

Week 7 — Nuclear Secrecy, Security, and the Tragedy of Oppenheimer**Nuclear Politics**

1. Politics
 - Power changes or power relationships
 - Micropolitics vs. Macropolitics
2. Does the bomb produce its own politics?
 - Existential Politics (the Hobbesian dilemma):
 - If the state charged with keeping security, and the security needs are total, does the state need to become total?
 - Power and responsibility:
 - If the fate of millions is tied up in the minds of individuals, how are they vetted, trusted, and treated?
 - Technological politics:
 - Does tech produce its own political structures? Are nuclear weapons compatible with democratic governance and oversight (Manhattan project)

Secrecy Regimes

1. Secrets
 - *How does the idea of secrecy change with today's standards with electronic documents?*

Oppenheimer — Unlikely WMD Creator

1. Early Oppenheimer
 - Communism is something along the lines of civil rights instead (pre & ww2)
 - Rumors about the Gulag and stuff but it was not confirmed yet
 - Did not officially join communist party
 - Speculated to possibly be a member
2. WWII Oppenheimer
 - Good cop to Groves's bad cop
 - Almost always backs the military views
3. Wartime security issues
 - Oppenheimer's family has a history of communism
 - Frank (brother), Kitty (sister-in-law), Jean Tatlock (ex)
 - * Conspiracy surrounding her death since she was heavily involved in communism
 - Students: Weinberg, Lomanitz, Bohm, Friedman
 - Are also involved with communism
 - Thought to be spies by the FBI
4. Chevalier incident
 - 1943: Oppenheimer tells security agents that Haakon Chevalier asks him about passing on info to USSR
 - Security worries that Oppenheimer is covering for a spy
5. Oppenheimer's postwar career
 - Chairman of General Advisory Committee of the AEC
 - Project Vista: recommending development of tactical nuclear weapons for use in Europe
 - In favor of using a *ton* of little nuclear weapons

Red fears

1. Postwar anti-communism in the USA
 - Gov. can fire employees if believed that they might be “disloyal” to USA

- House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) — investigates all aspects of American life for un-American Communism
 - In film industry, scientists, others starting in 1947
- Senate Internal Security Subcommittee looks into espionage charges in 1950
- Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (1953-54) — Sen. Joseph McCarthy’s bully pulpit
 - Thinks that there is big conspiracy theory with Communism
 - Using fear of communism as a way to build up political career (i.e. fake evidence)
- 2. Venona
 - Goal was to decrypt Soviet diplomatic communications between US embassies and Moscow
 - All messages decrypted were not in real time, they were a few years old
 - Find Fuchs and nearly all of spy ring is broken
- 3. The Rosenberg trial
 - Julius and Ethel Rosenberg arrested, charged with conspiracy to espionage
 - They don’t cooperate
 - FBI/DOJ push for death sentence in an attempt to get them to cooperate and/or to warn off other non-cooperators
 - ***Were the people who were protesting the Rosenberg trial mainly aligned with the Communist party?***

Oppenheimer’s associates and his enemies

1. Associates
 - Bernard Peters — student, “quite a red,” blacklisted
 - Frank — brother, blacklisted
 - Called before HUAC but does not name names
 - HUAC avoid Robert Oppenheimer to avoid turf war
 - David Bohm — student, blacklisted
 - Rossi Lomanitz — Student, drafted, blacklisted
 - Robert Serber — harassed by FBI, wiretapped
2. Enemies
 - Edward Teller very friendly with Robert Oppenheimer but clashes with:
 - Priority of “Super” bomb
 - Secrecy of bomb project
 - International control
 - Desires second lab to compete with one another and produce good results
 - Personality, finds Oppenheimer tends toward cruel
 - Lewis Strauss
 - Worried about secrecy
 - Conservative on the AEC
 - Religious, Oppenheimer is not
 - Grateful
 - Had to work for everything
 - Strauss H-Bomb debate:
 - * Uses book for debate whose thesis is: **Oppenheimer delayed H-bomb development, probably on purpose**
3. Fallout from the H-bomb debate
 - H-bomb debate “losers” generally quiet after Truman order; but “winners” think H-bomb was **delayed**
4. Investigating Oppenheimer
 - Letter detailing Oppenheimer’s past Communist ties (that everyone knows) and how he was against the H-bomb (that everyone knows) implies that he’s a Soviet spy
 - Strauss knows this isn’t necessarily true but uses the opportunity to get back at Oppenheimer
 - “blank wall” put between Oppenheimer and classified info by Eisenhower by Strauss’ letter

- Two options for Oppenheimer:
 1. Resign
 2. Take hearing to clear name (Oppenheimer takes this)
- Other scientists fear another witch hunt similar to Rosenberg trial
- 5. Oppenheimer hearings
 - **said in same voice from lecture* How did you find these original hearings Professor Wellerstein?*
 - Determine he is flawed but loyal
- 6. Consequences: Oppenheimer
 - Retreats from public life and gov. service
 - His clearance was set to expire in a matter of weeks anyway, so gov. could just not re-up
 - Strauss did this just because of grudge
 - Dies of throat cancer in 1967
- 7. Consequences: Teller & Strauss
 - Teller reviled by scientists (thought he was a traitor) and retreats to Livermore
 - Strauss continues as AEC Chairman until 1958
 - Both seen as having martyred Oppenheimer — become eternal “bad guy” in talking about period
- 8. Nuclear politics
 - If you’re important, you’re scrutinized
 - Physicists and scientists benefited immensely from association with the wonder weapons of WWII but their apparent access to power meant that they were the subject of increasing scrutiny, especially after the discovery of the atomic spies
 - By the 1950s, deep rifts forming between the “academic scientific community” and the “government weapons science community,” even though there are still deep overlaps
 - Fear of nuclear weapons created a dicey situation for scientists: their benefits or their downfall, and it could switch from one to the other very quickly (Oppenheimer’s high and low)
 - Criteria for “security” change over time: in 1950s, past political associations important, but other things as well — sex life, drinking habits
 - Today: Finances and drugs most closely scrutinized