of rapid change:** This photograph was taken only weeks after Japan's surrender to the United States at the end of World War II. This period marked the beginning of the seven-year U.S. occupation of Japan.
- **General MacArthur's task was to demilitarize and democratize Japan:** General MacArthur headed the U.S. occupation, and held far-reaching powers to dictate public policy. His task was to demilitarize and democratize a country that had viewed the U.S. as an enemy. His task was also to begin to change public opinion in the U.S., where Japan was viewed as an enemy.
- **General MacArthur carefully staged the photograph:** Emperor Hirohito was the sovereign and most visible representative of the former enemy nation. Thus, MacArthur staged the photograph with the goal of making both the Americans and the Japanese receptive to the demilitarization and democratization of Japan. The photograph became a powerful message to American and Japanese audiences.

5. Conclusions

Which image of MacArthur and which image of Hirohito do you think appeared in the September 27, 1945, photograph?

- MacArthur: 2
- Hirohito: A

What evidence from the photographs can you gather to support this answer?

[Distribute copies of the original photograph. Refer also to the

Handout Answers

(<http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/pdf/HirohitoHandoutAnswers.pdf>)

for additional information.]

- **Clothing:** The clothing was chosen carefully. Hirohito appears in this photo in civilian dress, not the military uniform he commonly wore for pictures during the war, and not the Shinto robes he commonly wore in pictures before the war. MacArthur is dressed casually, not in a formal military uniform.
- **Why?** Both General MacArthur and Japanese authorities wanted to distance Hirohito from his military function during the war. MacArthur also sought to puncture the aura of divinity that Emperor Hirohito had before the war.
- **Pose:** MacArthur looks relaxed and casually indifferent—authoritative but not menacing.
- **Why?** MacArthur wanted to impress upon the Japanese people that he was in charge, but he did not want to emphasize their defeat. MacArthur also wanted to appear relaxed before Japanese royalty. The Japanese, after years of exposure to anti-U.S. propaganda, anticipated that defeat and occupation would leave them at the mercy of an evil conqueror. In such a climate, MacArthur sought to put a relatively friendly face on what was, after all, a military occupation.

6. Classroom Applications

- Do you think this activity would work with your students?
- Could you use this strategy with other resources?
- Would you do anything differently in your classroom?

*This activity is based on the [What are the social conditions of the use of the image?](http://chnm.gmu.edu/worldhistorysources/unpacking/imagesq4.php)

(<http://chnm.gmu.edu/worldhistorysources/unpacking/imagesq4.php>)

exercise developed with Professor Brian Platt on [World History](http://chnm.gmu.edu/worldhistorysources)

[Sources \(http://chnm.gmu.edu/worldhistorysources\)](http://chnm.gmu.edu/worldhistorysources).

A



B



C



1



2



3



Original Photograph



A



CORRECT!

- Hirohito is dressed in Western-style, civilian clothes.
- Japan's wartime propaganda had focused on the emperor as the descendant of the Shinto deities.
- In the postwar order, MacArthur envisioned for Hirohito a new role as a symbol of democracy. In order for Hirohito to play this role, MacArthur wanted to emphasize his humanity rather than his divinity—thus Hirohito appears in this photo in civilian dress.

B



- Hirohito is in a formal military uniform. Hirohito frequently appeared in public in military dress during World War II.
- After the war Hirohito and his advisors sought to distance the emperor from his military functions—and, from the taint of Japan's wartime militarism.
- MacArthur also wanted to distance Hirohito from his military functions. He felt that the emperor could serve as a stabilizing force in postwar Japanese society, a symbol of a new, peaceful democratic order. Posing Hirohito in military uniform would have worked against these goals.

C



- Hirohito is in ceremonial Shinto dress, a symbol of the aura of divinity Hirohito possessed as Emperor of Japan.
- Japan's wartime propaganda had focused on the emperor as the descendant of the Shinto deities. In the postwar order, MacArthur envisioned for Hirohito a new role as a symbol of democracy. After the war, such dress would have been inconsistent with the democratic, human image MacArthur sought to project.

1



- MacArthur is wearing informal khakis, but appears rather stiff, even deferential.
- In reality, this was MacArthur's mood on the occasion of his meeting with Hirohito--he was nervous about his encounter with royalty. However, he did not want to project such an image publicly.

2



CORRECT!

- MacArthur is wearing informal khakis.
- MacArthur wanted to appear relaxed next to Japanese royalty. Thus, he purposely struck an expression of casual indifference. MacArthur wanted to impress upon the Japanese people that he was in charge, but he did not want to emphasize their defeat.
- In this photo, MacArthur's casual, informal demeanor served such ends: he appears authoritative, but not menacing.

3



- This is MacArthur's formal military uniform.
- A militaristic MacArthur could have been interpreted as bullying the smaller man beside him. Such an image would have reminded the Japanese people of an uncomfortable truth: that they were living under a military occupation, through which their former enemy could (and did) impose its will upon their defeated nation. MacArthur sought to put as friendly a face as possible on what was, after all, a military occupation.