

J. ROBERT OPPENHEIMER "FATHER OF THE BOMB" HAS HIS SECURITY CLEARANCE REVOKED
ON JUNE 29, 1954

THIS ARTICLE IS IN TWO PARTS

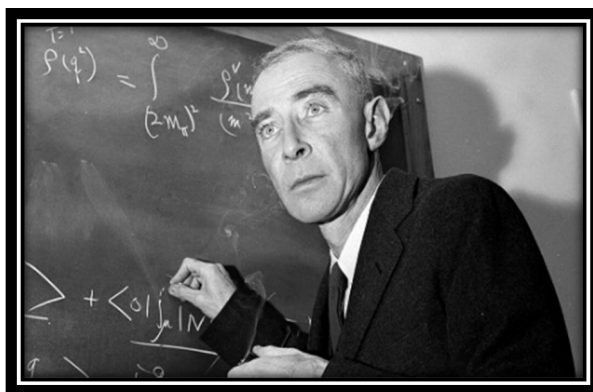
PART ONE

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PART TWO

U.S. RESTORES J. ROBERT OPPENHEIMER'S SECURITY CLEARANCE AFTER 69 YEARS **AND 55 YEARS**
AFTER HIS DEATH IN 1967!

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PART ONE

Few would dispute the vital contributions physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer made not just to physics, but to the national security interests of the United States. So, it is an odd quirk of history that the former director of Los Alamos National Laboratory and former chair of the General Advisory Committee of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) should find himself accused of disloyalty and being a national security risk, sparking a high-profile hearing culminating in the loss of the scientist's security clearance.

Despite his long history of service on behalf of the US government, there was growing suspicion of Oppenheimer by the early 1950s. The physicist had several Communist acquaintances dating back to the 1930s, and had implicated some of his friends as Soviet agents during an inquiry back in 1942-testimony which he later admitted was "a tissue of lies". His outspoken opposition to the development of the hydrogen bomb-accomplished on November 1, 1952-did little to allay suspicions, and the AEC was compiling a mounting file of Oppenheimer's alleged questionable activities. By early December, AEC representatives had removed all secret papers and documents pertaining to the General Advisory Commission from Oppenheimer's Princeton office.

Oppenheimer's troubles were further exacerbated by the onset of the McCarthy Era. A key component of the Republican Party platform in 1952 was the need to rid the Federal Government of "subversives" who had supposedly infiltrated the system, along with an overhaul of loyalty and security programs. Senator Joseph McCarthy's call for a tough anti-Communist drive at that year's convention received a standing ovation. When Dwight D. Eisenhower was sworn in as the 34th US president, McCarthy became chairman of the Senate's Investigations Subcommittee, with broad power to choose investigative targets. Other appointees in the new administration wasted no time in unveiling a new security policy under which a government employee not only had to be judged "loyal" to serve the country; his or her background had to be "clearly consistent with the interests of national security.

In December 1953, just four days before Christmas, Oppenheimer was accused of having associated with Communists in the past, of delaying the naming of Soviet agents, and of opposing the building of the hydrogen bomb. A subsequent security hearing by the AEC declared him not guilty of treason but ruled he should not have access to military secrets, and his contract as an AEC advisor-his one remaining link with that body-was terminated. The AEC issued its decision and opinions on June 29, 1954, with a vote of 4 to 1 to revoke Oppenheimer's security clearance, citing "fundamental defects of character", and Communist associations "far beyond the tolerable limits of prudence and self-restraint which are to be expected of one holding the high positions" he had held since 1942.

The lone dissenting opinion came from Henry DeWolf Smyth, who concluded "there is no indication in the entire record that Dr. Oppenheimer has ever divulged any secret information," despite nearly 11 years of constant surveillance that DeWolf believed was "supplemented by enthusiastic amateur help from powerful personal enemies." "In his opinion, Oppenheimer was not subversive of questionable loyalty and moral character, but "an able, imaginative human being with normal human weaknesses and failings."

