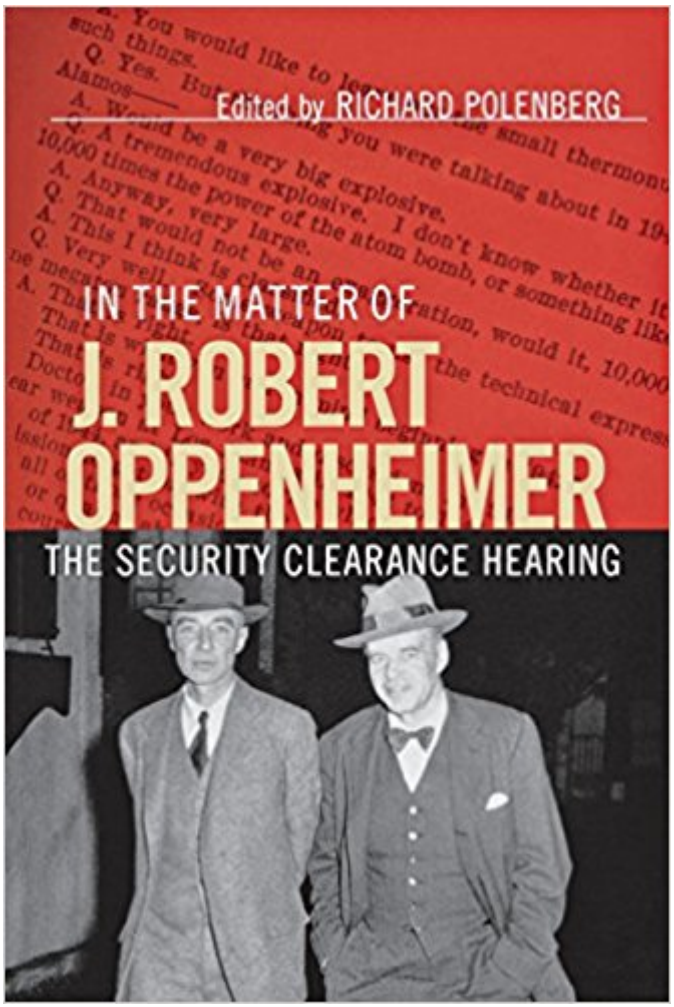
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In The Matter Of J. Robert Oppenheimer: The Security Clearance Hearing (Cornell Paperbacks)



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Synopsis

At the end of World War II, J. Robert Oppenheimer was one of America’s preeminent physicists. For his work as director of the Manhattan Project, he was awarded the Medal for Merit, the highest honor the U.S. government can bestow on a civilian. Yet, in 1953, Oppenheimer was denied security clearance amidst allegations that he was "more probably than not" an "agent of the Soviet Union." Determined to clear his name, he insisted on a hearing before the Atomic Energy Commission’s Personnel Security Board.In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer contains an edited and annotated transcript of the 1954 hearing, as well as the various reports resulting from it. Drawing on recently declassified FBI files, Richard Polenberg’s introductory and concluding essays situate the hearing in the Cold War period, and his thoughtful analysis helps explain why the hearing was held, why it turned out as it did, and what that result meant, both for Oppenheimer and for the United States.Among the forty witnesses who testified were many who had played vitally important roles in the making of U.S. nuclear policy: Enrico Fermi, Hans Bethe, Edward Teller, Vannevar Bush, George F. Kennan, and Oppenheimer himself. The hearing provides valuable insights into the development of the atomic bomb and the postwar debate among scientists over the hydrogen bomb, the conflict between the foreign policy and military establishments over national defense, and the controversy over the proper standards to apply in assessing an individual’s loyalty. It reveals as well the fears and anxieties that plagued America during the Cold War era.

