Response Week 2

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HST 415 / Alex Wellerstein

The Frisch-Peierls memorandum seems very on point for this point of history. They did assume the Germans were working on the bomb so therefore they had to complete it as soon as possible. Peierls raises a good point that if they started working on creating the bomb as soon as they knew the Germans already had the bomb created it would be too late. What I do not understand is why the memo describes exactly how to separate the isotopes in the Uranium to create U-235. I feel like that should not be information that even gets shared in letters. What is also interesting is the fact that there is no study on the biological effects of radiation at this point. The people writing this know it is dangerous, but they do not know what a lethal dose of radiation would be. All of the effects are pure speculation which is very impressive since it is mostly correct with the rain and wind carrying radiation for several deadly miles. The mindset in the 1940s seems to be that of fear. They are scared that the Germans are building the bomb and they are scared that they will not be able to finish it before the Germans. However, there is no doubt in their minds that they can finish building this. I mean the fact that building atomic bomb is even possible. They know it is possible and they will do it.

From reading about the project description from Groves, he gave Truman a very detailed description about the Manhattan project and also the scientific ramifications. I was very impressed that Truman could grasp these concepts for the first time and was very into this project. Personally, I would have taken this more with a grain of salt if I was approached by these people for the first time and they told me of a bomb that could be as powerful as 10,000 tons of TNT. Either way he took the briefing well from the accounts of both Groves and Stimson. He gave them complete control and resources that FDR apparently gave them and also them more resources on top of that. I think what helped was the Truman already knew Groves from the military, so I think that gave the Manhattan project an extra boost from the executive side.

Goldberg saw this as an investment from the US. The $400 million plant in Hanford and $1 billion spent on Little Man were a lot of money. Goldberg ‘blames’ Groves for all of this since if they spent all this money and didn’t use the bombs then Groves would have to answer as to why he built two plants and why all this money was spent. I think at the time the project started it was justifiable that Groves spread out his resources and worked on the 2 plants. Nobody knew which type of bomb would work better or at all. At a certain point it became clear however that the Hanford plant was not needed, and Groves just pressed on. I think that was the tipping point for me personally. If you don’t need a second plant why keep building and spending resources on it? This has to be some kind of fallacy that Groves fell into, if you spent all this time and money then you have to finish it. But this was how his personality was too, he never second guessed himself and his decisions. The second bomb did not need to be dropped as well. Groves was trying to justify the ends with the means. He needed you use that bomb to prove that his second facility in Hanford was worth the $400 million. Goldberg shows us the political drives of this time influenced the dropping of the second bomb and even dropping the bombs at all.

Hiroshima by John Hersey is a story that was easy to get into. One could imagine the daily life in Hiroshima the day it dropped and the perspectives of the survivors shows us how horrifying and traumatizing it was. What surprised me most was the amount of detail in the stories themselves. It seems like everybody remembers their emotions and what they were doing every day at the time of the bombing and the days after.