



100 Suns

By Michael Light

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100 Suns By Michael Light

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 A dramatic sequel to Michael Light's **Full Moon**, **100 Suns** forms an unprecedented historical document.

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100 Suns By Michael Light Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #236785 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Knopf
- Published on: 2003-10-21
- Released on: 2003-10-21
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 13.60" h x .95" w x 10.84" l, 4.50 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 208 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

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"; "Mike"; "Wahoo"), the test date and the number of kilotons (or megatons) of energy released. Extensive notes on each photo and test are in the back, along with a bibliography. Many of the photos show only the blast, but some have people. One photograph, in particular ("019. Simon"), does not show an explosion: soldiers huddle in a trench, identifiable only by the blurred shapes of their helmets, with what looks like glowing debris raining upon them. The back caption notes: "In a moment the ground and air shockwaves will toss them like dolls, then fill their mouths with radioactive dust and also make it temporarily impossible to see." Ultimately, that particular test "scattered deadly fallout throughout southwest Utah" and "highly radioactive rain fell in Albany, New York the following day." Aboveground tests ended with the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty. Releasing worldwide with a first printing of 35,000, this book, some of whose colors are impossible to describe, will leave readers changed.

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From Scientific American

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.

From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Light gathered together select NASA images to create the spellbinding *Full Moon* (1999), and now he presents that pleasurable volume's evil twin, a riveting collection of photographs of aboveground atomic detonations culled from Los Alamos National Laboratory and the U.S. National Archives. These apocalyptic images of man-made suns captured on film at great risk by military photographers in both stark black-and-white and fiery color are nearly pornographic (one bomb is named "Climax") in their troubling allure. In the Nevada desert bomb tests, fantastic clouds roar into the sky like monsters from the center of the earth and assume phallic and mushroom shapes, while soldiers crouch in the foreground as the deadly flash overtakes them. The ocean tests are even more surreal as lethal radiance bombards the shock-waved sea and explosions grow so impossibly enormous it looks as though the molten lifeblood of the planet is being shot into space. Light offers a terse and sobering history of the bomb at this staggering and unprecedented volume's conclusion, fully documenting each detonation and tacitly reminding readers of the need to stay informed about the state of the world's nuclear arsenal and make their concerns known. *Donna Seaman*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michael Short:

Do you have favorite book? When you have, what is your favorite's book? Book is very important thing for us to understand everything in the world. Each guide has different aim as well as goal; it means that e-book has different type. Some people really feel enjoy to spend their a chance to read a book. They are reading whatever they take because their hobby is actually reading a book. What about the person who don't like reading a book? Sometime, particular person feel need book if they found difficult problem or perhaps exercise. Well, probably you will require this 100 Suns.

Sherman Etheridge:

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