

# The Manhattan Project

A Documentary Introduction  
to the Atomic Age

Michael B. Stoff  
Jonathan F. Fanton  
R. Hal Williams

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**Primis Custom Publishing**

New York St. Louis San Francisco Auckland Bogotá  
Caracas Lisbon London Madrid Mexico Milan Montreal  
New Delhi Paris San Juan Singapore Sydney Tokyo Toronto

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8 9 0 QSR QSR 0 9 8 7 6 5 4

ISBN 0-07-246394-5

Editor: Lynn Nordbrock  
Cover Design: Maggie Lytle  
Production Editor: Sue Culbertson  
Printer/Binder: Quebecor World

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# Chronology, 1938-1945

## Atomic Developments

### 1938

December     Nuclear fission  
discovered in Germany.

### 1939

August 2     Albert Einstein writes  
President Roosevelt of  
need for an American  
atomic bomb project.

October 21 First meeting of  
President's advisory  
committee on uranium.

### 1940

### 1941

## War Developments

September 29     Munich Pact, ceding  
Sudetenland of  
Czechoslovakia to Germany,  
signed.

August 23     German-Russian nonaggression  
pact signed.

August 24     British-Polish mutual  
assistance pact signed.

September 1     Germany invades Poland,  
setting off Second World War.

June 22     France surrenders to Germany.

Summer-Fall     Battle of Britain.

September 2     American destroyers ex-  
changed for British bases.

September 27     Germany, Italy, and Japan  
sign Tripartite Pact, creating  
Triple Alliance.

March 11     Congress approves lend-  
lease assistance to aid  
Allies.

**Atomic Developments****War Developments****1941 cont'd**

April 13	Russian-Japanes five-year neutrality pact signed.
June 22	Germany invades Russia.
December 7	Japanese attack American base at Pearl Harbor.
December 8	United States declares war on Japan.
December 11	Germany declares war on United States.
May 6	Fall of the Philippines to Japanese.

**1942**

September 17	Leslie R. Groves appointed military chief of newly created Manhattan Engineer District (MED).
December 2	Scientists under Enrico Fermi produce first self-sustaining chain reaction.

**1943**

		January 14-23	Casablanca conference: Roosevelt and Churchill announce policy of "unconditional surrender."
		May 13	Surrender of Axis forces in North Africa.
August 14-24	Quebec Conference: Roosevelt and Churchill negotiate Quebec Agreement.		
September 18	Roosevelt and Churchill meet at Hyde Park and agree on atomic policy.	September 8	Surrender of Italy.
		November 22-26	Cairo conference: Roosevelt, Churchill, and Chiang Kai-shek meet to discuss postwar far eastern policy.



**Atomic Developments****War Developments****1943 cont'd**

November 28- December 7	Teheran conference: First wartime meeting of "BigThree" (Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin), who agree on Anglo-American invasion of western Europe and on postwar international security organization.
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**1944**

June 6	Allied invasion of Normandy, France (D day).
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**1945**

December 16-26	Battle of the Bulge.
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February 4-9	Yalta conference: Roosevelt , Churchill, and Stalin meet for extensive planning for postwar Europe and Asia; Stalin promises Russian entry into war against Japan two or three months after defeat of Germany.
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April 7	Japanese Prime Minister Suzuki forms new cabinet to bring war to end.
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April 25	Secretary of War Stimson informs Truman of Manhattan Project.
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April 12	Roosevelt dies; Truman becomes President.
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May 9	Interim Committee to advise President on atomic weapons holds first meeting.
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May 7	Surrender of Germany.
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June 12	Franck Report is delivered to office of secretary of war, and its substance is communicated to Scientific Advisory Panel.
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June 22	Japanese Supreme War Council approves effort to negotiate peace and to seek Russian mediation.
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Atomic DevelopmentsWar Developments1945 cont'd

