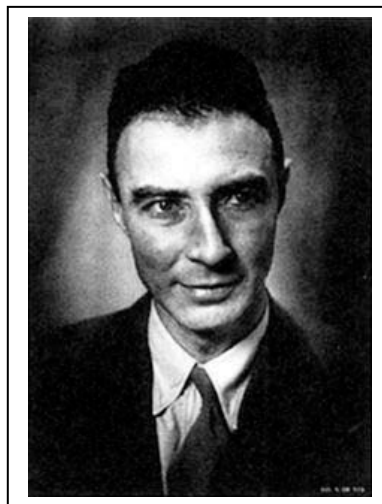


James Robert Oppenheimer (1904 - 1967)

Oppenheimer was an American scientist who became an expert on nuclear physics. From 1943 to 1945 he was director of the Los Alamos laboratory in the United States, where the first atomic bombs were constructed.

Oppenheimer was born to Julius Oppenheimer who had emigrated to the United States from Germany and Ella Friedman, a painter. Oppenheimer studied at the Ethical Culture Society School. He entered Harvard University one year late due to an attack of colitis. During the interim, he went with a former English teacher to recuperate in New Mexico, where he fell in love with horseback riding and the mountains and plateau of the Southwest.



At Harvard, he majored in chemistry, but also studied topics beyond science, including Greek, architecture, classics, art, and literature. He made up for the delay caused by his illness, taking six courses each term and graduating in just three years. Oppenheimer's clumsiness in the laboratory made it apparent that his forte was theoretical, not experimental physics, so he left in 1926 for the University of Göttingen to study under Max Born. He was enthusiastic in discussions, sometimes to the point of taking over seminar sessions, a fact that used to irritate a few of Born's pupils. In 1927 Oppenheimer obtained his Ph.D. at the young age of 22.

At the University of Leiden, the Netherlands, where he impressed those there by giving lectures in Dutch despite having little experience with the language. There he was given the nickname of "Opje," which was later Anglicized by his students as "Oppie". Oppenheimer's papers were considered difficult to understand. He was sometimes criticized for making mathematical mistakes, presumably out of haste.

Before his Berkeley professorship began, Oppenheimer was diagnosed with a mild case of tuberculosis. But he was also emotionally troubled throughout his life, and professed to experiencing periods of depression. A tall, thin chain smoker who often neglected to eat during periods of intellectual discomfort and concentration.

The collaboration of Oppenheimer and Pauling was nipped in the bud when Pauling began to suspect that Oppenheimer was becoming too close to his wife. One of the incident disquieted Oppenheimer. Pauling said about him as a pacifist.