

Albert Einstein personally commented on his role in the making of an atomic bomb. He clarified that he did one thing—and one thing only—and that was to sign a letter to President Roosevelt.

Beyond that—Einstein said, in a short essay—he did nothing.

Einstein's essay answered a question put to him by Katsuo Hara, the editor of *Kaizo*. The Japanese magazine (which published its [first issue](#) in 1919 and its last in 1955) then published Einstein's September 22, 1952 response (in a special 1952 edition).

Hereafter is the text of Einstein's "single act" essay.

On My Participation In The Atom Bomb Project

by A. Einstein

My part in producing the atomic bomb consisted in a single act: I signed [a letter to President Roosevelt](#), pressing the need for experiments on a large scale to explore the possibilities for the production of an atomic bomb.

I was fully aware of the terrible danger to mankind in case this attempt succeeded. But the likelihood that the Germans were working on the same problem with a chance of succeeding forced me to this step. I could do nothing else although I have always been a convinced pacifist. To my mind, to kill in war is not a whit better than to commit ordinary murder.

As long, however, as the nations are not resolved to abolish war through common actions and to solve their conflicts and protect their interests by peaceful decisions on a legal basis, they feel compelled to prepare for war. They feel obliged to prepare all possible means, even the most detestable ones, so as not to be left behind in the general armament race. This road necessarily leads to war, a war which under the present conditions means universal destruction.

Under these circumstances the fight against means has no chance of success. Only the radical abolition of wars and of the threat of war can help. This is what one has to work for. One has to be resolved not to let himself be forced to actions that run counter to this goal. This is a severe demand on an individual who is conscious of his dependence on society. But it is not an impossible demand.

*Gandhi, the greatest political genius of our time has pointed the way. He has shown of what sacrifices people are capable once they have found the right way. His work for the liberation of India is a living testimony to the fact that a will governed by firm conviction is stronger than a seemingly invincible material power. (See *Ideas and Opinions*, by Albert Einstein, at [pages 165-66](#).)*

A [version of this letter](#) is maintained by The Albert Einstein Archives at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (for whom [Einstein laid the cornerstone](#) of the campus' first building). A thumbnail image is available, via the Archives, for online viewing.

The image at the top of this page is a still shot from historic footage filmed by an American crew member who witnessed the dropping of "Fat Man"—as the bomb was called, due to its shape—over the [Japanese city of Nagasaki](#). (Einstein's famous equation $E=mc^2$ —stating that a small amount of mass could be transformed into a massive amount of energy—is superimposed over the still shot.)

We can see the actual footage, where the still shot appears, in a silent-film compilation of events as U.S. military teams, on [Tinian Island](#), prepared both "[Little Boy](#)" (the name of the Hiroshima bomb) and "Fat Man," and then [dropped the bombs](#) over the two Japanese cities.

Move the video forward, to 20:47, to see [Bockscar](#) (a B-29), en route to Nagasaki, and the immediate aftermath of the bomb's detonation.

The embedded video footage is online via the Atomic Heritage Foundation and its channel at YouTube.

Credits:

Image depicting the mushroom cloud of "Fat Man" after it detonated above the Japanese town of Nagasaki. The image is a still shot from historic footage taken by the U.S. military on August 9, 1945.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Albert-Einstein-Role-in-the-Atom-Bomb-Project>

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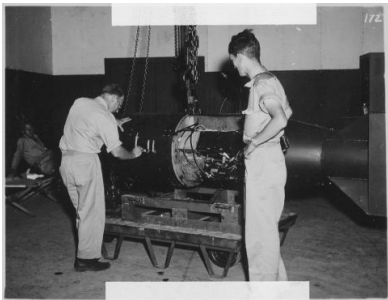
Atomic Bomb, Fat Man - Target, Nagasaki

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives. ARC Identifier 519397

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Assembling the Bomb - Little Boy, Unit L-11

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives. ARC Identifier 519395.

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