

THE ABOLITIONIST VIEWING GUIDE FOR CHRISTOPHER NOLAN'S

OPPENHEIMER



New York Campaign to
NYCAN
Abolish Nuclear Weapons

www.nycan.nyc
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Oppenheimer, directed by Christopher Nolan, is the story of J. Robert Oppenheimer and the Manhattan Project: the top-secret military operation to develop the world's first nuclear weapons. This clandestine collaboration between scientists and the United States military that opened the door to the nuclear age was aptly called The Manhattan Project, as it was in New York City where it all began.

The Manhattan Project and its legacy lives on in NYC and across the world. To learn more see our Nuclear NYC Map www.nuclearnyc.com As New Yorkers, as human beings everywhere, we have a moral responsibility to learn this story, and share it forward into action for nuclear abolition. In this spirit, we bring you an Abolitionist Viewer's Guide to Watching Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer*.

ASK QUESTIONS

Asking questions is critical for abolition. Here are examples of questions to consider while you watch *Oppenheimer* :

- **What moral questions are being introduced in this film?**
 - **How are these questions addressed? Whose voices are most prominent in this film?**
 - **Who is made to be the hero within the narrative of this film?**
 - **Does this film amplify the voices of atomic bomb victims, atomic bomb survivors, Downwinders, and those exposed to long-lived radiation caused by the Manhattan Project and the nuclear industry?**
 - **Are there implicit or explicit ways that this film contributes to military violence (past, present, and future)?**
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ARRIVE INFORMED

Familiarize yourself with the legacy of J. Robert Oppenheimer's work for the Manhattan Project and be open to a more comprehensive story about nuclear weapons.

The goal of the Manhattan Project was to weaponize the splitting of the atom. Headquartered initially in New York City, in 1943 the Manhattan Project secretly began operating out of Los Alamos, New Mexico, situated within the tribal lands of Pueblo Nations. By August 1945, the purpose of the Manhattan Project was realized in the unspeakable devastation of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki where hundreds of thousands of people perished.

Many people believe that the total destruction of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended the war. However, the Japanese military was significantly weakened by this time, and Japan was already prepared to surrender due to the threat of Russian invasion.



ARRIVE INFORMED

According to Hiroshima survivor Setsuko Thurlow, "we survivors reject the American myth that the use of atomic bombs was necessary to avoid a costly invasion of Japan and to save lives. This argument can be refuted for many reasons.... [primarily] the U.S. desire to position itself as the dominant power in East Asia in the post-war period. In addition, decision-makers wanted to test the new weapons of two different kinds (uranium and plutonium)...With the understanding of this historical perspective, we survivors saw ourselves as pawns in the opening moves of the Cold War rather than as sacrifices on the altar of peace".

Still to this day, the Manhattan Project lives on through radioactive harms wrought by the arms race between the United States and Russia, and the seven other nations (U.K., China, France, India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea) that have pursued technologies that can destroy all life on earth. Nuclear weapons development has resulted in test detonations that have been conducted all over the globe, primarily on Indigenous Land.

