

Eric Altenburg

Professor Wellerstein

HST-415

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### Week 3: Using the Bomb

1. Prepare at least one question that comes to mind while watching the lecture or reading the sources. You can prepare more than one! But come up with one question that you would find the answer to be interesting.
  - a. Upon testing the “implosion-type” bomb in the Trinity Test, it was stated that it was used in a barren wide area, however, were there any ecosystems occupying the space? If so, how were they affected?
  - b. When shipping the bomb materials to the island of Tinian, did Japan or any other forces know that this was the central hub for assembling the bomb? How likely could it be that, had the USSR known more about the project, could they steal the shipment and use the bomb themselves?
  - c. In the Minutes of the Target Committee Meeting, what about the Little Boy’s design made it so any internal contact with water would detonate it?
2. Read the minutes of the Target Committee Meeting carefully. What do they reveal about the assumptions being made about the purpose of the weapon, the ways it could be deployed, the role of and responsibilities of scientists in the operational use of the bombs?
  - a. The bomb was described as being used for two factors: first for a psychological effect on both the Japanese and the rest of the world, and second for military

purposes in regards to the war. The former had influence in the decision for picking the potential targets as Kyoto was seen as an intelligent area making Japan not only recognize the sheer power of the bomb, but also allowing them to fully appreciate the capabilities and scientific aspect of it. This not only applies to Kyoto, but also the rest of the world as the United States wanted international recognition for the bombs powers. The latter is discussed around the idea of using in a militaristic fashion by means of destroying Japanese military objectives in areas that will allow the bomb to not be recovered if the plan goes astray.

As for how the bomb would be deployed, due to the time and resources allocated in developing the bomb, it was stated to only be dropped by means of a visual bombing mission. Meaning that the pilot should only drop the bomb if they had a clear visual on the target this way the maximum amount of damage could be inflicted. Though, if it came down to it and the plane holding the bomb was severely damaged and possibly unable to return to base with it, dropping using radar was allowed. Another interesting topic discussed in the meeting was the idea of the bomb being ready for deployment within a 12-hour period due to weather variation and the strict visual bombing requirement.

With this being said, from this point onward, the use of the bomb seems to be outside of the hands of the scientists and within the control of the military. The way the meeting unfolded seems to exhibit a courtesy feel with the goal being to inform and not necessarily take opinions from the scientists in its intended target or use. Their only involvement is the calculations for how it goes off (i.e. height of detonation) along with target selection at best.

3. Reading the Franck Report, the Scientists' Panel, and the Szilard petition, what do you make of all of this? If it was 1945, and you were a scientist being consulted on this question, where do you think you would fall on the question of how the first use of the bomb ought to have been? Which reasoning do you find the most familiar, and which do you find the most alien — and why? Would you have signed the Szilard petition, if you had worked on the bomb?

- a. After reading the Franck Report I agree with some of the ideas the scientists had, but at the same time, given the current circumstances, what they were expressing might have been too extreme. While performing a demonstration might be a good option for displaying a sense of the power that the US had, in reality, this might not pan out as expected. When touting the bomb as the greatest thing since sliced bread, and then giving a demonstration on a remote island, expectations might be set too high and the bomb will seemingly under-perform. As far as I can tell, being witness to a demonstration and reading the outcomes from Hiroshima and Nagasaki produce dramatically different results. The former merely shows a “Powerpoint Presentation” style of displaying the bomb; you do not get a complete sense of the destruction it is capable of, especially when comparing the lasting radiation effects on those affected first-hand. With this being said, I can agree that dropping the bomb on the targets is not something to be desired but other options would need to be fully exhausted before settling on a demonstration.

Had I been a scientist working on the Manhattan Project I would have signed the Szilard petition. The idea of a moral responsibility is something that, given the

circumstances, was often overlooked and not considered until after the bombs were dropped. It seems as though the US was so caught up in the idea of “act now and think later” with the Manhattan Project, that it began to bleed over into the decision of dropping the bomb. From the diary of Henry Wallace on August 8, 1945, “Truman said he had given orders to stop atomic bombing. He said the thought of wiping out another 100,000 people was too horrible. He didn’t like the idea of killing, as he said, ‘all those kids’” (Wallace). This is an excellent example of this ideology because once it finally set in what the US had done, Truman finally felt the weight of what he had done. If the thought of “killing all those kids” happened prior to the decision to drop, maybe he would have thought against using it.

4. Finally, for the provocative article written by the enigmatic Professor Wellerstein, I'd like you to look at how the argument is made. What kind of evidence is presented? How is the plotting of the article itself, and the particular presentation of evidence, made to reinforce the interpretation? If you want to write about whether you buy the argument or things it brought up, that's fine, but I understand it's awkward to read a professor's article and then be asked whether you agree with it!! So you are welcome to just focus on how the article is written — I can attest it was very deliberately plotted, with an eye towards making even the most suspicious skeptic feel that it was a non-crazy proposition, despite it being radically at odds with the mainstream historical approaches to Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

- a. The way in which the argument was framed by Professor Wellerstein lies in the thought that Truman believed Hiroshima was a purely military target and did not understand that it was a city full of civilians. Based on the map of Hiroshima, it

seems as though the military presence was very minimal, limiting itself to a small base in the upper right side with the rest being civilian territory. However, while this is common knowledge now, back when decisions were being made to drop the bomb, it seems Truman might not have known this. Afterall, in terms of planning for the bombing, Truman was comparatively hands-off only intervening when it came to the target selection, with him taking preference in Hiroshima as opposed to Kyoto.

In terms of evidence provided, the main sources are first-hand with diary entries and letters, but the contents of such evidence is contradictory for Truman. He is often seen speaking about the bomb in the light of it being magnificent, yet after it is dropped, that attitude changes considerably; he states in Henry Wallace's diary saying that he didn't want to kill all these kids. While this might be a normal reaction, it could have seemingly been prevented had he known the civilian presence in Hiroshima and seeing it as a city and not a military target. But with the timing of the events and the war's position, it makes sense that Truman made the decisions he made given the evidence presented in Wellerstein's article. From the project having tight relations with the military to Truman trying to take back command, the lack of communication and misinformation would make it very likely for such events and decisions to unfold.