

History 62N: The Atomic Bomb in Policy and History (2/07 syllabus.)

Thursdays, 1:15-4:05, Spring Quarter
Rm. 107 in Hist. Bldg. (Bldg. 200)

B. J. Bernstein, Rm. 206
Ofc. Hrs: F, 2:15-5:00

This is a draft syllabus, with small revisions likely. This document has been scanned and may contain some inadvertent typographical errors on that basis.

This seminar has been designed to be intellectually demanding and intensive. Thus, the course requires careful reading, probing classroom discussions, and a few well-written, thoughtful essays. The seminar has been conceived to focus primarily upon US decisions and attitudes, and sometimes to examine events and responses in Japan and also in the Soviet Union.

The course will consider why the atomic bombs were used, whether there were alternatives, and if so, why alternatives were not pursued instead. The course focuses on how the use of the A- bomb has been explained by policymakers, historians, and lay people in the past 61 years, and why the 1945 atomic bombing has become a passionately contested subject. The course will emphasize understanding the A-bomb events of 1945, and how and why they have been variously interpreted. The process of analyzing various interpretations will necessarily involve consideration of key personnel and of wartime and postwar US culture. Put too simply, but usefully, the course is partly about competing “memories” involving the A-bomb--by 1945 participants, by others alive then, and by those born afterward.

Among the questions meriting consideration in this seminar are: Would other nations have acted differently in 1945 on the A-bomb? What was the process of US decisionmaking? Who made the key decisions, when, and how? Would matters have been handled differently under FDR, or Henry Wallace, or perhaps Herbert Hoover? Before Hiroshima, who opposed the atomic bombing and why? How did the 1945 use, and the results, of the A-bomb alter thinking about war, weaponry, mass killing, and international relations? Was the use of the bomb on Japanese cities ethical, or not? By what standards? Do scientists have a special responsibility in a democracy? If so, what is that responsibility and why? Reaching to a very different group, the course will briefly consider: Do military men have a special responsibility? And after Hiroshima, how did top WWII military leaders judge the atomic bombings?

The seminar will also do some important cultural and intellectual history. Was there in 1945 or somewhat afterward a “conservative” or a “liberal” or a “radical” position in the US on the atomic bombing? If so, have the political lineups remained relatively constant, or has there been a shift? Where would you expect to find Admiral William Leahy, former Under Secretary of State Joseph Grew, Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy, Herbert Hoover, and Generals Dwight D. Eisenhower, George C. Marshall, and Douglas MacArthur on these issues? Why? The US Communist party’s newspaper? Or such publications as the right-leaning U.S. News (later U.S. News and World Report), or the liberal Nation and New Republic? Or the self-declared conservative National Review in the 1950s? Why?

The seminar also aims to introduce students to the critical use of primary and secondary sources, and to emphasize the problems of how historians and others seek to understand, and to explain, the past. Many of the primary materials are declassified wartime documents.

The seminar is, in a sense, a difficult, troubling intellectual journey in the recent American past, beginning with the early days of World War II, spending considerable time in the last months of that war, and then entering the postwar period and reaching near the present time.

Among the problems is trying to understand the key A-bomb decisions in the context of World War II, to seek to interpret (or construct) these events in terms of reliable evidence, and to understand them in the context of the central values of the major decisionmakers. But in doing that intellectual analysis, it is important never to lose sight of the fact that the A-bombs killed over 100,000 humans, and thus the analyst must beware of allowing, unreflectively, an understanding of pre-Hiroshima values to shape one's own judgment in 2004 about the morality and necessity of those bombings. But some analysts may conclude that pre-Hiroshima standards are the only appropriate basis for such judgments. Others may argue that understanding a historical process, and the dominant values of that much earlier time, does not require approving of decisionmakers and their values. By this latter position, the exercise of moral judgment need not be bound by the standards of 1945 decisionmakers. To some analysts, a possible middle way may involve focusing on pre-Hiroshima dissidents. But what if there had been no pre-Hiroshima dissidents?

The seminar asks that students consider seeking to be coldly analytical part of the time but without eschewing their moral right, and perhaps their moral responsibility, to ethical judgment. There should be a systematic effort, often despite strains and difficulties, to separate the processes of historical interpretation and of moral judgment. Yet, even the suggestion of making such an effort--of separating historical interpretation and ethical judgment at least briefly--raises important questions: Is such separation possible, and truly desirable, if possible? In reflecting on these important problems, students may want to jump ahead briefly, in about the third or fourth week, to read Dwight Macdonald, Paul Fussell and Michael Walzer, and John Rawls, while keeping in mind the analyses by Stimson and Feis, among others. At a few crucial junctures, the course will focus on the moral arguments and moral critiques.

