

A Duty to Starve:

The Minnesota Starvation Experiment

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I discovered the Minnesota Starvation Experiment while searching for a historically significant scientific topic. I am very interested in science and its historical influence, but I struggled to find a scientific compromise. When I learned about the Minnesota Starvation Experiment, I found it captivating because it showed the intersection of humanities and science, two topics that can feel unconnected.

Next, I began searching for primary sources that helped me understand the specific details and the legacy of the Minnesota Starvation Experiment. Early in my research, I went to University of Minnesota Libraries, where I found numerous primary sources on Conscientious Objection throughout history. Though the U of MN had many helpful primary resources, there were few sources specific to the Minnesota Starvation Experiment. For these more specific sources I went to the Minnesota Historical Society, which had vast collections on Ancel Keys and Max Kampleman, one of the participants in the Minnesota Starvation Experiment. While conducting my research, I did 9 interviews with the most preeminent experts on the Minnesota Starvation Experiment, famine, and ethics. Because the Minnesota Starvation Experiment is not well known, many of its past and current implications are not well recognized, such as its contribution to US foreign policy during the Cold War. This lack of information and analysis allowed me to establish new historical connections.

After my initial research, I wrote summaries of my topic to put on my website with visuals that supported my writing. Throughout my research I collected quotes and added them to my website, and improved layout. I constantly sought feedback and worked to improve my project in any way possible. After putting together my website, I added more historical analysis, interconnecting my project through the theme of ethical conflict.

In adding this theme of ethical conflict, I did research on the ethics of history. In the end, I decided to use my project as a way to present the ethical conflicts that arise from the Minnesota Starvation Experiment, rather than include my personal feelings on the matter. As I advanced my research of ethics, I found it increasingly inappropriate to make judgments on the ethics of the experiment, because in doing so, I would limit readers understanding and deter individual analysis. Through my website I hope to provide many perspectives, giving readers an opportunity to question, apply, and reflect on their own ethical standards. I felt that the wide-ranging interactive options available in the website category provided a unique way for me to communicate this exploration of ethics.

My topic is an unique example of conflict and compromise in history. The Minnesota Starvation Experiment was a compromise for Conscientious Objectors, providing an opportunity to serve meaningfully in the US war effort without violating personal values. While Conscientious Objectors did volunteer to serve in the experiment, they were required to serve the US military, raising questions on the voluntary nature of the experiment. Despite the ethical conflicts stemming from the experiment, this compromise has made a irreproducible contribution to science.