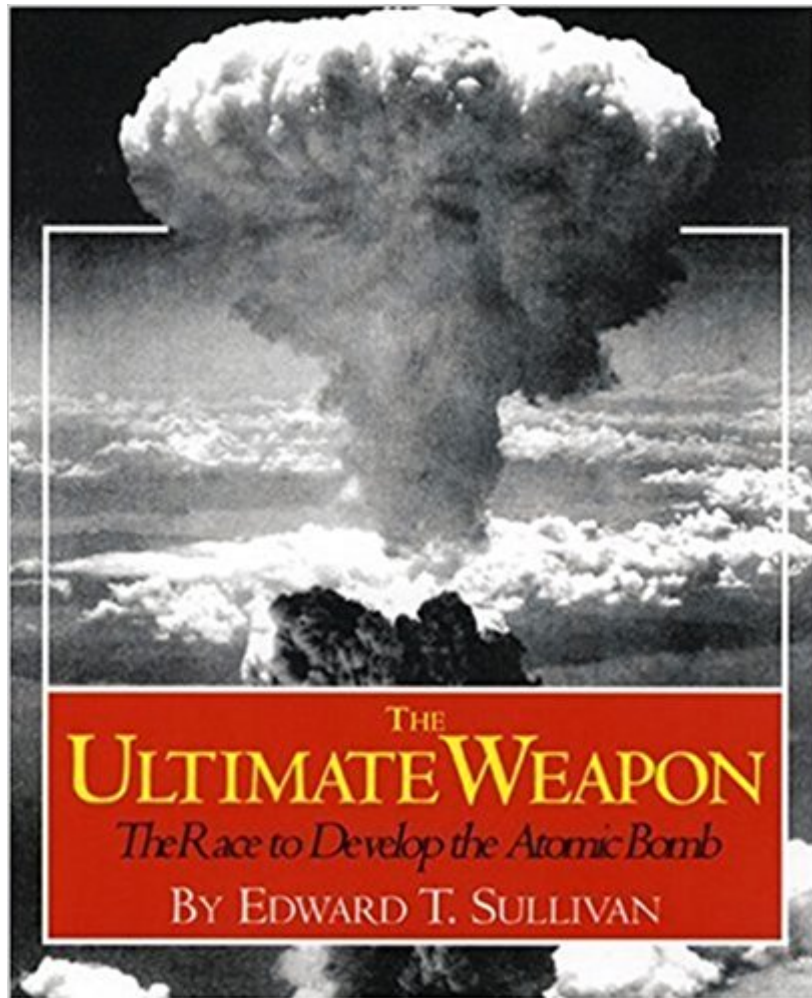




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The Ultimate Weapon: The Race To Develop The Atomic Bomb



Synopsis

When the first atomic bomb, nicknamed "Little Boy," was dropped from the Enola Gay onto Hiroshima on the morning of August 6, 1945, the world changed forever. But the story started long before then, and here Edward T. Sullivan delves into all the advances that led to the making of the most destructive weapons ever invented: the scientific developments of the Manhattan Project, the massive commitment by the Western world to win the great nuclear arms race, and the contributions to the war effort big or small by all those involved. From bus driver to scientist to spy to the president, Sullivan examines all the key personalities concerned, including Albert Einstein, J. Robert Oppenheimer, President Roosevelt, and many more. The dropping of the bomb, as well as the complicated aftermath is also discussed. In this comprehensive book, featuring several arresting black-and-white photographs of the day, Sullivan offers a broad and compelling look at the atomic bomb and its pronounced effects on our world today.

