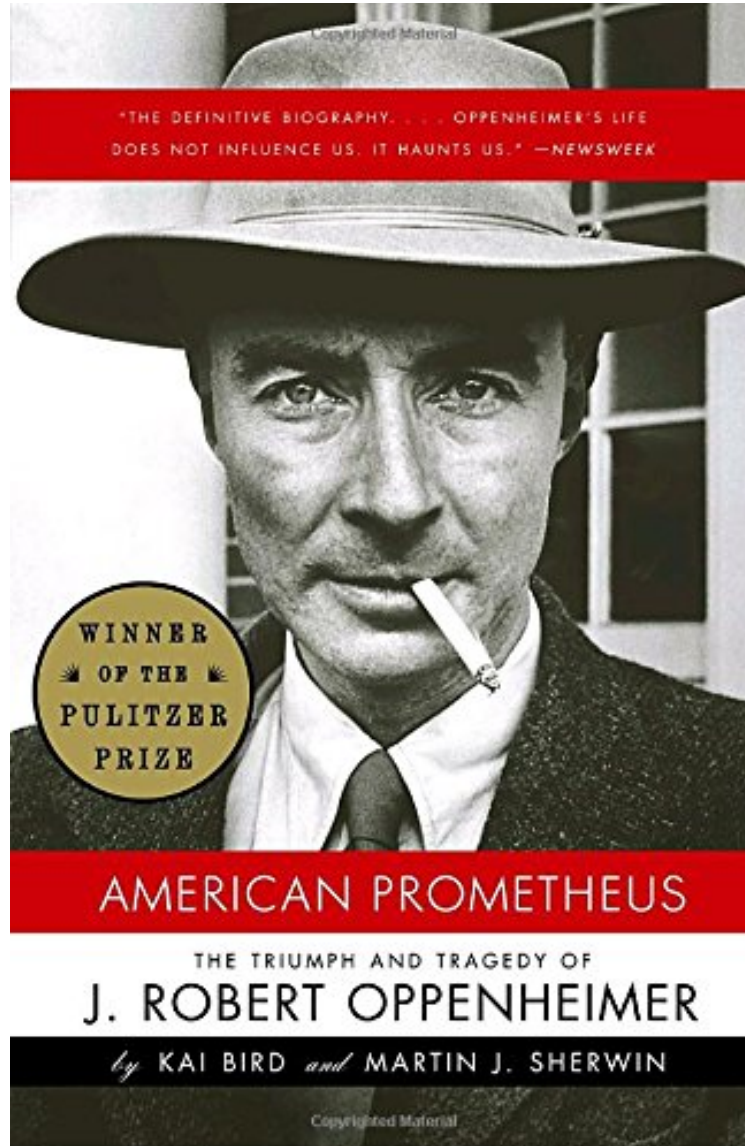


# American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer

*Kai Bird, Martin J. Sherwin*

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**Kai Bird, Martin J. Sherwin : American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer**  
before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised American Prometheus:  
The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. One Half Done RightBy ASThis is an excellent - and incredibly well researched - book presenting the pro-Oppenheimer view. The problem is that represents only one half of an informed perspective. The book consumes way too much ink for half a story told.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The best book I've read this year!By John HamiltonThis is a very good book. It describes not only the man and his life but explores the events, both tragic and triumphant, that he shaped and that shaped him. From the evolution of democratic and republican thought to attitudes about communism. From development of the bomb to the tragedy of McCarthyism. His public life and his personal life. His brilliance and his failings. Concerning the authors, I can't imagine working that long to produce the product that is this book. If you want a history of this nation from the perspective of someone who changed it, buy this book. Then buy and read other good books covering the same time period to round out your perspective.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Quite an exceptional biographyBy Michael EllenbergerI've been reading a lot of biography lately, from Washington to Einstein, Jobs to Truman, and so far I've had good luck (thanks in large part to these reviews!) so I figure I'd give a brief review here. American Prometheus is quite a good read; never really dragging, and equally balanced between the importance of Oppie ('the Triumph') and his relationship with S-1 and 'the gadget,' to his later hearing with the Grey Board and (spoilers!) revocation of his security clearance ('the Tragedy'). While perhaps I don't know Oppie as well as I know Harry S Truman, Bird did an exceptional job of portraying the younger Oppie (in my opinion, the most important and difficult part of a biography) in order to fully appreciate his older self. Highly recommended as a biography, a history, and a scientific read.

