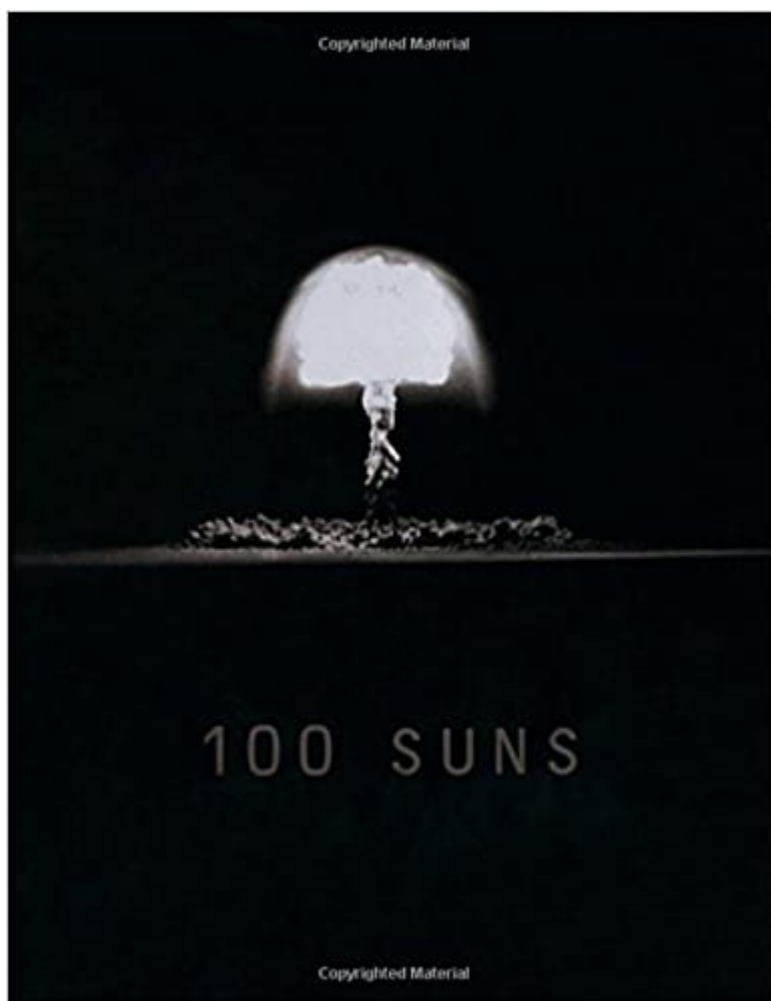


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# 100 Suns



## Synopsis

Between July 1945 and November 1962 the United States is known to have conducted 216 atmospheric and underwater nuclear tests. After the Limited Test Ban Treaty between the United States and the Soviet Union in 1963, nuclear testing went underground. It became literally invisible— but more frequent: the United States conducted a further 723 underground tests, the last in 1992. 100 Suns documents the era of visible nuclear testing, the atmospheric era, with one hundred photographs drawn by Michael Light from the archives at Los Alamos National Laboratory and the U.S. National Archives in Maryland. It includes previously classified material from the clandestine Lookout Mountain Air Force Station based in Hollywood, whose film directors, cameramen and still photographers were sworn to secrecy. The title, 100 Suns, refers to the response by J. Robert Oppenheimer to the world's first nuclear explosion in New Mexico when he quoted a passage from the Bhagavad Gita, the classic Vedic text: "If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst forth at once in the sky, that would be like the splendor of the Mighty One . . . I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." This was Oppenheimer's attempt to describe the otherwise indescribable. 100 Suns likewise confronts the indescribable by presenting without embellishment the stark evidence of the tests at the moment of detonation. Since the tests were conducted either in Nevada or the Pacific the book is simply divided between the desert and the ocean. Each photograph is presented with the name of the test, its explosive yield in kilotons or megatons, the date and the location. The enormity of the events recorded is contrasted with the understated neutrality of bare data. Interspersed within the sequence of explosions are pictures of the awestruck witnesses. The evidence of these photographs is terrifying in its implication while at same time profoundly disconcerting as a spectacle. The visual grandeur of such imagery is balanced by the chilling facts provided at the end of the book in the detailed captions, a chronology of the development of nuclear weaponry and an extensive bibliography. A dramatic sequel to Michael Light's Full Moon, 100 Suns forms an unprecedented historical document.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Despite all the thousands of caricatures and artistic re-interpretations of the nuclear "mushroom cloud," photographs of the real thing are still intensely frightening and visually fascinating. The "thousand suns" referred to in the Bhagavad Gita, from which J. Robert Oppenheimer quoted when the first atomic bomb was detonated in New Mexico on July 16, 1945, are depicted here in 100 carefully selected photographs of the aboveground nuclear tests conducted by the United States in the Nevada and New Mexico deserts and over the Pacific Ocean. Culled by Light (Full Moon) from formerly classified documents held by the United States National Archives and Los Alamos National Laboratory, the photos, dating from 1942 to 1962, are awe-inspiring. Crisply printed on black glossy stock, each photo is printed full-page recto, with the facing verso page containing only the plate number, the name of the test ("Trinity