Remember that in 1994-95 the controversy over the atomic bombing, and how to represent the A-bomb issues in the heavily federally-funded Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum (NASM), led to bitter disputes in op-ed pages, complaints by an organization of American historians, a Congressional resolution basically condemning the museum's efforts, and ultimately the dismissal of NASM's director and the replacement of that Enola Gay exhibit. Critics of the original exhibit usually welcomed the new one, terming it a triumph for "history" and America. In turn, critics of the new exhibit often decried it as the selling out of "history."

More recently, briefly in 2003-04, with far less controversy, NASM at Dulles airport opened a new Enola Gay exhibit, with a minimal script avoiding any significant A-bomb interpretation. It is interesting to speculate on what interpretation, if any, would have been possible without evoking heated controversy.

Reading the seminar materials partly in the context of the 1994-95 heated dispute and the recent avoidance of substantial controversy, you might also keep in mind the questions of how should the A-bomb issues have been presented in the museum exhibit, what are the appropriate criteria for making a judgment, and what are the standards for accountability in a mostly federally-funded museum, or in any museum? Are there political and intellectual standards, and who should decide and apply them? At issue is the important matter of how "history" should be represented. Such questions necessarily spill over to issues of how the A-bomb's use should be presented in high school, and perhaps in college too. Should there be different standards for publicly and privately funded institutions? If so, why?

Even after nearly 62 years, the A-bomb issues remain so controversial that various historians and journalists on different "sides" frequently are unwilling to talk to one another, or at least not civilly. They privately sometimes refer to their adversaries as "dishonest" and as "scoundrels," and more than occasionally their public charges come close to using similar language. In part, authors on each side can usually find errors in the work by some members of the other side. Thus, an interesting set of problems is: Which errors are

fundamental, and which are comparatively minor? Is it possible to reach agreement on the nature of such errors, and even that they are errors? How? If they are errors, how does one determine whether these errors were intentional or accidental? Is the issue one of craftsmanship or of honesty? Are the important differences factual, or conceptual, and can these categories be separated?

After almost 62 years, is there still a vigorous potential controversy in America over the 1945 use of the atomic bomb(s) on Japan? If so, what would such controversy reveal about contemporary America? Why has there not been an intense controversy in Japan?

1. Introductory Session. (13 pp.)

Henry L. Stimson, "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," Harper's (Feb., 1947), pp. 97-107.

Harry S. Truman, "Why I Dropped the Bomb," Parade (Dec. 4, 1988), 2 pp.

Perhaps surprisingly, this discussion may take about 10-15 minutes of the next session.

2. Interpreting the A-Bomb Decision: An "Establishment" Analyst (c. 165 pp).

Herbert Feis, The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II (1966), pp. 1-130, 147-49, 170-201.

3. Interpreting the A-Bomb Decision: A Revisionist Perspective (p. 105-130 pp) Gar Alperovitz, Atomic Diplomacy (1985 or later eds.), pp 61-88, 274-90, and 1-60.

Note that pp. 1-60 were added in 1985, and that the other sections were published in 1965, so please read 1-60 after the other sections. This discussion is likely to carry over into the next session.

4. Reconsidering the A-Bomb Decision: Four Views (68 pp)

Harold Fischer, "Discussion of the Question of Whether It Was Essential to Use the Atomic Bomb Against Japan" (1962-65), 15 pp.

McGeorge Bundy, "The Decision to Drop Bombs on Japan," Danger and Survival (1988), pp. 54-97.

Stanley Goldberg, "Nagasaki" (1996), 2 pp.

Joseph Rotblat, "Leaving the Bomb Project" (c. 1985), 5 pp.

Probably the discussion of Alperovitz will carry over into the first part of this session--#4.

And, in turn, the discussion in #4 may take 15-20 minutes in #5.

5. From Roosevelt to Truman: Documents. 1944-June 1945 (c. 75 pp.)

Roosevelt speech, Oct. 5, 1937, 5 pp..

Gen. Leslie Groves, Military Policy Committee minutes, May 5, 1943, 3 pp.

J. Robert Oppenheimer to Enrico Fermi, May 1943, 2 pp.

Vannevar Bush, memos, September 1944, 6 pp.

James F. Byrnes to President, March 3, 1945, 1 p.

Hempelmann to Oppenheimer, and Oppenheimer to Warren, March 1945, 2 pp.