		July 12	Japanese Foreign Minister Togo instructs Ambassador Sato in Moscow to implore Russians to mediate end to war.
July 16	Successful test of atomic bomb at Alamogordo, New Mexico.	July 17- August 2	Potsdam Conference: First wartime meeting of Truman, Stalin, and Churchill (replaced by Attlee); inconclusive talks about postwar settlements; on July 24, Truman informs Stalin that United States has developed a "new weapon of unusual destructive force."
July 25	General Carl Spaatz, commander of U.S. Strategic Air Force, receives directive from Truman ordering 509 Composite Group to "deliver its first special bomb as soon as weather will permit visual bombing after about 3 August 1945."	July 26	Potsdam Declaration is issued.
		July 28	Japanese Prime Minister Suzuki calls Potsdam Declaration "unworthy of notice."
August 6	Uranium bomb (Little Boy) is dropped on Hiroshima.	August 8	Russia declares war on Japan and invades Manchuria the next day.
August 9	Plutonium bomb (Fat Man) is dropped on Nagasaki.	August 10	Japan offers to surrender.
		August 14	Japan accepts Allied terms of surrender.
		August 30	U.S. occupation forces land in Japan.
		September 2	Formal surrender of Japan.

# Major Characters

Anderson, John	Chemist by training, director of the Imperial Chemical Company and Lord President of the British Council.
Arneson, R. Gordon	Lieutenant in U.S. Army and recording secretary of Interim Committee.
Arnold, Henry H. (Hap)	General in the U.S. Army and commander of the U.S. Army Air Corps.
Attlee, Clement	British prime minister elected during the Potsdam conference in the summer of 1945.
Bard, Ralph A.	Under secretary of the Navy and member of the S-1 Interim Committee.
Barkley, Alben	Democratic senator from Kentucky and Senate majority leader (1937-1946); later became Vice President.
Bohr, Niels	Danish physicist.
Bundy, Harvey H.	Special assistant to Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson.
Bush, Vannevar	Director of the OSRD (1941-1946) and president of the Carnegie Institution.
Byrnes, James F.	Director of the Office of War Mobilization (1943-1945), adviser to Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, and secretary of state (1945-1947).
Cherwell, Lord (Frederick Lindemann)	Personal science adviser to Churchill.
Chiang Kai-shek	Leader of the Chinese Nationalists.
Churchill, Sir Winston	Prime minister of Great Britain (1940-1945; 1951-1955).
Clayton, William L.	Assistant secretary of state and member of the Interim Committee.
Compton, Arthur H.	Nobel prize-winning physicist (1927), professor of physics at the University of Chicago, and, during the war, director of the "Metallurgical Laboratory" at the University of Chicago and a member of the Scientific Advisory Panel to the Interim Committee.
Compton, Karl T.	President of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and chief of field service in the OSRD.
Conant, James B.	Assistant to Vannevar Bush, president of Harvard University, and chairman of the National Defense Research Committee (1941-1946), later known as OSRD.
de Gaulle, Charles	Leader of the Free French.
Einstein, Albert	Nobel prize-winning physicist (1921) driven from Germany and stripped of his citizenship in 1933. Became an American citizen in 1940.

