

MANHATTAN PROJECT – ASSIGNMENT 1 – ESSAY DRAFT

BACKGROUND

On Dec. 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor, a naval base in Hawaii, was bombed by Japan, and the United States declared war on Japan the next day. Meanwhile WWII had already been raging in Europe for two years (since Hitler invaded Poland on Sept. 1, 1939).

In 1942, the Manhattan Project became a large and secret U.S. military project. Over the next few years 500,000 people contributed to the project. Very few knew what they were contributing to.

On August 6, 1945, the U.S. destroyed Hiroshima with the Little Boy atomic bomb. Little Boy exploded with the power of 15,000 tons of conventional explosives. (A ton is 2,000 pounds.) On August 9, 1945, the U.S. destroyed Nagasaki with the Fat Man atomic bomb. Fat Man exploded with the power of 20,000 tons of conventional explosives.

For comparison, a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress could carry 4 tons or 8,000 pounds of explosives, and a Boeing B-29 Superfortress could carry 10 tons or 20,000 pounds of explosives. In other words, a single bomber, carrying a single atomic bomb, could do as much damage as about 1,000 bombers could do if they dropped their bombs all at once on a single target.

PROMPT

If you were recruited by the U.S. military in 1942 to work on a secret project that you were told could change the outcome of WWII, what would you have done, assuming you had the freedom to accept or refuse the recruitment? How would you have felt about this decision?

Consider both possibilities: (1) That due to secrecy, you do not know the ultimate goal of the secret project, only that it is a very large and important weapons project, or (2) that you are an insider and you know that the project goal is to produce atomic bombs.

OTHER DIRECTIONS

This can and should be draft-quality rather than finished quality. It is meant to be from the heart, like a journal entry of someone actually making the decision to be part of the Manhattan Project, rather than an argumentative and analytical essay. Unlike a private journal entry, it will be shared with your classmates for discussion. You do not need to research the paper.

LENGTH

500 words, double-spaced, occupying two pages (adjust spacing and font to keep it so if you are a little off).

DUE

By email, before class on Tuesday, Jan. 17 (9:30am). Simply turning it in counts as a regular assignment. (Most assignments will be problem sets, not essays.)

AGAIN

This can be draft quality. It will be read by others. It will otherwise not be graded. You will be revisiting this draft later.