Oppenheimer to Groves, May 11, 1945, 2 pp.

Target Committee minutes, 3 mtgs., April 27, May 14-15, and May 28, 1945, c. 16 pp.. (We may only focus on two meetings)

Stimson Diary, May 14, 15, 1945, 2 pp.

John J. McCloy, memorandum, May 29, 1945, 3 pp..

Harrison memo, May 1, 1945, and Interim Committee minutes, May 31, 1945, 11 pp..

Franck Committee report, June 11, 1945 c. 13 pp. (We may decide to delay this and the Scientific Advisory Panel report until session 7.)

Scientific Advisory Panel, June 15, 1945, 2 pp.

White House Meeting, June 18, 1945, pp. 903-910.

(The discussion of Goldberg and Rotblat may carry over into this session--#5. And the last four items in #5 may well carry over into #6.)

6. Truman and the Road to the A-Bomb Decision (c. 50 pp.)

Stimson Diary, May 14-15 (from #5), and June 6, and July 24, 1945, 4 pp.

Harrison memo, June 28, and Ralph Bard memo, June 27 1945, 2 pp..

Truman, Potsdam Diary, July 1945 4 pp.

Truman to Bess [Truman), July-August 1945, c. 6 pp.

W.B.'s Notes (by Walter Brown, Byrnes's assistant), July-August 1945

Col. Stone to Gen. Arnold ("Groves Project"), July 24, 1945, 2 pp.

Truman-Sen. Richard Russell, August 1945, 3 pp.

Truman to Samuel McCrea Cavert, August 1945, 2 pp.

Maybe Background: Truman letters to Bess, 1911-39, 10 pp.

Truman to Stimson, Nov. 13 and Dec. 31, 1946, 3 pp.

[George Kennan], "Far Eastern War and General Situation" (memo on Harriman-Stalin meeting), August 8, 1945, 3 pp.

Bundy to Secretary, March 3, 1945, 1 p.

Some of these materials will most likely carry over into session #7.

7. Scientists and Military Leaders: Participation in the Process and Judgments after the Atomic Bombing (c. 105 pp.)

Perhaps the Franck Committee report and the Scientific Advisory Panel report, from session 5.

Perhaps Oppenheimer to Fermi, May 1943, and Hempelman-Openheimer, Warren, March 1945, from session 5.

Edward Teller to Szilard, July 2, and Leo Szilard petitions, July 1945, 5 pp.

J. Robert Oppenheimer-Gen. Groves phone call, August 6, 1945, and Oppenheimer 1965 interview, 2 pp.

J. Robert Oppenheimer, speech at Los Alamos November 1945, 11 pp.

Maybe Albert Einstein, 10 pp.

"Was The A-Bomb A Mistake?" (1960), Szilard and Teller, 6 pp.

Dwight Macdonald, "The Bomb" (1945), 7 pp.

Norbert Weiner, "A Scientist Rebels" (1946), 1 p.

Leo Szilard, "My Trial as A War Criminal" (1947), 12 pp.

Eugene Wigner (1965), 1 p.

Memoirs of Admiral Leahy (1950), Admiral King (1952), General Arnold (1949), and General LeMay and comments by Generals MacArthur (1945) and Eisenhower (1960), about 25 pp.

#Also probably a Thursday evening session: Film ("The Day After Trinity"), 7:00-9:55 PM. (90 minutes plus a 60-minute discussion, so allot 2 hours and 55 minutes).

8. The Problem of Japan Reconsidered (c. 265 pp): Parts A and B

Part A. How Close Did Japan Seem to Surrender, and How Close Was Japan to Surrender? (c. 230 pp.)

George Harrison-Robert Patterson, August 2 and 8, 1945, 2 pp.. Forrestal to Truman, August 8, 1945, 1 p.

"Magic" intercepts, July-August 1945, c. 65 pp.

US Strategic Bombing Survey, interview with Prince Konoye, Nov. 9, 1945, c. 11 pp. Essays or book-excerpts by Robert Butow, Herbert Bix, Sadao Asada, and Edward Drea, c. 150 pp.

Part B. The Critical Days, August 9-15, 1945: What Were the Issues, and the Us and Japanese Decisions? (c. 35 pp.).

CG [Commanding General] to War Department, August 7, 1945, 1 p. Cables, August 8 and 10, 1945, 2 pp.

[Gen. Carl] Spaatz Diary, August 11, 1945, Gen. Groves to Arnold, August 10, 1945, 1 p. Groves to Marshall, August 10, 1945 1 p..