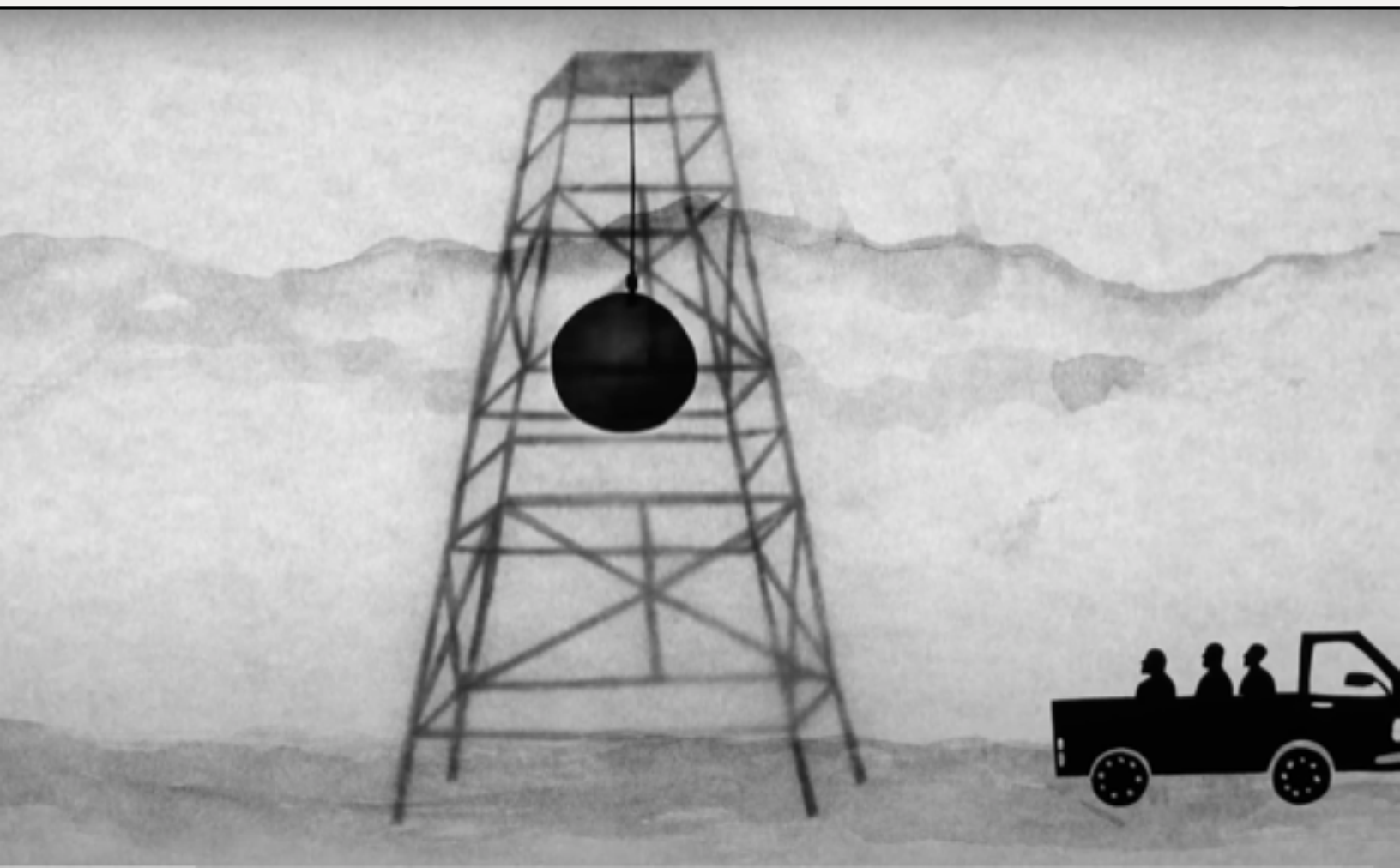


ARRIVE INFORMED

After the first Trinity Test in New Mexico and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, the United States alone detonated over 1,000 nuclear weapons across the American Southwest, the Marshall Islands, and in Amchitka, Alaska.

The number of deaths and illnesses caused by nuclear weapons development and testing is ultimately unknowable, though the sheer amount of human-made radiation in the environment will continue to disrupt ecosystems and cause illness in humans and other living beings for thousands of generations to come.

Today, the threat of nuclear war is the highest the world has seen since the Cuban Missile Crisis.



