Atomic Bomb Seen Through Troubled Eyes

The first atomic bomb was a momentous creation that created plenty of toxic jobs, built radioactive communities, ended World War II, and killed thousands of people, including women and children. In *Trinity: A Graphic History of the First Atomic Bomb*, Jonathan Fetter-Vorm delves into the creation of this weapon, from the discovery of fusion to its use on Hiroshima. The text states the reasoning for using the bomb, while also exposing its repercussions on the world. *Trinity* discusses the people involved and all the energy it took to create the atomic bomb. The author provides background on most of the characters, but goes into the most specifics with Dr. Robert Oppenheimer, the lead scientist during the Manhattan Project. Through his characterization of Oppenheimer in the narrative, Fetter-Vorm is able to effectively record the United States government’s change in opinion on warfare, as well as how the creation and use of the atomic bomb was detrimental to the world.

The author sufficiently shows that the American government idealized the creation of the bomb. However, the government disregarded its aftermath by ignoring the moral aspects of its creation. Fetter-Vorm makes this apparent to the reader through the characterization of Oppenheimer, particularly when he is introduced. The scientist represents America’s ability to come up with the finances and labor to create the bomb, while also possessing the mindset to move forward with creating it. When Fetter-Vorm describes Oppenheimer as “Precocious… Brilliant… Troubled… Arrogant” (22), he introduces the scientist as someone that was smart
enough to create the weapon, but unstable enough to ignore the moral details of it – at least initially. Fetter-Vorm characterizes Oppenheimer as psychologically disturbed by stating that he tried to poison his professor while illustrating a close-up picture of Oppenheimer's eyes: demonstrating a physical representation of his mental instability.

Furthermore, the author goes on to imply Oppenheimer wants to contain the information by having the creation of the atomic bomb “…be done in isolation.” (25). He includes this fact to show how secretive the bomb was from the outside world, effectively insinuating that the more knowledge that the Manhattan Project acquired, the more obsessed the American government became with the bomb and the more they idealized it. It is this idealization that created the split in who was allowed to acquire certain information. Fetter-Vorm explains that the creation of the atomic bomb was the military’s best kept secret. Even President Truman was limited in what he could and could not know. The only information the government and parts of the military were receiving was positive information. The author includes this fact to help the reader understand why the military was so welcoming to such a dangerous weapon. Before testing it, Oppenheimer pleads to the bomb, “O mighty one, be gracious toward me!” (63), quoting the Bhagavad Gita because it proves the scientist views the weapon as a godlike entity that could end the war and stop the killing of soldiers and citizens on a grand scale. The bomb had gone from being an idea to an idolized creation.

Fetter-Vorm explains that once the bomb became a reality, the military finally understood how dangerous it could be, which helped him to question whether the bomb should have been created to begin with. The author utilizes Oppenheimer’s famous quotation, “Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds” (77), to exemplify the contrast in how the bomb is perceived in the text before and after the American government realized the bomb worked. Only a few pages
before the test, Oppenheimer compares the bomb to a god. Then, after the bomb is successful, he compares himself to death. Fetter-Vorm uses these drastic comparisons to help the reader understand the severity of the bomb and how intense the difference in opinions were.

By the end of the book, the author effectively displays that many people who worked on the Manhattan Project have shifted their views on its creation. This change in opinion happens after they realize the bomb was used on Japanese citizens, which causes many of them to question whether they made the right decision to join the project in the first place (137-138). What’s more, controversy around the bomb’s use further increases because many American citizens begin to fear eventual retaliation from enemy countries over the decision to deploy the weapon on civilians. Oppenheimer, who is an advocate for the atomic bomb at the beginning of the text has completely changed his position by the final pages, as evidenced by his public comments expressing his anxieties: “We have made a thing that, by all standards of the world we grew up in, is an evil thing.” (139). Through the use of this quotation, Fetter-Vorm shows an extreme change in the perception of the bomb and how that created regret within the United States government. Near the end of the graphic history, the author illustrates another close up of Oppenheimer with tired eyes and a disheveled expression (140) to exemplify the remorse many in the American government feel for using the bomb in such a reckless manner.

At the start of *Trinity*, the bomb is seen as a beacon of hope for the American government, but as the story progresses, harsh realizations create fear and division. Fetter-Vorm successfully utilizes the characterization of Oppenheimer to demonstrate this change. Through him, the author proves that while the atomic bomb was a revolutionary idea, just because it could be done does not mean it should have been done.
Work Cited