Diaries of Forrestal, Stimson, Leahy, Walter Brown (as assistant to Secretary of State Byrnes), August 1945, and Henry Wallace diary, August 10, 1945, c. 20 pp. Maj. Gen. Clayton Bissell to Marshall, August 12, 1945, 3 pp. Col. Seeman-Gen. Groves phone transcript, August 13, 1945, 4 pp.. Balfour to [UK] Foreign Office, 14 August 1945, 1 p.

(The discussion from this session will undoubtedly carry into the next session, and the discussion of casualties will therefore be only one part of session 9. Depending on the pace of the course, a decision may be made at session 7 on how to handle the materials for Session #8. There may be a decision to trim the readings for #8A, and to divide the reading assignment for # 8 into two parts, with much of the second part carrying into session #9. There is also some temptation to have you read a 60- or 70-page essay by David Holloway on the USSR and the ending of the Pacific war, but it may unfortunately be difficult, because of time constraints, to fit this into our schedule.)

9. Invasions and Casualties: Pre-Hiroshima and Post-Hiroshima Interpretations (108 pp.)

Documents, June 14 (JPS 697/D); June 15 (JWPC 369/1); June 16 (JCS 1388); and “Amplifying Comments,” c. June 16, 1945; c. 20 pp.

James Cate, David Lloyd, and Truman letters, December 1952-January 1953, 6 pp.

Col. Ennis report, April 30 1946, 6 pp.

Norman Polmar and Thomas Allen, “Invasion Most Deadly” (1995), 6 pp.

Maybe D. M. Giangreco, “Casualty Projections for the US Invasions of Japan. . . ,” Journal of Military History (July 1997), 521-581.

Maybe P.C. Davenport, “Wrong Numbers” (1995), 4 pp.

(Part of session 8 will carry over into #9)

10. The Contested Meanings of the Atomic Bombing: A Reconsideration (c.140 pp.)

David Lawrence, “What Hath Man Wrought?” (1945), 3 pp.

John Gillis, “Nothing But Nihilism” (1945),3 pp.

Interviews (1960) with the Enola Gay crew, 10 pp.

Leo Szilard, “My Trial as a War Criminal” (194?), c. 12 pp

Joseph Rotblat, “A Social Conscience in the Nuclear Age” (1997-98), 12 pp.

Paul Fussell, “Thank God for The Atom Bomb,” and Michael Walzer-Fussell exchange (1981), 18 pp.

John Rawls, “Fifty Years After Hiroshima” (1995), 6 pp.

Maybe Sheldon Cohen, Arms and Judgment (1989), c. 35 pp.

Paul Chilton, “Nukespeak: Nuclear Language and Propaganda” (1982), 15 pp.

The 1995 Smithsonian/Enola Gay Script, selected parts.

(Quite probably, the discussion will focus on only a bit more than a handful of these items.)

Other Matters:

Probable film: “The Day After Trinity,” 90 minutes, probably on Thursday evening, 7:00- 9:55, after the Thursday-afternoon session on scientists (#7). After the film, there will also be a 60-minute discussion, so plan on approximately 2 hours and fifty-five minutes that night.

Essays--three papers, each 7-9 pages, with substantial choice:

Paper #1: Session 2, 3, or 4. A critical review-essay of the interpretive material assigned on why the A-bomb was used. You may write the paper for session 2, 3, or 4, and the paper will be on the material assigned for that session. The paper will be due at the beginning of that session. In the case of session # 4, the critical review should focus on Fischer, Bundy, and, if you wish, also Goldberg, but not Rotblat. The conception of a critical-review will be explained in class, and models are also available in the journal, Reviews in American History. It's in the library normally in open stacks on the main floor among periodicals.

Paper #2. Session 5, 6, or 7. A critical analysis of the May 31 and June 18 minutes and the June 11 Franck report, due at the beginning of session 5. Or a critical essay on Truman's Potsdam Diary and his July-August 1945 letters to Bess, due at the beginning of session 6. Or a critical discussion of Oppenheimer, Teller, and Szilard on the A-bomb, due at the beginning of session 7.

Paper #3. Session 8, 9, or 10. A critical essay from *8A on the analyses by Butow, Bix, Asada, and Drea, due at the beginning of session 8. Or an analysis of the events in 8B, August 8-15, from the diaries of Forrestal, Stimson, Leahy, Brown, and Wallace, August 1945, and the Groves-Marshall memo of August 10, due at session 8. Or an essay interpreting the Magic intercepts (on Japan's aims and actions) and the interview with Konoye, due at the beginning of session 8. Or a critical review of Polmar and Allen, or of Giangreco, or of both articles, due at the beginning of session 9. Or a critical essay on the Fussell-Walzer exchange, and of Rawls, on the morality of the 1945 atomic bombing, due at session 10.