Engel, Albert J.	Republican congressman from Michigan (1935-1951) and member of House Subcommittee on Military Appropriations.
Farrell, Thomas F.	Brigadier general in the U.S. Army, deputy of General Leslie Groves, and director, along with Groves, of the Target Committee.
Fermi, Enrico	Italian-born physicist, Nobel prize winner (1938), professor of physics at Columbia University (1935-1945), the first to achieve a sustained chain reaction (1942), and director of research at the "Metallurgical Laboratory."
Forrestal, James V.	Secretary of the Navy (1944-1947) and member of the "Committee of Three."
Franck, James:	German chemist and Nobel laureate (1925); during the war associate director of the chemistry division of Metlab.
Frankfurter, Felix	Supreme Court justice (1939-1962) and confidant of President Franklin Roosevelt.
Grew, Joseph	Under secretary of state (1944-1945) and member, along with Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal and Secretary of War Henry Stimson, of the "Committee of Three".
Groves, Leslie R.	Brigadier general in the U.S. Army in charge of the Manhattan Project.
Hachiya, Michihiko	Physician and victim of Hiroshima bombing.
Halifax, Earl of (Edward Frederick Lindley Wood)	British ambassador to the United States.
Harriman, William Averill	American ambassador to Russia (1943-1946).
Harrison, George L.	President of New York Life Insurance Company serving during the war as special assistant to Secretary of War Henry Stimson.
Hirohito	Emperor of Japan.
Hopkins, Harry	Special assistant to President Roosevelt.
Joliot-Curie, Frederic	French physicist whose seminal work on fission contributed to the creation of the Manhattan Project.
King, Ernest J.	Fleet admiral in the U.S. Navy, first commander-in-chief of the U.S. fleet (1941), chief of naval operations (1942-1945), and a vital member of the joint chiefs of staff during the war.
Konoye, Prince Fumimaro	Special envoy for the Emperor of Japan.
Lawrence, Ernest Orlando	Nobel prize-winning physicist (1939), director of the Radiation Laboratory at the University of California at Berkeley (1936-1958), and member of the Scientific Advisory Panel to the Interim Committee.
Leahy, William D.	Admiral serving as chief liaison officer to the joint chiefs of staff.
Lovett, Robert A.	Assistant secretary of war for air (1941-1945).
Lowe, Frank	Brigadier general assigned as executive officer to the Senate's Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program.
MacArthur, Douglas	General of the U.S. Army, supreme commander of forces in the southwestern Pacific and later of the Allied forces during the occupation of Japan (1945-1951).
McCormack, John	Democratic congressman from Massachusetts (1928-1971) and, during the war, House majority leader.

Marshall, George C.	Army chief of staff (1939-1945).
Martin, Joseph	Republican congressman from Massachusetts (1925-1967) and leader of the Republican minority in the House of Representatives.
May, Andrew Jackson	Democratic congressman from Kentucky (1931-1947) and chairman of the House Committee on Military Affairs.
Murray, Philip	Successor to John L. Lewis as president of Congress of Industrial Organizations (1940) and, two years later, militant president of the United Steel Workers of America (1942-1952).
Nimitz, Chester	Fleet admiral of the U.S. Navy and head of naval fighting forces in the Pacific.
Oppenheimer, J. Robert	American physicist and director of the atomic energy research project at Los Alamos, New Mexico (1942-1945). Later chairman of the General Advisory Committee of the A.E.C. (1947-1953).
Patterson, Robert P.	Under secretary of war (1940-1945); later secretary of war.
Purnell, William R.	Rear admiral in the U.S. Navy and member of the Military Policy Committee.
Ramsey, Norman F.	Physicist from Columbia University and member of the Target Committee.
Rayburn, Sam	Democratic congressman from Texas and speaker of the House of Representatives (1940-1946, 1949-1961).
Roosevelt, Franklin D.	President of the United States (1933-1945).
Sachs, Alexander	Russian-born Lehman Corporation economist instrumental in the creation of the advisory committee on uranium.
Smith, Harold	Director of the Bureau of the Budget.
Spaatz, Carl	Commanding general of the United States Strategic Air Forces.
Stalin, Joseph	Premier of Russia.
Stimson, Henry L.	Secretary of war (1940-1945).
Suzuki, Kantaro	Japanese prime minister who came to power in April 1945.
Szilard, Leo	Hungarian-born physicist, developer (along with Enrico Fermi) of the chain reaction system, and during the war, a member of Metlab.
Taber, John	Republican congressman from New York (1923-1963) and member of the House Committee on Military Appropriations.
Thomas, Elbert	Democratic senator from Utah (1933-1951) and chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Military Appropriations.
Togo, Shigenori	Foreign minister of the Suzuki government in Japan.
Truman, Harry S.	Democratic senator from Missouri (1934-1944) and, for most of the war, chairman of the Senate's Special Committee Investigating the National Defense Program. Elected Vice President in 1944 and elevated to the presidency upon the death of Franklin Roosevelt on April 12, 1944.
Urey, Harold C.	Nobel prize-winning (1934) professor of chemistry at Columbia (1934-1945) and research director of the Manhattan Project (1942-1945).
Wallace, Henry W.	Vice President of the United States (1941-1945); secretary of commerce (1945).
White, Wallace	Republican senator from Maine (1931-1949) and leader of the Republican minority in the Senate.