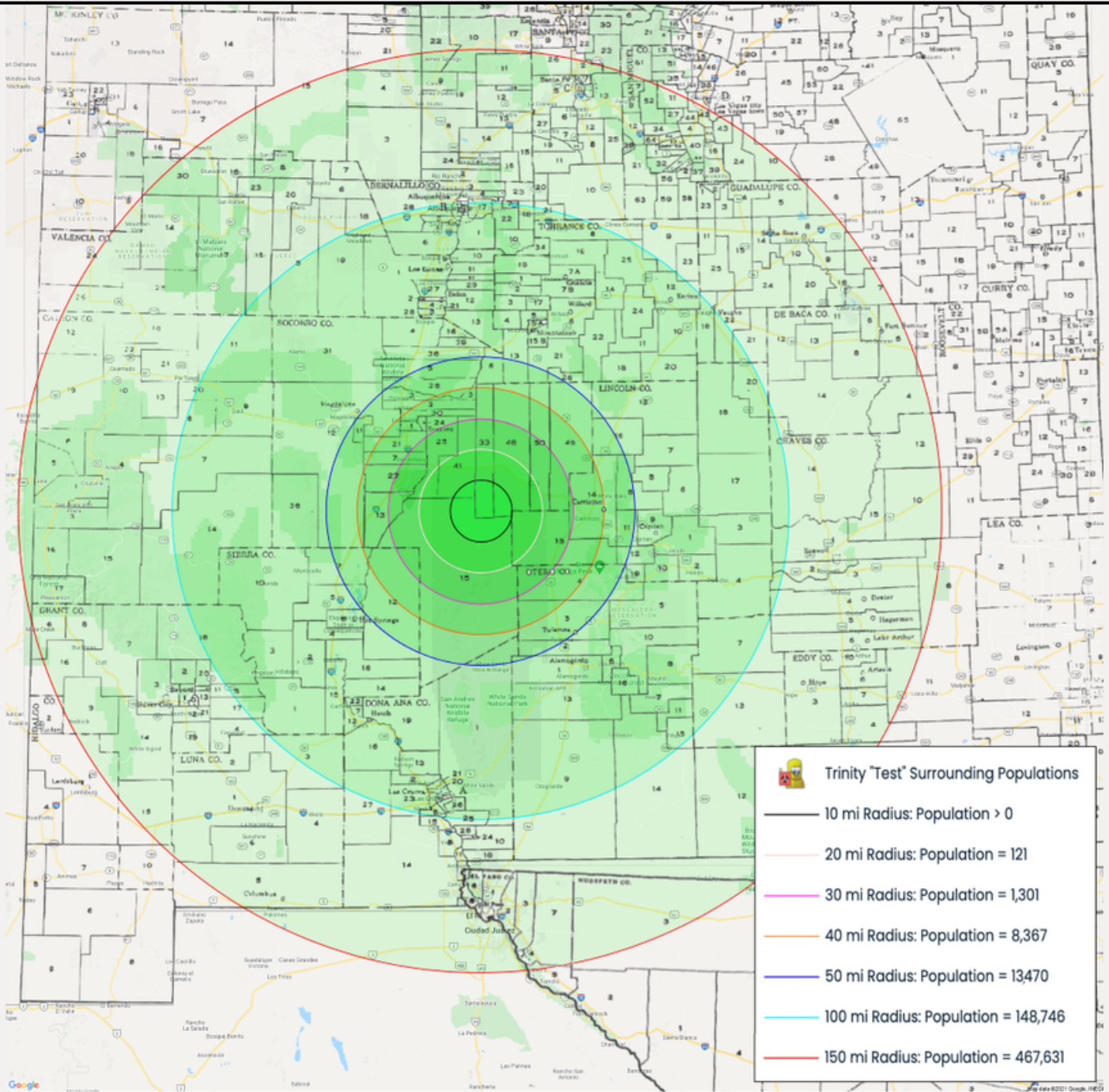
THE TRINITY TEST

Oppenheimer includes a depiction of the Trinity Test, the first-ever detonation of an atomic bomb. The plutonium-fueled "gadget" (as it was referred to by the scientists at Los Alamos) was detonated in Alamogordo, New Mexico, just north of the White Sands National Monument. The 40,000 people living nearby were not evacuated or warned of the test and were not made aware of the harmful effects of radiation exposure. Residents described the blast as a bright flash of light, followed by a plume of ash that rained radioactive particles onto their houses, farmlands, and into waterways.

Due to the long-term impact of ionizing radiation, "Downwinders," or those living nearby nuclear test sites, uranium mines, nuclear power plants, nuclear bomb factories, nuclear waste dumps, and nuclear adjacent operations may still be experiencing negative health effects related to radioactive fallout and other types of exposure. The Trinity Downwinders in New Mexico have faced multiple generations of cancer, death, and reproductive health problems but are currently not included in the U.S. Government's Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) and therefore have not been compensated for their unwilling participation in the Manhattan Project.



THE TRINITY TEST: POPULATIONS LIVING NEARBY THE EXPLOSION



Provided by the Tularosa Downwinders Consortium

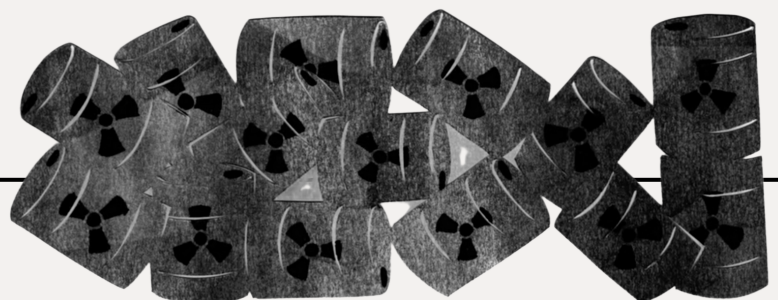
MORE ABOUT: URANIUM FROM NYC TO NEW MEXICO

Uranium is the primary material used to produce nuclear weapons. During the initial stages of the Manhattan Project, uranium was brutally procured from the Shinkolobwe mine in the former Belgian Congo by a colonialist mining company. These uranium miners worked without protective gear and were unaware of the dangers of radiation exposure.