J. Robert Oppenheimer is one of the iconic figures of the twentieth century, a brilliant physicist who led the effort to build the atomic bomb for his country in a time of war, and who later found himself confronting the moral consequences of scientific progress. In this magisterial, acclaimed biography twenty-five years in the making, Kai Bird and Martin Sherwin capture Oppenheimer's life and times, from his early career to his central role in the Cold War. This is biography and history at its finest, riveting and deeply informative.

.com In American Prometheus, Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin delve deep into J. Robert Oppenheimer's life and deliver a thorough and devastatingly sad biography of the man whose very name has come to represent the culmination of 20th century physics and the irrevocable soiling of science by governments eager to exploit its products. Rich in historical detail and personal narratives, the book paints a picture of Oppenheimer as both a controlling force and victim of the mechanisms of power. By the time the story reaches Oppenheimer's fateful Manhattan Project work, readers have been swept along much as the project's young physicists were by fate and enormous pressure. The authors allow the scientists to speak for themselves about their reactions to the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, avoiding any sort of preacherly tone while revealing the utter, horrible ambiguity of the situation. For instance, Oppenheimer wrote in a letter to a friend, "The thing had to be done," then, "Circumstances are heavy with misgiving." Many biographies of Oppenheimer end here, with the seeds of his later pacifism sown and the dangers of mixing science with politics clearly outlined. But Bird and Sherwin devote the second half of this hefty book to what happened to Oppenheimer after the bomb. For a short time, he was lionized as the ultimate patriot by a victorious nation, but things soured as the Cold War crept forward and anti-communist witchhunts focused paranoia and anti-Semitism onto Oppenheimer, destroying his career and disillusioning him about his life's work. Devastated by the atom bomb's legacy of fear, he became a vocal and passionate opponent of the Strangelovian madness that gripped the world because of the weapons he helped develop. Twenty-five years of research went into creating American Prometheus, and there has never been a more honest and complete biography of this tragic scientific giant. The many great ironies of Oppenheimer's life are revealed through the careful reconstruction of a wealth of records, conversations, and ideas, leaving the clearest picture yet of his life. --Therese LittletonFrom Publishers WeeklyStarred . Though many recognize Oppenheimer (1904-1967) as the father of the atomic bomb, few are as familiar with his career before and after Los Alamos. Sherwin (A World Destroyed) has spent 25 years researching every facet of Oppenheimer's life, from his childhood on Manhattan's Upper West Side and his prewar years as a Berkeley physicist to his public humiliation when he was branded a security risk at the height of anticommunist hysteria in 1954. Teaming up with Bird, an acclaimed Cold War historian (The Color of Truth), Sherwin examines the evidence surrounding Oppenheimer's "hazy and vague" connections to the Communist Party in the 1930s—loose interactions consistent with the activities of contemporary progressives. But those politics, in combination with Oppenheimer's abrasive personality, were enough for conservatives, from fellow scientist Edward Teller to FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, to work at destroying Oppenheimer's postwar reputation and prevent him from swaying public opinion against the development of a hydrogen bomb. Bird and Sherwin identify Atomic Energy Commission head Lewis Strauss as the ringleader of a "conspiracy" that culminated in a security clearance hearing designed as a "show trial." Strauss's tactics included illegal wiretaps of Oppenheimer's attorney; those transcripts and other government documents are invaluable in debunking the charges against Oppenheimer. The political drama is enhanced by the close attention to Oppenheimer's personal life, and Bird and Sherwin do not conceal their occasional frustration with his arrogant

stonewalling and panicky blunders, even as they shed light on the psychological roots for those failures, restoring human complexity to a man who had been both elevated and demonized. 32 pages of photos not seen by PW. (Apr. 10) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From The New Yorker. Robert Oppenheimer, the physicist who oversaw the creation of the atomic bomb, was lauded as a patriot after the United States dropped the bomb on Japan, but nine years later he was disgraced, accused of Communist sympathies and "substantial defects of character." This commanding biography, the result of twenty-five years of research, reevaluates that character, and delivers the most complex portrait of Oppenheimer to date: a brilliant but insecure child prodigy who became a charismatic leader; a polymath who learned Sanskrit just so he could read the Bhagavad Gita; an aesthete who mixed infamously strong Martinis; a one-time fellow-traveller who was almost willfully naive about politics. Drawing on thousands of pages of F.B.I. surveillance records, the authors contend that the scientist was never a member of the Communist Party. Copyright 2005 The New Yorker