Text-free, portrait-large photographs--many in dramatic full color, mainly crimson and black by land, clouded skies by sea--are the hundred metaphorical suns promised. Rather more than half of them disclose the proverbial mushroom cloud, luminous or vapor-borne. Each one is a prompt, distant shot of an American nuclear weapon explosion, made during the years from 1945 to 1962, until the Limited Test Ban Treaty quelled both public witness and most fallout through burial underground. The meticulous compiler--photographer Michael Light, whose book Full Moon drew wide praise--ordered his portraits here for visual effect. A contextual look discloses much of weapon development amid the politics of unbridled state power. Since 1945, with the first test and the two calamitous attacks on Japanese cities, the explosive energy ranged from Little Feller I, a test of a midget atomic rocket suited for one-man launch, up to H-bomb Mike, shown in five striking views from 1952. Mike, the first large American thermonuclear device, raised the ante as measured in tons of TNT, from a 10-ton truckload to a fanciful TNT-laden boxcar train 2,000 miles long, rattling past at full speed during two nights and one day. Numbers do not convey everything. The image that most

compels a viewer is one from 1946 itself, the first postwar year. The U.S. Navy felt the need for a demonstration of the new atomic threat against warships (no H-bombs as yet). The Bikini Atoll test was duly prepared in the summer of 1946. One fast daylight snapshot from the air shows something near human scale. Against the huge foamy tower of seawater thrown upward, a few tiny black splinters are dwarfed. The furious waters reached and ruined them. Are they kayaks? They were in fact among the largest battleships ever sent to sea, Japan's naval pride, anchored empty as targets. H-bomb tests are observed from 50 miles off; their images here are mostly colorful and complex layers of cloud formations out to the horizon. A few plates show witnesses, some of them troops set closer to the fireball than we would so casually plan today. The documentation is admirable. And Michael Light has put his own views briefly but clearly at the end of the book, recognizing that photographs tell only how things look: "When it's all we have, however, it's enough to help understanding. It exists. It happened. It is happening. May no further nuclear detonation photographs be made, ever." Philip Morrison, emeritus professor of physics at M.I.T., wrote the book review column for this magazine for more than 30 years. He was a member of the Manhattan Project and a witness of the first test.

Incredible book with unexpected historical details on the USA's endless, mindbogglingly insane atmospheric nuclear testing programs that spewed radioactive fallout into the global ecosystem with impunity and utter disregard for nature, animals, and human life for nearly half a century.

This is a very handsome volume, with images every bit as beautiful as the subject matter is terrifying. Shown are mushroom clouds from near and far, in black and white and in color, and soldiers hunkered down and bracing themselves against the burst in the distance. There's the seemingly harmless--and innocently named--Little Feller I (#46), a "mere" 18-ton-TNT-equivalent delicate puff rising from the barren Nevada desert, captured 40 seconds after detonation. And then consider Bravo, the largest single nuclear explosion ever. At 15 megatons--the equivalent of 15 million tons of TNT--it released in an instant more energy than all the ordnance spent in World Wars I and II combined. The list of captions in the back of the book provides interesting data about each test and makes a nice tidy summary of our government's Cold War excesses. Light's book includes a chronology of developments in the nuclear era, including year-by-year counts of Soviet and U.S. nuclear weapons stockpiles. It is noteworthy that, during the hottest years of the Cold War, when the U.S. public was being warned of a widening "missile gap" with the Soviet Union, we always had a greater number of warheads, often as many as ten times more.

Terrifyingly beautiful. 100 Suns is a stark reminder of the power unleashed by atomic weapons.

Beautiful, haunting reminder of what humanity is capable of. This book offers a visual and emotional experience that history texts cannot. Excellent gift for anyone fond of history or politics. I'd gladly buy again for my own collection.

100 Suns is a great book that shows the American nuclear tests from an "artistic" perspective. The images and the edition are spectacular, and the choice of the pictures depends only on his compiler, Michael Light. Anyway, if you are looking for an exhaustive nuclear test data, nuclear technology or nuclear consequences, definitely this is not your book. But if you can abstract the mortal power from the breath-taking image that a nuclear explosion owns, then you've got the book of the year. Greetings from Barcelona, Spain

This is an amazing photographic document about a strange time in American history. It is somewhat personal to me as I was one of the 900 Marines 2 miles from the HOOD detonation on July 5th, 1957. I did not know until I read the caption in the book that I was present at both the largest, and first hydrogen, bomb exploded in the US. I hope to hell we never see any contemporary photos of atomic explosions. The photos in this book ought to be enough for all time.

A wonderful piece of work. The author thankfully did not over-politicize nuclear weapons or U.S. nuclear testing policies, and the reader is left with incredible pictures and factual commentary. The book does not so much tell a story as it presents for the reader a dangerous time in American history for reflection. Thankfully, we are still here to reflect on these ominous, but nonetheless beautiful pictures. I think perhaps John Foster Dulles has been vindicated.

Both '100 Suns' and 'Full Moon' give a visual - sometimes visceral - understanding to their respective subjects I have gotten from no other source. They are unique.

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