A staggering 1,200 tons of this uranium were stored in a warehouse on Staten Island. An additional 300,000 pounds of uranium were stored at the Baker and Williams Warehouses on West 20th Street in Manhattan. Approximately 3.75 tons of thorium oxalate sludge was stored at the Wolff-Alport Chemical Company Warehouse in Queens. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, this company buried its radioactive waste onsite and may have even dumped radioactive materials into New York City's sewer system.

The uranium would later be shipped from NYC around the country to three secret “nuclear cities” of the Manhattan Project: Los Alamos, Hanford, and Oakridge. By the 1950s, uranium ore was heavily mined within the United States.

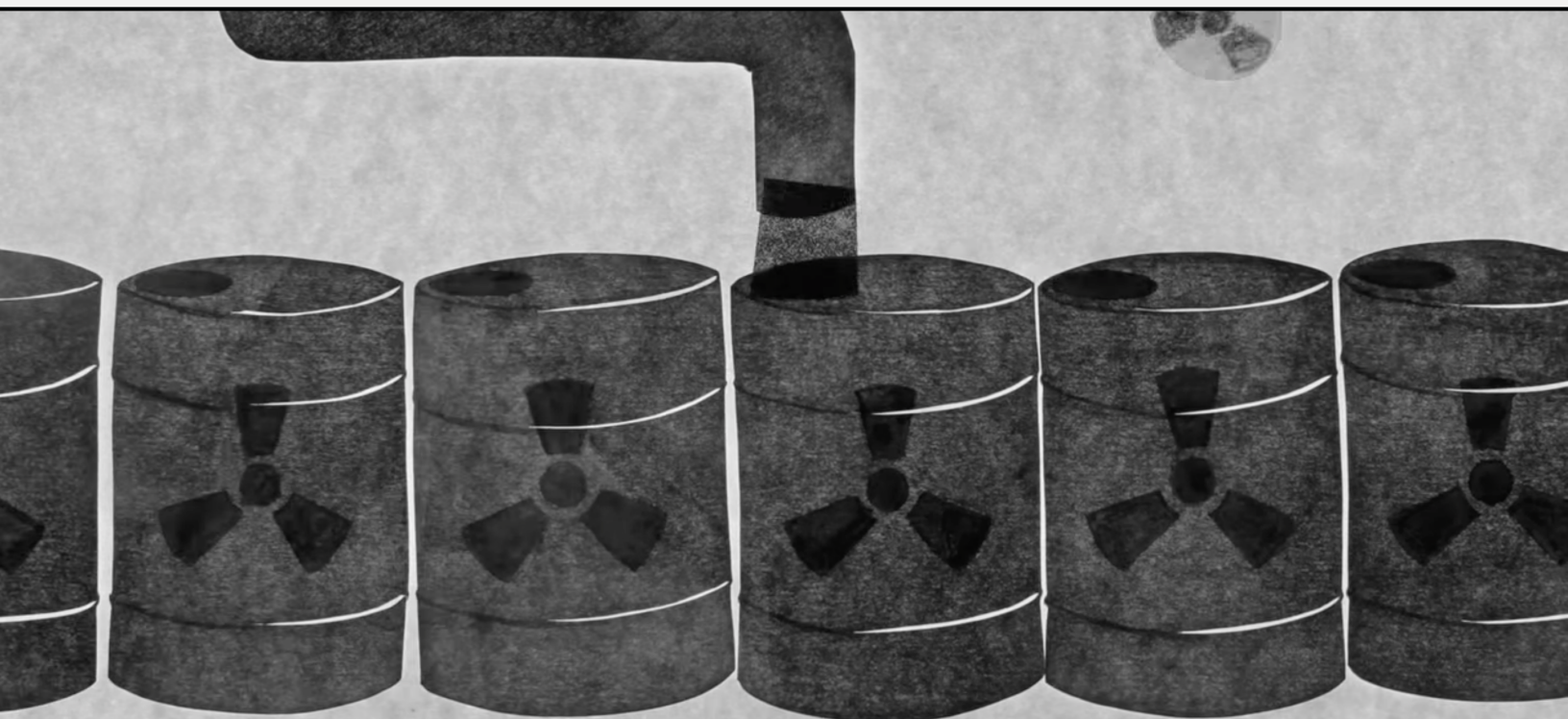
Almost half of all recoverable uranium in the U.S. lies in New Mexico, primarily found on Indigenous Lands. During the Manhattan Project, the majority of miners were members of the Navajo Nation. They worked in perilous conditions, and the lack of safety regulations within the mines resulted in widespread contamination across the region. Currently, there are 1,100 abandoned uranium mines scattered across the Navajo Nation.