# Preface

Good history begins with a good story, and there is none better than the story of the Manhattan Project. It contains all the elements of high drama: an earth-shaking discovery; a desperate race for life or death; a climax that changed human affairs—all played out on a global stage in the most fearsome war ever waged.

No novelist could have created a more exciting plot or, for that matter, more memorable characters. There are the scientists, who stand at the very center of the Manhattan Project, seeking to penetrate the inner structure of the atom. In it, they find a bewitching beauty, but when its energy is unleashed, when its eager inventors confront the bomb's incredible destructiveness, they recoil. Albert Einstein gropes for the right English words to urge the President to make a Uranium bomb, then, years afterward, disowns the creation in disgust. Danish physicist Niels Bohr travels across the Atlantic to enlist the aid of scientists, only later to repeat the journey with dark prophecies of an arms race. J. Robert Oppenheimer drives himself to exhaustion to solve the puzzle of how to sustain an explosive nuclear reaction. Yet as he watches the first atomic fireball rise from the New Mexican desert, he thinks only of death and destruction.

One step removed, possessing a different kind of power, are the bureaucrats. They, too, must readjust their calculations as the atomic bomb changes the hand they hold. At first they imagine the weapon as nothing more than a big bomb. But soon they realize that the quantitative jump they can imagine so easily is, in fact, a frightening qualitative leap. Leslie Groves—soldier, super organizer, master of the Manhattan Project—literally sees as much. He lies near the test site, burying his face in the sand, awe-struck at the blast. It is brighter than anything he has ever beheld, brighter than the sun, like “several suns at midday.” Secretary of War Henry Stimson, eighty years old and ill, sees a new danger in the weapon on which he has hung so many hopes. It is a double-edged sword, he warns, “a Frankenstein which would eat us up or . . . a project ‘by which the peace of the world would be helped in becoming secure.’ ”

Farthest from the sunburst at ground zero but at the center of political power are the Presidents. They control a weapon whose astonishing force they have never seen but whose use, they slowly realize, will change everything. Franklin Roosevelt decides to build the bomb but refuses to say whether he will use it. With the project near completion, he dies unexpectedly, before the device can be tested. Four months later, as the war with Japan draws to a close, Harry Truman faces a terrible choice—to drop a bomb that may vaporize a city or to rely on a conventional invasion that may cost millions of lives. Still a novice President, he nevertheless appreciates the stakes implied by the “possession of a weapon that would not only revolutionize war but could alter the course of history and civilization.”



Such a story and such characters have long fascinated historians. They have told the tale scores of times and analyzed it over and over again. In their hands, the Manhattan Project has served as a lens through which to examine the triumphs and tensions of the Grand Alliance, the seeds of the cold war, and the emergence of a powerful new trinity—government, industry, and science.

This version is different. It covers many of the same themes but relies on raw documents to do it. The story unfolds in the words of those who were there. They speak with their own voices and from their own points of view. Sometimes their message is discreet and personal, conveyed in a diary entry or a letter. Sometimes it is broad and corporate, communicated through a position paper, the minutes of a committee meeting, or the results of a survey. Thus, this collection serves a dual purpose: to tell the story of an important wartime episode, the Manhattan Project, from as many perspectives and in as much detail as space permits; and to give readers the chance to do some history on their own, using the evidence in its most original form.

