

“Thank God for the Atom Bomb” by Paul Fussell

From: *Thank God for the Atom Bomb and Other Essays* (Summit Books, 1988)

Author Background:

Paul Fussell was born in Pasadena, CA in 1924. He served the United States Army from 1943-1945. In October 1944 he landed in France as part of the 103rd Infantry Division. On November 11th, he experienced his first night on the front lines. He was wounded while fighting in France as a second lieutenant. Fussell suffered from depression and rage for years following his military service. In his 1996 autobiography he associated this condition with the dehumanization of his military service and his anger at the way the United States government and popular culture romanticized warfare. Since the 1980s Fussell has been an outspoken critic of the glorification of military service and warfare. Paul Fussell is now retired after a long career as a historian, professor, social critic, and author.

Please read the excerpts from: “Thank God for the Atom Bomb”

“Those for whom the use of the A-bomb was ‘wrong’ seem to be implying that it would have been better to allow thousands on thousands of American and Japanese infantrymen to die.

“Planners of the invasion assumed that it would require a full year, to November 1946, for the Japanese to be sufficiently worn down by land-combat attrition to surrender. By that time, one million American casualties was the expected price.

“The true, climactic, and successful effort of the Japanese peace advocates... did not begin in deadly earnest until after the second bomb had destroyed Nagasaki. The Nagasaki bomb was thus the trigger to all the developments that lead to peace.

“Why delay and allow one more American high school kid to see his own intestines blown out of his body and spread before him in the dirt while he screams and screams when with the new bomb we can end the whole thing just like that?

“The purpose of the bomb was not to ‘punish’ people but to stop the war.

“Knowing that unflattering truth by experience, soldiers have every motive for wanting a war stopped, by any means.

“(Truman) knew war, and he knew better than some of his critics then and now what he was doing and why he was doing it. ‘Having found the bomb,’ he said, ‘we have used it... We have used it to shorten the agony of young Americans.’”

Questions to answer for homework:

- Here, the “event” refers to the dropping of the atom bomb.
- Please use specific textual examples to support your answers.
 - o How did the author interact with the event? Was he close or far away? Was he or his loved ones directly influenced by the event? These questions will help us understand how he perceives the event. Usually, a perception that is up close and personal will sway the author to internalize the devastation of the event.
 - o How does the author place the event in a historical setting? Does he focus primarily on the immediate results, or does he think of long-term effects, or both?
 - o Does the author imagine alternative possibilities of the event? If so, how do these ideas shape the authors perception of the event?
 - o Does the author use an outside source to corroborate their argument? How would this corroboration substantiate their argument?