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Customer Reviews

"In the spring of 1954. . . . the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) held hearings to determine if Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer, scientific director of the WWII atomic bomb project, should be allowed to retain his security clearance. The proceedings were initiated by a letter from the Chief of Staff of the AEC. . . . in which he suggested that Oppenheimer was an agent of the Soviet Union. . . . The 28-page introduction contains a useful discussion of the background and politics behind the hearings. The index is good, and the list of suggested reading material is useful."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Choice, September 2002"The Polenburg edition has a number of important virtues, beginning with the fact that it brings this classic back into print, three decades after the original 1954 edition was reprinted by MIT Press in 1971. Whereas the original volume extended over a thousand pages of tiny, densely packed type and was nearly unreadable for more than a few pages at a time, the new edition is handsomely produced with a decently sized typeface and is a pleasure to read."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Steven Aftergood, Journal of Cold War Studies, Summer 2003"The criteria of significane and balance are very well met, making the book an excellent case study in the temper of those times. . . . This book deserves high marks indeed."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Gordon L. Shull, Perspectives on Politics, Summer 2002"This book is a wonderful resource for teaching. It is ideal for use as a core text in courses on twentieth-century American history and on the history of modern science. And it should appeal also to the general reader as an accessible version of an authentic and pivotal historical drama."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Charles Thorpe, British Journal for the History of Science"The Oppenheimer hearings were one of the great dramas of the Cold War at home. Their outcome still affects the relationship between scientists and the state. Richard Polenberg’s skillfully edited transcript proves once again that history reads better than fiction."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Gregg Herken, author of The Winning Weapon: The Atomic Bomb in the Cold War, 1945Ã¢â ¬â œ50"This book is very valuable because it gives the full arguments of the Personnel Security Board and of the Atomic Energy Commission leading to their decision against Oppenheimer. It also gives the more important testimony during the Hearings. Professor Polenberg, in his introduction, shows how hopelessly the cards were stacked against Oppenheimer."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Hans Bethe, Professor Emeritus, Cornell University"The Oppenheimer security clearance hearings serve as a stark reminder of the cold war state’s abuses of power in its efforts to scrutinize the interior recesses of the human mind and spirit. In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer: The Security Clearance conveys fully the drama of the case, the complex individuals involved, and the explosive combination of anti-communist ideology, nuclear fear, and old-fashioned personal resentment that led to Oppenheimer’s downfall. It offers compelling reading to anyone interested in reckoning with the true meaning of loyalty amid the

political pressures of the cold war and the nuclear age."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Jessica Wang, University of California, Los Angeles"Few of the outrages of the McCarthy era were as politically and emotionally disturbing as the withdrawal of J. Robert Oppenheimer's security clearance. Though the nation's most eminent scientist, Oppenheimer was no match for the furies of the anticommunist witchhunt. By making the transcript of this hearing available again, Richard Polenberg gives us a direct entre into the supercharged atmosphere of the period, enabling us to understand how it could have produced such a devastating outcome."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Ellen Schrecker, author of Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America

Richard Polenberg is Marie Underhill Noll Professor of History Emeritus at Cornell University. He is the author of Hear My Sad Story: The True Tales That Inspired "Stagolee," "John Henry," and Other Traditional American Folk Songs and Fighting Faiths: The Abrams Case, The Supreme Court, and Free Speech, and is the editor of In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer: The Security Clearance Hearing, all from Cornell.

as described

This book was originally intended to be a TV drama, I believe. I don't remember if it got made, but it doesn't change the fact that the written work is excellent.The drama follows the security clearance hearing. Kipphart took the official transcripts and melded some people together into one, rearranged the order, shortened the list of witnesses to produce one work that showed both sides of the argument. Because of the way it was pieced together, I myself couldn't decide if I sympathised with Oppenheimer or believed he was wrongfully accused. The moment one side got the upper hand, it would be the other side's turn to state its case.Perhaps one negative point is that it's hard to say Kipphart truly "wrote" this, as so much is taken from historical fact. His artistic touch is visible through what exactly is shown, not the content. He chooses to show these arguments, the ones he believes are the most important.My favorite part is Oppenheimer's monologue at the end, although that was freely invented by Kipphart. It's one of the few things that can be easily attributed to him.I enjoyed this work, and I would recommend it to everybody.

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