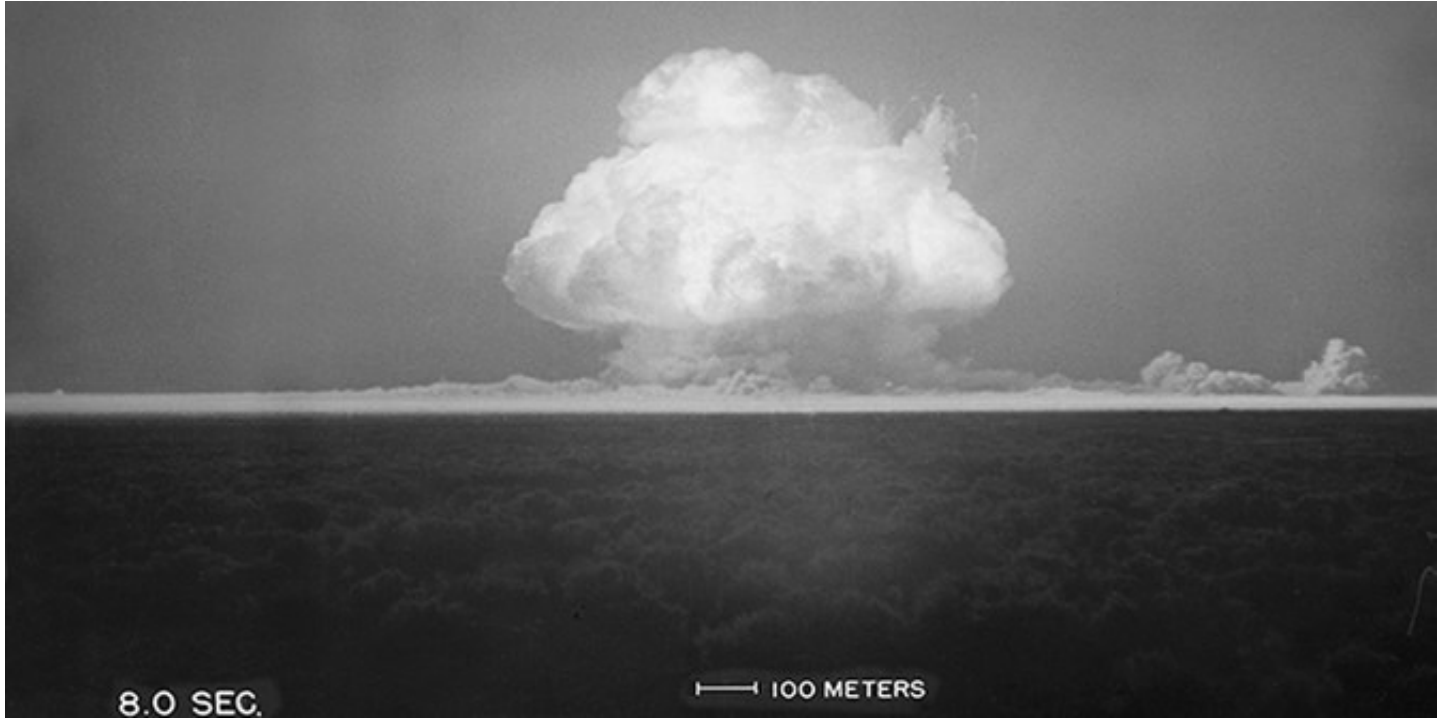


'First We Bombed New Mexico' depicts resilience in the face of inhumanity



CHENNAI: Man's inhumanity toward other men is well documented yet every now and then there comes along a story that will shock and dismay audiences. "First We Bombed New Mexico" details one such story in a documentary produced and directed by Lois Lipman.

The film, which screened at the Palm Springs International Film Festival on Monday, explores the weeks before the US's use of two atomic bombs in Japan.

On July 16, 1945 – just a few weeks before the US Army dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – they detonated their first ever nuclear device approximately 60 miles north of White Sands National Park in the state of New Mexico.

The army did not inform the surrounding inhabitants about the dangers of radiation and for 75 years, men, women and children fell ill, suffered and died.

The 95-minute documentary details New Mexico-born Hispanic cancer survivor Tina Cordova's movement seeking compensation for the victims, who have suffered from cancer and a high infant mortality rate for generations.

For many, this documentary serves as an introduction to the incident, which has not seen anywhere near the level of international awareness as the bombs dropped in Japan.

Through Lipman's work, we become privy to the fact American physicians had warned General Leslie Groves — who directed the Manhattan Project, a top secret research project that developed the atomic bomb during World War II — that the Trinity explosion would be catastrophic and urged that residents be quickly moved out of the region. This did not happen, nor did the US government provide any medical information or aid after the detonation.

Although victims of the Nevada Cold War nuclear tests, held between 1951 and 1992, have been eligible for compensation since 1990, those in New Mexico had been ignored. This documentary does a solid job at exposing the apparent racial discrimination at play.

Expertly woven into the narrative are comments by respected nuclear experts including MIT professor and author Kate Brown – who quips that efforts to be compensated by the government are “a bit like the fox guarding the henhouse.”

“First We Bombed New Mexico” is compelling and is truly a great example of man's resilience against lies and hypocrisy.