This flashback to the dawn of the atomic-bomb age arrives as the U.S. government moves toward renuclearizing its military arsenal and power plants, in turn sparking fears of a renewed arms race and of the advent of nuclear terror.

In a first-of-its-kind, across-time investigation, this case study documents how The New York Times® almost singlehandedly shaped news and public perceptions beginning 60 years ago that helped the U.S. government birth the acceptance of the most destructive man-made force ever created.

The award-winning science writer of The Times, William L. Lawrence, was handpicked exclusively and paid by the U.S. Army to chronicle the birth, testing and first use of atomic bombs; he spun government propaganda that this self-advertised newspaper-of-record passed off as news to the nation’s other media.


Failing to challenge secrecy and echoing the government’s spin, The Times helped U.S. officials to hide from public consciousness nearly half of the 86 atmospheric tests and their yield that from 1946 to 1962 in U.S.-administered atolls and international waters convulsed the Pacific region once described as paradise.

By doing so, The Times provided distorted coverage that predated by more than 40 years its recent crisis of made-up stories by its reporter Jayson Blair. The people of Enewetak, displaced for 33 years from their home atoll and some still exiled because of radioactivity, have much to tell the Iraqis about the sad history of U.S. governance abroad. The Marshallese used secretly as human radiation subjects without their informed consent foreshadowed by exactly 50 years the electrifying abuses in Abu Ghraib prison.

An epilogue from 1980 to 2004 details that The Times is still offering warped coverage. It hides from the world the bitter legacy after 60 years of disease and despair from the Pacific experimental grounds used to launch the United States to its supreme military superpower status today.

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