It is important that you allocate adequate time to writing your papers. Ideally, in looking at the choices and in thinking about your academic schedule, you should seek to determine in advance how and when you can reserve adequate time to write and then rewrite your essay before submitting it. Try not to leave the paper until the "last minutes" and certainly do the assigned reading for the paper at least twice--or at least read the crucial parts twice.

I will seek to return student essays, with comments, within two weeks of your submitting the papers in class. **No emails.** Please make sure that your submitted paper is easy to read; no faint printers. Because I have two small-group courses, and will be reading about 48 essays from them, as well as two honors theses (usually in multiple drafts) and at least one doctoral dissertation, I may sometimes fall behind my optimistic two-week schedule.

Grades. The course grade is based about 50 percent on written work and about 50 percent on classroom participation.

Attendance is expected at all sessions. If a student misses more than one session, he/she will not receive credit for the course. Late papers are not acceptable. Students have substantial choice for all three written essays, and should plan to meet deadlines.

The course is scheduled for 1:15-4:05, and students are expected to arrive on time and not to plan conflicting obligations. It is possible that we may not always need the entire time, and we may occasionally run over 3-7 minutes, so don't commit to other activities before 4:15. After a few weeks, we may decide to shift to 1:20-4:00 for class.

The two main books are on reserve, and in xerox copy in the Bookstore. The various documents will be provided in two course readers, with the first reader covering sessions 4-7. That reader will be provided at session 3. The second course reader at session 7 for sessions 8-10.

N.B. This syllabus is a guide to the course, but it may be somewhat revised to meet our needs. It is more important that we discuss matters in depth, and thus there may sometimes be a need to revise an assignment, by trimming some pages, in order to accommodate to our pace of careful, thoughtful analysis.

On Reading. The selections have been carefully chosen. In the first few weeks, you will learn the salient chronology and get to know the key US personnel. The publications by Stimson, Truman, Feis, Alperovitz, Fischer, and Bundy traverse similar terrain, but often in rather different ways. By the time you get to the archival documents in session 5, you will have a good sense of the main questions. In dealing with the documents, you may find it wisest first to read the documents quickly to gain a partial understanding of their themes, and then to return to them-- the night before or the morning of class--to read them very carefully. In reading the documents, consider the following issues, among others: Why was the document created? Is there great significance to the authorship or recipient? What did the author deem important, and why? What are the questions that we care about, and why? Did the author have the same conceptions, or rather different ones? Are there curious omissions in the document? If so, why--and what do those omissions "mean"? How do these documents "speak" to the earlier interpretations (Stimson, Truman, Feis, Alperovitz, Fischer, Bundy, etc.) you have encountered?

In reading materials, and especially in thinking critically about the "secondary" interpretive literature, keep in mind that there is an important difference often between the author's presentation of an argument and the logical structure of that argument. Among other issues, you should be attentive to how facts are used or omitted, how questions are framed and perhaps avoided, and what adversaries are being rebutted explicitly or implicitly. You should think about the identity of the author, his/her purposes, the "ideology" of the work, any salient social theories undergirding it, and the strategies employed by the author--e.g., narration, explicit argumentation, some mixture--in presenting that work. In considering these issues, you will learn to read more critically, and also to improve your own writing. Ideally, you want to develop a sense of intellectual mastery--how to analyze a piece of work, and how to write critically and thoughtfully to achieve your purposes.

In session 8, the materials on Japan's policies--Butow, Bix, Drea, and Asada--will introduce you to a new set of personnel and to some unfamiliar problems and processes. Thus, you may find that this segment will take considerable time. That is one of the reasons I am considering splitting the materials for #8 into two parts and maybe trimming #8A. About a third or so of the assignment in 8B may be discussed in session 9.

Judged by the number of assigned pages, the course reading does not appear heavy. But judged by the time required for careful, thoughtful reading, which is the kind of reading that prepares you for probing analysis in class and intelligent papers, the reading is not light. You should assume that this is truly a 5-unit course.

By the end of the course, you should have learned much about A-bomb history, and also about how to think and write about historical problems.

A caveat: I normally don't use e-mail. But I will usually be briefly available before or after class for a few minutes, and at my office hours.

Office hours: These are designed for students, and there usually is a sign-up list on my office door (#206) a few days in advance. During the quarter, I hope to see each student at least once at office hours.