

Reappraising Oppenheimer

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Reappraising Oppenheimer
Centennial Studies and Reflections

Edited by
Cathryn Carson and David A. Hollinger

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Contents

PREFACE	xi
INTRODUCTION	
<i>Cathryn Carson</i>	1
PART 1: Oppenheimer as Physicist	11
CHAPTER 1: From Theoretical Physics to the Bomb: J. Robert Oppenheimer and the American School of Theoretical Physics	
<i>David C. Cassidy</i>	13
CHAPTER 2: J. Robert Oppenheimer's Path to Black Holes	
<i>Karl Hufbauer</i>	31
PART 2: The Communist Question	49
CHAPTER 3: Was Robert Oppenheimer a "Closet Communist"? The Debate and the Evidence	
<i>Gregg Herken</i>	51
CHAPTER 4: Robert Oppenheimer and the Communist Party	
<i>Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin</i>	57
CHAPTER 5: The Puzzles of Interpreting J. Robert Oppenheimer, His Politics, and the Issues of His Possible Communist Party Membership	
<i>Barton J. Bernstein</i>	77

PART 3: The Soviet Comparison: New Insights	113
CHAPTER 6: Parallel Lives? Oppenheimer and Khariton <i>David Holloway</i>	115
CHAPTER 7: The Making of the Soviet Bomb and the Shaping of Cold War Science <i>Alexei Kojevnikov</i>	129
PART 4: Postwar Politics: The Oppenheimer Case in Context	147
CHAPTER 8: “The Jig Was Up”: J. Robert Oppenheimer and the International Control of Atomic Energy, 1947-49 <i>James G. Hershberg</i>	149
CHAPTER 9: The Atomic Secret in Red Hands? American Suspensions of Theoretical Physicists During the Early Cold War <i>David Kaiser</i>	185
CHAPTER 10: Something Resembling Justice: John Francis Neylan and the AEC Personnel Security Hearings at Berkeley, 1948-49 <i>Stephanie Young</i>	217
CHAPTER 11: Killing the Messenger: Robert Oppenheimer and Caltech’s Project Vista <i>W. Patrick McCray</i>	253
CHAPTER 12: The Fortunate Fox <i>Richard Polenberg</i>	267
PART 5: Cultural Resonances	273
CHAPTER 13: Oppenheimer’s Guru <i>J.L. Heilbron</i>	275
CHAPTER 14: The Scientist in Mass Society: J. Robert Oppenheimer and the Postwar Liberal Imagination <i>Charles Thorpe</i>	293
CHAPTER 15: Oppenheimer and the Sense of the Tragic <i>Robert P. Crease</i>	315

PART 6: The Public Oppenheimer	325
CHAPTER 16: Scientists, Arms, and the State: J. Robert Oppenheimer and the Twentieth Century <i>Daniel J. Kevles</i>	327
CHAPTER 17: Intersections: Oppenheimer and Einstein <i>S.S. Schweber</i>	343
CHAPTER 18: Oppenheimer in Film: A Transcript <i>Jon Else and Peter Galison</i>	361
 AFTERWORD <i>David A. Hollinger</i>	385
 GUIDE TO FURTHER READING	391
 CONTRIBUTORS	397
 INDEX	403



J. Robert Oppenheimer and Ernest O. Lawrence on an excursion, 1930s.
Courtesy The J. Robert Oppenheimer Memorial Committee.



Oppenheimer entertaining at Los Alamos during the war.
Courtesy Los Alamos National Laboratory.



J. Robert Oppenheimer, Enrico Fermi, and Ernest O. Lawrence at the University of California Radiation Laboratory, probably late 1930s.
Courtesy Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.



Ernest O. Lawrence, Glenn T. Seaborg, and J. Robert Oppenheimer in early 1946, at the controls of the magnet of Lawrence's 184-inch cyclotron.
Courtesy Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.



Kitty and Robert Oppenheimer visiting Japan, 1960.
Courtesy The J. Robert Oppenheimer Memorial Committee.



Oppenheimer receiving the Fermi Award from President Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963.
Courtesy Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

Preface

J. Robert Oppenheimer, that protean figure, still holds fascination today. So an observer would conclude upon surveying his centennial: old biographies and new ones, treatments in film, literature, and television, even an opera. About this man, scientist and intellectual, advisor to the powerful and political martyr, this man who stood at the center of his century—about Oppenheimer there is something simultaneously engrossing and tantalizing. Just when we think we understand him, he always, somehow, shows a new side.

The present volume brings together the best of the new historical studies on many aspects of Oppenheimer's life. It offers cutting-edge scholarship, fresh insights, and deep contextualization, as well as an entrée into the fierce debates still surrounding the man. It aims to deliver all this in a publicly accessible format. An introduction to an ongoing discussion, it brings important new findings not just to the specialist, but to other interested readers and to students and teachers. In this it complements the online exhibit "J. Robert Oppenheimer: A Life," winner of a *Scientific American* web award (<http://ohst.berkeley.edu/oppenheimer/exhibit/>).

This volume originated in a conference in 2004, at a moment when the community of historians writing on Oppenheimer had reached critical mass. The conference had the advantage of a historic location, the University of California, Berkeley, where Oppenheimer in the 1930s built up a school of theoretical physics, and where he and a small group of colleagues in 1942 carried out the first calculations fixing the design parameters of an atomic bomb.

In our own deliberations, a hundred years after Oppenheimer's birth, fifty years after his security hearing, we found wide areas of agreement—and also contention. The chapters that follow reflect the balance at the conference. They are grouped under rubrics representing the most active areas of research today:

Oppenheimer as Physicist
The Communist Question
The Soviet Comparison: New Insights

Postwar Politics: The Oppenheimer Case in Context
Cultural Resonances
The Public Oppenheimer

Each section begins with a short overview highlighting and contextualizing its essays. At the end of the book, the selective bibliography will assist readers who want to pursue matters further, into the popular as well as the scholarly literature.

It is our pleasure to thank the people and organizations who made this volume possible. Along with the contributors, the conference benefited from the participation of several people not represented here, including commentators Charlie Weiner and Jessica Wang, as well as Chancellor Robert M. Berdahl. We were honored by Charles Oppenheimer's presence and comments at our conference. The larger Oppenheimer Centennial at Berkeley gained much from the excellent exhibits created by the Bancroft Library (David Farrell and Eric Vettel) and the Library (Diane Fortner), and from the participation of the Department of Physics (coordinated by Virginia Rapp). The staff of the Office for History of Science and Technology—Diana Wear, Kate Spohr, Alex Wellerstein, and Kevin Saavedra—not only put on a remarkable centennial program, but have also seen the conference volume through to completion. Without their efforts, often above and beyond the call of duty, none of this would have been possible. Finally, this material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. SES-0332474. We gratefully acknowledge this support. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

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