MORE ABOUT: THE CHURCH ROCK SPILL

On July 16, 1979— the 34th anniversary of the Trinity Test— the largest nuclear accident to date in the United States took place when a dam failed at the Nuclear United Corporation uranium mill near Church Rock, New Mexico. More than one thousand tons of radioactive detritus and 95 million gallons of radioactive wastewater flowed into the Puerco River.

Despite its magnitude, the Church Rock catastrophe is barely mentioned in public discourse. The ongoing radioactive harms of the Church Rock spill have been systematically ignored and continue to wreak havoc on local populations, specifically members of the Navajo Nation. According to a U.S. Government study on uranium exposure "about a quarter of Navajo women and some infants... had high levels of radioactive metal in their systems, decades after mining for Cold War weaponry ended on their reservation" (Grand Canyon Trust).



ACTION FOR ABOLITION



Here are actions you can take to support affected communities and efforts for nuclear abolition:

- **Share this information** with your communities to **normalize disarmament**. Our cause can only be achieved through local and international awareness and support. Together we can denormalize nuclear proliferation and the false idea that nuclear deterrence prevents war. **The only prevention is abolition.**
- **Support RECA:** Downwinders in New Mexico, including affected communities across the United States and Pacific, are calling to extend the **Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA)** along with amendments that will provide restitution and access to cancer screenings for those affected by Trinity Test. Call on your legislators to support the extension of and amendments to RECA. For more information about supporting RECA Amendments, S.1751 and H.R.4426 see: www.trinitydownwinders.com
- **Support the TPNW: The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)** is a legally binding international agreement that prohibits the use, the threat of use, the possession, and the development of nuclear weapons. Sixty-eight countries have ratified or acceded to the Treaty since its adoption in 2017. The United States is not yet a signatory to the TPNW.
 - Get your country to join the [#nuclearban](https://www.icanw.org/) - [jointheban.icanw.org](https://www.jointheban.icanw.org)
 - Here is a template to write to your government: [jointheban.icanw.org/write_government](https://www.jointheban.icanw.org/write_government)
 - Share ratification kits: [jointheban.icanw.org/ratification_kit](https://www.jointheban.icanw.org/ratification_kit)



ACTION FOR ABOLITION

Here are some organizations to get you started with nuclear abolition:

New York Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (NYCAN) www.nycan.nyc

International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)
www.icanw.org

Youth Arts New York/Hibakusha Stories www.hibakushastories.org

Reaching Critical Will (RCW) www.reachingcriticalwill.org

International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW)
www.ippnw.org

Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium www.trinitydownwinders.com

Youth for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (Y4TPNW)
www.youthfortpnw.net

Nuclear Truth Project www.nucleartruthproject.org

Institute for Energy and Environmental Research (IEER) www.ieer.org



FURTHER READING



On Oppenheimer and the Manhattan Project:
www.thebulletin.org/magazine/2023-07

On the Trinity Test and the harms it caused:
www.trinitydownwinders.com/_files/ugd/2b2028_c92fea5300724b2cbcd1ae585aeb241a.pdf

www.sciencehistory.org/stories/magazine/in-the-shadow-of-oppenheimer

On Los Alamos:
www.motherjones.com/politics/2003/05/fear-and-fallout-los-alamos

On the TPNW
www.reachingcriticalwill.org/disarmament-fora/nuclear-weapon-ban

On the Church Rock disaster and the impacts of uranium mining Navajo Nation:
www.storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/bcc266d0937e4e24adfb65c36b93884f

For more information on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons:
www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/americans-insist-the-atom-bomb-ended-the-war-in-japan--ignoring-its-human-cost/2020/08/06/2095f314-d76f-11ea-aff6-220dd3a14741_story.html



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The Nuclear Age In Six Movements and If You Love This Planet

Special thanks to Robert Croonquist