Book Information

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Grade Level: 7 - 12

Customer Reviews

The history of the Manhattan Project presents a daunting challenge to any author writing for a general audience; especially when that audience is young readers. Sullivan responds admirably with an account that effectively distills the science behind the development of the atomic

bomb into understandable terms and that turns the human story behind the project into compelling drama. Most histories of the Manhattan Project focus on Robert Oppenheimer and the other scientists who worked with him to create the bomb at Los Alamos, but Sullivan gives plenty of space to the activities at the two other project sites: Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where enriched uranium was manufactured, and Hanford, Washington, where bomb-ready plutonium was developed. Without slighting the familiar parts of the Manhattan Project story—the scientific breakthroughs, the Trinity test, the flight of the Enola Gay, the aftermath of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki explosions—Sullivan takes readers into daily life at all three sites, showing the less-than-comfortable conditions under which thousands of men and women worked. Effectively illustrated with archival photographs, this volume will be useful both as personal reading and as background for reports. Ott, Bill

Edward T. Sullivan has worked as a public and school librarian for over ten years. The author of many articles and books for librarians and teachers, this is his first book for young people. He lives with his wife and three cats in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, a city that played a major role in the building of the first atomic bombs.

Anna wrote: This book was very informative, and I recommend it to people ages fifteen and up. The book was a little bit harder to read, because there were some confusing parts that I had to read a couple of times over. It didn't use a lot of hard words, but I still had to look some of them up or ask someone about what it meant. This book, by Edward T. Sullivan is a book that is very informative. It tells how the sites were selected at Los Alamos, Oak Ridge, and Hanford because of the small populations with large amount of open land. The book describes the security precautions taken to control spying, including investigating the Santas that came in for children to sit on their lap. It goes on to tell about the first test that took place at the Trinity site in NM, detonating a device called "The Gadget". Finally they dropped the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and tells of the pain, horror, and destruction that took in Japan after the bombings. The book is very interesting, because it tells some of the opinions of some of the scientists and people that worked on the laboratory sites where the atomic bomb was developed. For example, there was part in the book that said, "Albert Einstein always regretted the role he played in getting the Manhattan Project under way" (page 146). Also, the book doesn't tell the story of just one of the laboratory's that helped in the construction of the most deadly bomb in the world, it tells the part that each of the laboratory's played in building the bomb, and in great detail. It was an amazing story that helped me understand how important it was

to make the bomb before the Axis Powers. There were so many people though in the story, that it got a little confusing to understand, as I had said before.

quite interesting

I came across this book by accident, not realizing it is intended as a text for "young adults", a euphemism for teenagers. Having read it, I am frightened by what these adolescents are being taught in America's secondary schools. The United States of America fought in World War II and lost more than 400,000 of its sons, fathers and brothers. The nation mobilized more than thirteen million men and women in its armed forces and auxiliaries. Tens of millions more went to work voluntarily in the nation's factories and on its farms turning out everything from food to bandages to bullets and airplanes and tanks and tens of thousands of other products/ Much of this bounty was freely shared with other nations fighting the forces of fascism. After the war, the United States brought all of its troops home except for those which remains, by dint of international agreement, as protectors or, in the cases of Germany and Japan, as occupiers. Yet, for some, the United States is an unending source of evil and this book reflects that attitude. Yes, the United States was fortunately the first to develop nuclear weapons. The nation was also the first to deploy them against a barbarous, evil regime in order to end a horrific war. This book, sub-titled "The Race to Develop the Atomic Bomb", barely details the immense and extraordinary effort to develop the atomic bomb before the Germans or anyone else. Any intent to tell this fantastic story is quickly abandoned by the author. Instead he embarks on a catalog of evils perpetrated by the United States of America and, occasionally, others such as the ostensibly misogynistic Nobel Prize Committee that failed to award a Nobel to Dr. Lise Meitner, an Austrian physicist. This first - and far from last excursion into the doctrine of victimology - occurs on page 12. The act that there is substantial disagreement in scientific and history circles over whether Ms. Meitner's work was sufficient to merit a Nobel goes unremarked. Also unremarked is the Ms. Meitner assisted a certain Dr. Hahn, who did receive a Nobel and who worked to develop German nuclear weapons before and during World War II. Dr. Meitner was also born into a Jewish family, though she converted early in the 20th Century. In short, the mixed facts regarding Lise Meitner are obscured by the author in preference for the single implied allegation that she was victimized because she was a woman. Not many pages later, the author spends considerable time lamenting the treatment of blacks in the American South. Precisely what does this have to do with "The Race to Develop the Atomic Bomb"? Nothing. But this is, as we shall see, a book that dwells on establishing the United States as evil, so it must be here.

