



FILM: **OPPENHEIMER**

FDG RATING: 4.0 ☺☺☺☺○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Christopher Nolan: *director*
Cillian Murphy: *actor, J. Robert Oppenheimer*
Robert Downey, Jr.: *actor, Lewis Strauss*

DATE: October 22, 2023

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **OPPENHEIMER**

Though there have been many films about the Manhattan Project, the 2023 film, *Oppenheimer*, focuses on the human being, his conflicted emotions, and reservations about creating the first nuclear weapon, the world's first atomic bombs. Cillian Murphy's intense performance as J. Robert Oppenheimer, the brilliant, obsessive, impulsive theoretical physicist is definitely Oscar worthy.

We follow Oppenheimer across decades, starting when he was a young adult student in 1920s Germany, studying quantum physics. The next decade he's at Berkeley teaching and building a center for the study of quantum physics. The film touches on personal and professional milestones, including the controversies that dogged him, the anti-Communist attacks that nearly ruined him, as well as his friendships and romances.

In 1942, General Leslie Groves, leader of the Manhattan Project, appointed Oppenheimer to lead Site Y, the secret weapons research and development facility in a remote desolate area of Los Alamos, New Mexico. Oppenheimer was joined by many other brilliant scientists, and mathematicians to focus on how to harness nuclear reactions. The 3-hour film goes deep and long on the building of the bomb as we watch Oppenheimer's genius mind at work, his thought process, personality, and obsession with solving the quantum physics problem. And then we see his conflicted emotions, his reservations about creating the weapon. He struggles with the moral dilemma both psychologically and emotionally. Several discussion participants agreed that the film told a complete story and excused the 3-hour length.

His meeting and conversation with Albert Einstein was a favorite scene. Their close relationship abetted the jealousy of Oppenheimer's nemesis, Lewis Strauss, an amateur physicist who rose up in power from a traveling shoe salesman to become one of America's most important atomic-energy advisers during the Cold War. Strauss orchestrated the blacklisting of Oppenheimer stating he was not a national hero but rather a national security threat because of his past ties with the Communist party. Einstein says to Oppenheimer, "They will tear you to shreds but later they will honor you for their own credit."

Although a few felt that the story was too scrambled, many of us found the non-chronological structure of the film to be compelling as was the mix of black and white scenes interspersed with color sequences and sometimes with blinding visuals of protons-neutrons. Others appreciated that the film was silent during the actual bomb explosion rather than blasting sound which was delayed. And we were thankful that there are no documentary images of the dead or panoramas of cities in ashes. A perfect blend of flash and substance was a discussion participants enthusiastic comment. Excellent acting, nuanced characters, and witnessing the huge rippling consequences of individual decisions is thought provoking.

An especially memorable scene is near the end when Oppenheimer is in President Truman's office. The bomb has been dropped and Oppenheimer admits to feeling guilty about killing so many civilians. Truman says, "they don't care who made the bomb. They care who dropped it and it was me." As soon as Oppenheimer leaves, Truman says to his staff, "Don't let that cry baby in again."

Important from an educational perspective, the film presents the necessity of the atom bomb to win the war although one character in the film said it wasn't needed since Japan was losing anyway. We understand the horror of the bomb's effect and the reality of the prediction that now there would be an arms race. One discussion participant stated, it was an incredible technological achievement but the consequences are horrific. Lots of high marks for this thrilling biographic drama, culminating in a rousing 4.0 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies! Adriane Dedic, adedic@pacbell.net
www.filmdiscussiongroup.com