Response Week 5

Theodore Jagodits

HST 415 / Alex Wellerstein

The GAC had some interesting points on why they did not want to build the Super. During that time, I feel like the only validity they had was that they were scientists that worked on the first bomb and they are part of the advising committee. The argument itself was not flawed, but incomplete. They had not done enough research into H-Bomb design and did not thoroughly investigate it either since they did not want to do it. If this were the same situation as in world war two and they were building it to ‘defend’ themselves, they would have tried to build it in a heartbeat even if it did not work. What is interesting is the intersection of politics and science. Some scientists were completely for building the bomb for political reasons and some scientists were against it for their own political reasons. In computer science it feels like we try to separate these and make our applications as apolitical as possible. But somehow, they always get used for political purposes and have unintended consequences (I guess that’s why we take these classes). At least these scientists knew the magnitude and consequences of what they were building. Anyway, the argument does not seem valid during that time and the fear of the Soviets catching up was a real perceived threat to many. In hindsight, today is a different story, if we never brought in such powerful nuclear weapons into the world it would have been a safer place.

York’s argument is that the advice of the AEC was good, and that pursuing building Super was not a good idea. However, this argument was in hindsight of this decision and regretting it only came after we experienced the terrible side effects of the fallout. It apparently killed a Japanese fisherman in the tests. Then only was there a movement to ban all nuclear weapons and have total international control. York even admits there were too many sources of information other than the AEC that had an input such as politicians and the military to consider.

As a scientist with this classified information, it really depends on my background but I would not have been in favor of building a bigger and better bomb just to show that we are dominant in the field of atomic energy. However, that would not be a strong argument against protecting ourselves at the time against a possible Soviet threat. A better argument would have been to prevent a war of escalation and to diplomatically advocate for nuclear arms control. So, I think I would have sided with Oppenheimer on this matter. As a citizen with no classified information I would have been scared of the Soviet threat and would support the H-Bomb to establish dominance. It seems to be another bomb to me that just proved our dominance and would establish protection for our country. As a president that listens to all citizens, I agree that Truman probably made the right decision but could have done it a little differently. Even if the information about an H-Bomb was leaked I don’t think it was the right step to say our scientists were working on it even if we were.