

History of the Manhattan Project

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Course Overview

I have several main goals for this course:

I want you to learn some of the history behind the Manhattan Project, including a qualitative understanding of some physics and chemistry.

I want you to gain experience thinking critically about scientists, science, and technology.

I want you to gain a greater understanding of science as an institution and science as a culture.

I want to begin to think about how the multiple narratives of the atom bomb and Hiroshima affect U.S. culture in general, and the culture of science in particular.

Readings:

Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*. Simon and Schuster, 1986.

Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifschultz, eds., *Hiroshima's Shadow: Writings on the Denial of History and the Smithsonian Controversy*. The Pamphleteer's Press, 1998.

Richard Wolfson, *Nuclear Choices*. MIT Press, 1993.

Peter Bacon Hales, *Atomic Spaces: Living on the Manhattan Project*. University of Illinois Press, 1997.

Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. University of North Carolina Press, 1994.

Paul Boyer, *Fallout*. Ohio State University Press, 1998.

Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: Fifty Years of Denial*. Grosset/Putnam, 1995.

We will read all of Rhodes and a lot of the essays from Bird and Lifschultz. Everyone will need to buy Rhodes; buying a copy of Bird and Lifschultz is strongly recommended. We'll do a smattering of readings from the other books listed. All the books will be on reserve. We'll read a bunch of other stuff, too.

Evaluation:

Your evaluation will be based roughly equally on the following:

Class Participation

Short Papers and Other Exercises

Final Paper or Project

I will assign grades (for those who so opt) by following the guidelines in the COA Course Catalog. I do not have any quota of A's, B's, etc. I encourage you to not take letter grades; I think doing so usually helps students learn and be more critical of their education.

Short Response Papers:

During the course you will write three of four short response papers. See the daily schedule for due dates and assignment details.

Study Groups:

By the end of the first week, you should form study groups of 4 people each. These groups should meet at least one time a week for around an hour. Groups may be asked to bring ideas and questions to class. Later in the term (starting around week 3), your group will be charged with leading the discussion on the day's reading. Final Synthetic Paper
Toward the end of the term, you will write a medium length (5-8 page) paper. This paper should be an informed personal and/or analytic essay, in which you try to make some sort of sense of what we've been reading and learning about. Very roughly speaking, this paper should discuss what the "moral of the story" is, or, alternatively, discuss why there isn't really a "moral of the story". A rough draft will be due, probably at the end of week 7. Students will then read other's drafts and provide feedback. There will be a handful of different options for this paper. I'll give you more details soon.

You should not view this as a research paper or a term paper.

Other Policies and Stuff

This course does not fulfill the QR requirement. It does satisfy the history requirement.

The final version of the syllabus will be on the course webpage.

All course work must be completed by the end of the term. I will not grant an incomplete except in extreme circumstances.

I expect you to attend class. Missing a class isn't a big deal, but please let me know in advance if you can.

We will see at least two films. These will probably require evening attendance.

We may need to schedule a few extra classes during the last two weeks of the term.

Academic misconduct -- cheating, plagiarizing, etc. -- is bad. Any cases of academic misconduct will result in a judicial hearing, as per pp. 14-15 of the COA handbook.

Possible consequences range from failure of the assignment to expulsion. For more, see the revised statement on academic integrity passed unanimously by the faculty two winters ago.