Interestingly, the author does acknowledge that segregation was regional and that outside the South, it was barely in evidence in the government facilities described. The author also fails to note that the United States was indeed a nation of prejudices and biases toward many groups. Jews and Catholics were victims of open discrimination through the 1960s and were denied housing, jobs, educations and more because of their ethnicity. Some groups, such as the now trendily described Appalachians were dismissed as "hillbillies" and the displaced farmers from the dust storm states were denigrated as "Okies". But context is unimportant to the author. Another trope that tilts toward contemporary "progressive" themes is how the United States government stripped citizens of their Constitutional Rights: "[p]eople working for the Manhattan Project had to be willing to sacrifice many of their civil liberties, such as freedom of speech". Here we have a top-secret project and the author complains that workers were told to keep their mouths shut. He further complains that items such as "binoculars, cameras, firearms and telescopes" on a top-secret military reservation had to be registered. That workers in many other war-related installations had to abide by the same rules, though perhaps to a lesser degree, is lost upon the author. And, of course, the fact that the 13 million men and women in the armed forces were subject to the same kinds of restrictions is unspoken. In short, for the author, the trope is convenient to falsely depict the American government as the enemy of freedom. The book is loaded with this kind of what I perceive as anti-American propaganda. The author tries to connect Einstein's unhappiness with the use of the atomic bomb with his refusal of the first presidency of the modern State of Israel. The truth is that the two were not connected. Einstein wanted nothing to do with politics. But the truth does not serve the author's purposes. Another example is the author's reference to two words commonly used at the time to describe the Japanese as racial slurs. The author fails to point out that the Japanese attitudes toward others because of race, ethnicity and nationality were far harsher and much more malign. But only the United States figures in the author's perspective. Ultimately, the book paints the United States and its government as being evil for developing nuclear weapons and using them. It is propaganda and political indoctrination, not merely a history of scientific development. What amazes me most is that the author, who clearly believes that the United States should not have employed nuclear weapons against Japan, never specifically mentions such atrocities as the "Rape of Nanking" or the murder of between 10 and 17 million Asians whose lands Japan had conquered. While he recites the casualty figures for bombing raids on Japanese cities, he says nothing of the tens of thousands of Korean women forced to be prostitutes for the Japanese. I certainly hope that informed parents become aware of this book and do their best to explain to their children that not everything they read is the truth, because the words in this book surely aren't. Jerry

"We love to laugh and play and run
And we would never start a war
We're all afraid of bombs and
guns
We know that one fight leads to more.
Our country says we must be ready
For a fight, no matter
where
Even though that might be right,
It makes the other countries scared"--Peter Alsop, "Kid's
Peace Song"

