Response Week 5

Theodore Jagodits

HST 415 / Alex Wellerstein

The situation in Soviet Union seemed to be very closed off from Stalin. Did Beria have all the control over science department as well as intelligence? I am confused on the bureaucratic structure at the time. Also, they did not talk about cost of the Soviet project versus the Manhattan project. I feel like the forced labor made it possible to speed up the project as well as resources provided by factories and companies in the USSR provided for free. Also how did the scientists not know that some of the information provided to them was stolen from the US?

A lot of the questions and interviews in the diary and the joint committee’s notes seem to indicate what the response should be in terms of policy and just a response to the bomb being dropped. The scientists definitely had the opinion that everyone should know about the USSR bomb drop, however, did not really have opinion about any other policy concerning foreign relations with the USSR. The meetings did not look very productive, since at the end Oppenheimer said it was expected and it would be business as usual.

From reading Kojevnikov and watching the lecture I don’t believe the Soviets copied the Americans. From a student’s perspective, they would not have been honor boarded for plagiarism. There is a grey area that the Soviets live in for some of the project, however I do not think it is straight copying the bomb. Also, with Beria in charge there was no copying or taking information for granted. The soviets did all the work and more. The more I think about it, the more I can see this being like two students discussing in broad terms the details of a really hard homework assignment but doing the work on their own in their own way. The professor showed a picture of the soviet bomb which looks like the American one. But again, there is only so much variation you can have when you have the same goals. Additionally, it seems like the Soviets before the war also had very good experimental physics. They innovated on their own independently for some time until the war made them turn their attention to more practical applications. After the war the only thing they can be caught for ‘cheating’ would be setting up the ENORMOZ project the same way as the Manhattan project. Then again, the professor mentioned this would maybe a cut a year off building a bomb of their own. A man like Beria would probably have set it up in the same fashion anyway.

I liked the lecture a lot and I feel like this is not talked about anymore, but the history gives an important context as how relations stand today with Russia and the US during and after the Cold War.