By piecing together the story and puzzling out its meaning, readers can begin to understand not just the Manhattan Project but history itself. They can be their own historians as they confront the sources and try to make sense of them. In the process, they may gain some valuable insights: that history is not a static record of past things but a creative act; that historians are not mere “messengers from the past,” shuttling back to the future with news of what happened long ago, but detectives and analysts, ferreting out information, making assessments, and searching for meaning.

Some explanation of strategies, organization, and the division of labors is in order. The present book originated in a collection of documents assembled by Jonathan F. Fanton and R. Hal Williams for a history course at Yale University. Source books often cover several events, presenting only a few documents for each. This book contains a large number of documents that follow a single episode from start to finish. The documents lead to no particular conclusion but leave room for readers to arrive at conclusions of their own.

It took Fanton and Williams countless hours to track down the original group of documents. Encyclopedic coverage was never the goal. The Manhattan Project has generated enough material to fill a library, and to cover it in detail would require more space than was available. Instead, adequacy, balance, and variety governed the search. There are enough documents here to tell the story, at least in its rough outlines and from several points of view.

Over the years, succeeding generations of instructors inherited the collection and added documents to it. When Michael Stoff received it, the manuscript had grown to nearly 400 pages. He added still more documents and spent the next several years shaping them into a book. That entailed removing about half of the documents, dividing them into seven sections, writing a general introduction and seven historiographical essays, and creating a timeline, cast of characters, bibliography, and set of maps. (In the college edition, he also prepared groups of study questions to guide students through the documents.)

For the sake of clarity, the documents are arranged in chronological order and not in order of their discovery. Arranging the documents, like selecting them, risks the charge of cutting the historical record to suit interpretive tastes. The hope is that the wieldiness of the collection and the coherence it achieves outweigh any risk. Great care, moreover, has been taken to avoid emphasizing any single interpretation.

To distinguish the collection still further, the intention was to have the documents photographed so readers could encounter them just as historians do. Unfortunately, that process took far too long. Worse still, many of the photographs turned out to be illegible. To preserve the look of the originals, the collection instead relies on meticulously reproduced facsimiles. Whenever possible, these reproductions duplicate the originals, including even typographical and spelling errors. A few of the documents are typeset, but most are near-exact reproductions. In many cases the documents have been tinted to achieve the look of age. Four typewriters from the 1940s, keyed to the original typefaces, were used to recreate diary entries, letters, memoranda, reports, cables, and minutes of committee meetings. The letterheads, classification stamps, even the marginal notations and signatures have been reproduced.

The result is a unique collection that presents a representative sample of the evidence as historians themselves encounter it. The facsimiles even offer a taste of the illicit pleasures available in the course of the historian's working day. Who, after all, can turn away from a letter or memorandum, worn brown with time, bearing a "Top Secret" stamp or the initials of a high-ranking official? There is a seductiveness in watching fallible men and women come into possession of immense power, all under the cloak of secrecy. That seductiveness—even of watching the drama, to say nothing of acting in it—should perhaps give us all pause.

Grants from the University Research Institute and the Vice President's Fund at the University of Texas at Austin furnished Michael Stoff with valuable time for turning a pile of documents into a book. Additional thanks to Gary Clifford, James Davidson, Jim Holmes, Mark Lytle, Michael Sherry, Allan Winkler, and the legions of students who offered their suggestions over the years. In one way or another, all helped to make this a better book. Thanks also to Niels Aaboe, Larry Goldberg, Ed Hanson, and David Follmer at McGraw-Hill for shepherding the project through the last crucial stages. Finally, a special word of appreciation for Christopher Rogers, former history editor at McGraw-Hill. He placed the book under contract, had patient faith in it, and offered nothing but support along the way.

M. B. S.

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