"By 2006, six nuclear weapons had been lost and never recovered." I'm frightened. In fact, a piece of me has been frightened ever since my childhood days when I followed my teachers' instructions by watching and reading the daily news and then employed scissors and glue to complete those weekly current events assignments. Sadly, the more I've learned over the years, the more frightened I've become. Using the atomic bomb against Japan unleashed a Pandora's box of consequences that haunt the world to this day. When the Soviet Union announced in 1949 that they, too, had the atomic bomb, it sparked a nuclear arms race that lasted over three decades. It consumed billions of dollars, instilled in Americans and Russians a constant fear of mutual nuclear annihilation, and in 1962 brought the Soviet Union and the United States to the brink of nuclear war during the Cuban Missile Crisis. At the peak of the nuclear arms race, the Soviet Union and the United States combined had enough weapons to destroy the Earth hundreds of times over. When the Soviet Union collapsed and fragmented in the late 1980s, it appeared that the menacing cloud of global nuclear destruction that had hung over the world for so long had finally lifted. The reality is that nuclear war is more of a probability now than it ever was. India and Pakistan, who have been fighting for decades over a disputed region called Kashmir, both possess a nuclear arsenal and have threatened to use them against each other if violence between the two countries escalates to full-scale war. Nations formerly part of the Soviet Union still possess nuclear weapons from the cold war era. Some of those countries are so ravaged by corruption and poverty that there is the very reasonable fear that they could sell the weapons to terrorist organizations or nations hostile to the United States. North Korea, a nation ruled by a ruthless and unpredictably dangerous dictator, has claimed to have detonated a nuclear weapon. Iran, a nation that has a long history of hostility toward Israel, the United States, and other countries, is believed to be in the process of developing nuclear weapons. The five acknowledged nuclear powers -- the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom -- together possess thirty-one thousand nuclear weapons. Israel, surrounded by hostile nations in the Middle East, also possesses a nuclear arsenal. The threat of nuclear war is still a very real, frightening possibility. What happened during World War II, back when my own parents were teenagers, to put the United States in the forefront of what is still an out-of-control nuclear arms race? Why did the U.S. develop The Bomb? What was the rationale for dropping the pair of nuclear bombs that annihilated Japanese cities full of everyday people, despite

the already-completed victory over Nazi Germany and the fact that Japan was clearly on the brink of defeat? What were Albert Einstein's regrets about his role in this awful business? These are some of the multitude of questions that are answered in Edward Sullivan's *THE ULTIMATE WEAPON: THE RACE TO DEVELOP THE ATOMIC BOMB*. Some of the information that I've learned about the Manhattan Project -- the process of building the bombs that were used to vaporize the citizens and infrastructure of Hiroshima and Nagasaki -- includes a clear, basic explanation of how the bombs actually "worked," what work was being performed in the Oak Ridge, Tennessee and Hanford, Washington facilities that supported the Project, how the work at Oak Ridge (producing uranium-235) was responsible at the time for consuming one-seventh of the total electrical output of the United States, and how -- even while desperately marshalling all possible national resources to meet the very real threat of Hitler taking over the world -- the armed forces of the United States still had to make sure that African Americans working and living at the Oak Ridge facility were "kept in their place" through discriminatory and inhumane employment and housing practices.

It's time to try a different way of fighting
Isn't it in the plan
We can be strong without our bombs
It's time that all the bombs were banned
Kids like us live everywhere
Around the world, in every land
The words we speak are not the same
But Peace on Earth we understand.

"I am very appreciative for Sullivan's having devoted significant space and research to chronicling the debate -- beforehand and afterward -- concerning the U.S.' decision to use the bombs on Japan. This has always been of interest to me, especially having grown up during the Vietnam War working on construction jobs alongside a bunch of oft-outspoken WWII vets." "This is the world we live in, and these are the hands we're given." -- Genesis

One thing that has not changed since 1945 is that the President of the United States -- whomever he or she is -- wields the power to order the use of another nuclear weapon somewhere in the world at any given moment. Many of us got a kick out of the 1986 music video that was created for the Genesis song "Land of Confusion," in which a befuddled Ronald Reagan pushes the button marked "Nuke" instead of the one marked "Nurse." But the message is an all-too-serious one as we become immersed in the 2008 presidential campaign season. On which fallible human being will we next bestow such enormous power?

With schools opening back up this week and next, I've got a suitcase chock full of great, new 2007 titles all set for my fall booktalks. But I am sure hard-pressed to name a book in the suitcase whose contents are more consequential to tomorrow's voters and problem solvers than this well-researched, profound look at how the whole nuclear business began, where it has currently brought us to in the 21st Century, and what it is that I have to be frightened of.

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