While the press was almost unanimously favorable to the AEC's majority verdict, Oppenheimer's case became a cause célèbre in the world of science because of its implications concerning the political and moral issues relating to the role of scientists in government. The Federation of American Scientists quickly came to his defense with a protest against the trial, and Albert Einstein and 25 colleagues at Princeton declared themselves "proud to give the public expression" to their "confidence in [Oppenheimer's] loyalty and patriotic devotion." Ironically, in October Oppenheimer was unanimously re-elected as a director of the Institute of Advanced Study in Princeton, whose board included at least one member of the Commission who had revoked his security clearance.

Once the Communist hysteria began to fade and the Cold War declined, Oppenheimer began to recover from that painful episode, and he spent the last years of his life developing his concept of the relationship between science and society. In 1963, President Lyndon B. Johnson presented Oppenheimer with the AEC's Enrico Fermi Award. Three years later the physicist retired from the Institute and died of throat cancer the following year.

At his funeral, Smyth (now a Congressman) cited Oppenheimer's many contributions to the nation and expressed profound regret at the shabby way the government had repaid that service:

"Such a wrong can never be righted; such a blot on our history never erased."

PART TWO

U.S. RESTORES J. ROBERT OPPENHEIMER'S SECURITY CLEARANCE AFTER 69 YEARS AND 55 YEARS AFTER HIS DEATH IN 1967.



DECEMBER 20, 2022

Oppenheimer fell from grace after the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) alleged he had ties to communism and revoked his security clearance in 1954. Now, (Dec 16, 2022) almost 70 years later, the United States Department of Energy has reversed the decision, stating the trial was a "flawed process that violated the Commission's regulations."

"As time has passed, more evidence has come to light of the bias and unfairness of the process that Dr. Oppenheimer was subjected to, while the evidence of his loyalty and love of country have only been further affirmed," Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm says in the statement.

What's more, a review of the historical evidence shows the 1954 decision was less born out of genuine national security concerns than it was a product of the AEC's disagreement with Oppenheimer on nuclear weapons policy, Granholm writes in the order.

After World War II, Oppenheimer opposed nuclear proliferation and argued against developing the hydrogen bomb, writes Dan Whitcomb for Reuters.

Before the decision to revoke his clearance, Oppenheimer was widely regarded as a brilliant scientist. He graduated from Harvard in three years, researched at the University of Cambridge in England, earned a Ph.D. at the University of Göttingen in Germany, and became a professor at the University of California, Berkeley.

He's most well-known for leading the Manhattan Project, a mission to develop the atomic bomb during World War II. Oppenheimer was then the director of the Los Alamos Laboratory. Described in his obituary as having a "special genius for administration," he built a team of 4,000 top-notch scientists and completed the mission in two years. The weaponry was then used to kill about 214,000 people in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, though the exact death toll is unknown.

Historians have long advocated for a reversal of the AEC's decision, writes the *New York Times's* William J. Broad. In 2014, the Obama administration released declassified pages from the trial, and experts say they show no evidence of disloyalty or wrongdoing.

"I'm overwhelmed with emotion," Kai Bird, co-author of *American Prometheus*, a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Oppenheimer, tells the *Times*. "History matters, and what was done to Oppenheimer in 1954 was a travesty, a black mark on the honor of the nation."

Senator Patrick Leahy praised the reversal in a statement: "This decision reaffirms that government scientists, whether renowned like Oppenheimer or a technician doing his or her daily job—including those willing to raise safety concerns or to express unpopular opinions on matters of national security—can do so freely and that their cases will be fairly reviewed based on facts, not personal animus or politics."

From 1947 to 1966, Oppenheimer also served as Director of Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study. There, he stimulated discussion and research on quantum and relativistic physics in the School of Natural Sciences. Oppenheimer retired from the Institute in 1966 and died of throat cancer on February 18, 1967.