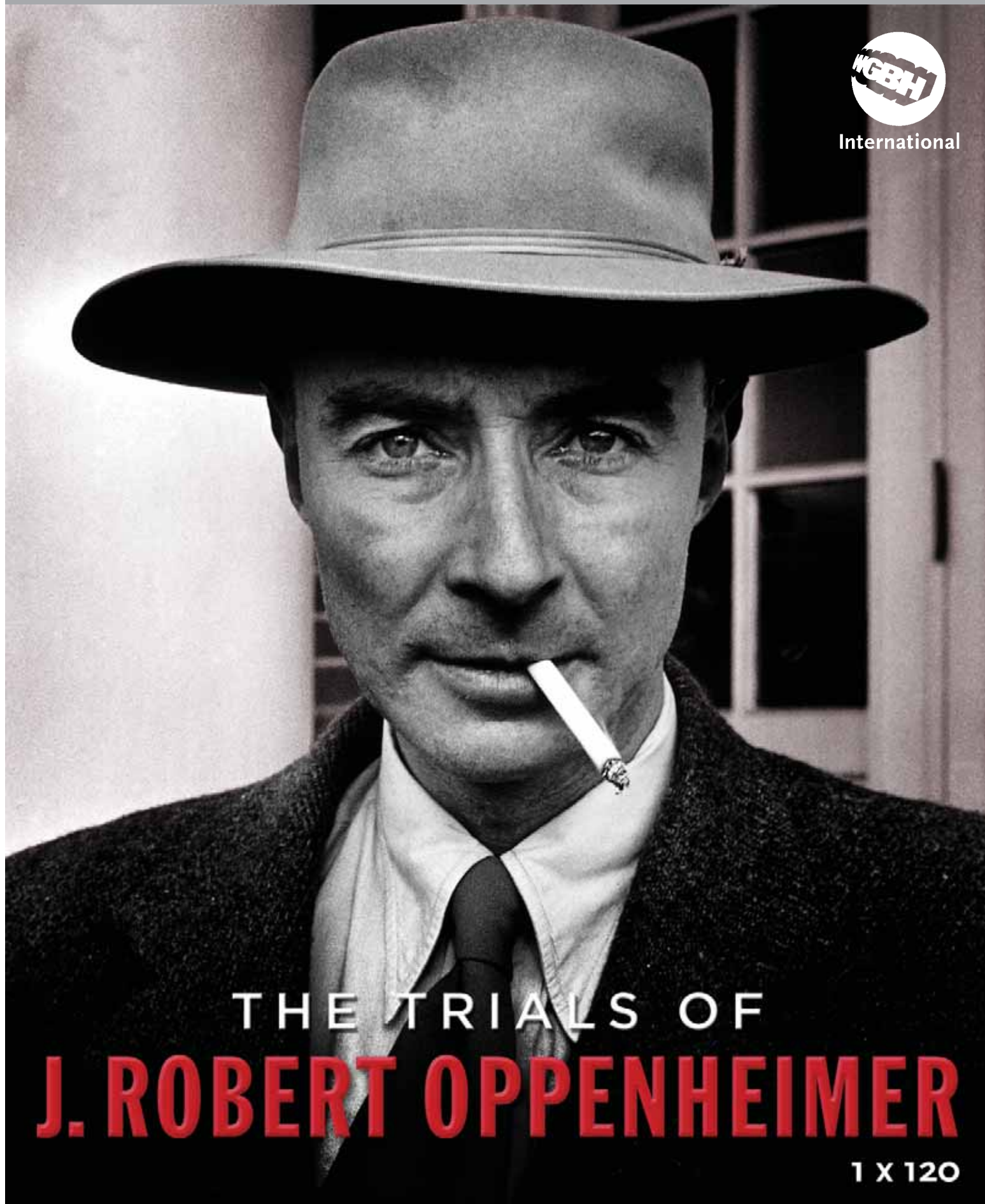




International



THE TRIALS OF  
**J. ROBERT OPPENHEIMER**

1 X 120

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*The Trials of J. Robert Oppenheimer* presents a complex and revealing portrait of one of the most important and controversial scientists of the twentieth century. With Academy Award-nominated actor David Strathairn (*Good Night and Good Luck*, *The Bourne Ultimatum*) as Robert Oppenheimer and featuring interviews with the scientist's former colleagues and eminent scholars, the film traces the course of Oppenheimer's life: his rarefied childhood, his troubled adolescence, his emergence as one of America's leading nuclear physicists, his leadership of the Los Alamos laboratory and his tragic humiliation.

In 1939, the world's best scientists in were working covertly to create a weapon of awesome destructive power. In the US, the man leading that race was J. Robert Oppenheimer, the atomic scientist handpicked to head up The Manhattan Project's top-secret laboratory in Los Alamos, New Mexico.

America got there first. On July 16, 1945, the first atomic bomb was tested in the Alamogordo desert. Less than a month later, the US exploded two atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, putting an end to World War II. Overnight, Robert Oppenheimer was transformed into a national hero. His newfound fame did not relieve his anguish over the destructive power he had helped unleash.

"He was a great supporter of using the bomb. But he understood all along that he was on the cusp of a new terror," says historian Martin J. Sherwin. After the war, as chief advisor to the US Atomic Energy Commission, Oppenheimer recommended putting control over atomic energy into the hands of an international agency; he spoke out for moderation as tensions between the Soviet Union and the US began to escalate; he advised against the development of the hydrogen bomb, and took a stand against building nuclear powered aircraft and submarines. To powerful Washington insiders, Oppenheimer was an obstacle, and they wanted him gone.

Although Oppenheimer himself never joined the Communist Party, many of those close to him, including his wife and brother, had. Army Intelligence and the FBI considered the eminent scientist a security risk. His phones were tapped, his office was wired, his mail was opened and his comings and goings were closely monitored. In his position, Oppenheimer was privy to the most sensitive information about US atomic weapons and technology. As a consequence, to perform his work, he had been granted top-secret security. His past connections to Communists became the pretext to revoke this clearance: effectively ending his career. Arrogant, proud and charismatic and not realizing the forces arrayed against him, he insisted on a hearing to regain his reputation.

Throughout the hearings, the FBI bugged Oppenheimer's lawyers' offices, home, and followed nearly everywhere he went, delivering information—even the defense strategy—to the prosecutor bent on bringing him down. Rather than regaining his reputation, the hearings permanently damaged Oppenheimer's esteem in the eyes of the American public: a public humiliation from which he never recovered. In the end, while declaring that Oppenheimer was a "loyal citizen" and owed a "great debt of gratitude", the security board ruled two to one that his security clearance be permanently revoked.

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## AMERICAN EXPERIENCE™

### CREDITS

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*Series Producer:* Sharon Grimberg

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