

Case Study Number 2: Wehrner von Braun

Pre-class preparation:

I. Read the following World Wide Web pages. The pages are all very short. You will want to print a copy of each page for the in-class discussion.

A. From NASA Marshall Space Flight Center (pages are linked)

1. <http://liftoff.msfc.nasa.gov/Academy/History/vonBraun/vonBraun.html> "Wernher Von Braun"
2. <http://liftoff.msfc.nasa.gov/Academy/History/vonBraun/early.html> "Von Braun: Early Life"
3. <http://liftoff.msfc.nasa.gov/Academy/History/vonBraun/germany.html> "Von Braun: Germany"
4. <http://liftoff.msfc.nasa.gov/Academy/History/vonBraun/moving.html> "Von Braun: Moving to the U.S."
5. <http://liftoff.msfc.nasa.gov/Academy/History/vonBraun/SpaceAge.html> "The Beginning of the Space Age"
6. <http://liftoff.msfc.nasa.gov/Academy/History/vonBraun/spaceage2.html> "Von Braun: The Space Age Continues"
7. <http://liftoff.msfc.nasa.gov/Academy/History/vonBraun/press-release.html> "Outstanding German Scientists Being Brought to the US"

B. From the Alabama Academy of Honor

8. Start at <http://www.archives.state.al.us/famous/academy/ahome.html>, then find Von Braun

C. Paper by Charles Donefer (pages are linked)

9. Download and read the paper by Charles Donefer (Donefer Material).

D. Satire by Tom Lehrer

10. Download and read Wernher Von Braun - lyrics to a song by Tom Lehrer (lyrics).

E. A Deeper Look

11. http://stahlbrandt.com/html/history/v1_v2_technical.html
12. <http://dept.english.upenn.edu/~afilreis/Holocaust/nasa-nazis.html> "NASA's Nazis"
13. <http://info.greenwood.com>, then go to title search, search for a book titled "The Nazi Rocketeers", and read the review of the book, which you will find under the "detailed view" tab.
14. Download and read the paper "KZ Memorial Mettelbau DORA".
15. <http://www.benthere.com/Travel/Europe/Germany/Germanytxt11.html>
16. <http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/camps/buchenwald/press/reuters-040395.html>

F. Today's Perspective

17. Download and read the paper Rocket Pioneers Retain their Passion (MSNBC Material).

II. Be prepared to discuss the following questions in class:

1. What do you believe motivated Von Braun to work for the German military (as early as 1934)? Do you think that Von Braun believed in the Nazi cause?
2. What do you believe motivated Von Braun to come to America after the war? Do you think that Von Braun had patriotic feelings for the US?
3. Consider Tom Lehrer's lyrics concerning Von Braun:
*"Don't say that he's hypocritical
Say rather that he's apolitical (meaning not caring about politics)
'Once the rockets are up who cares where they come down?,
That's not my department,' says Wernher Von Braun"*
Do you believe this is an accurate assessment of Von Braun's attitudes?
4. Do you think it is ethical for an engineer to develop a product (or technology) and not care how it will be used?
5. What do you believe motivated Von Braun to work for the Nazis and then come to America?
6. Comment on the use of slave labor at Pennemunde. Needless to say, this is an extreme case, but do you believe that an engineer has any responsibility for ensuring safe and humane working conditions for laborers and co-workers?
7. Do you believe that an engineer or scientist's technical contributions should be assessed independently of his or her behavior?
8. Do you believe that history has fairly judged Von Braun?
9. Do you believe that the US government acted ethically concerning Von Braun?