



No more Hiroshima,  
no more hibakusha!

## Description

# Key films relating to the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings

By **Byron Toben**

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**August 6 and 9, 1945**, were the dates, respectively, that the Japanese cities of **Hiroshima and Nagasaki** were destroyed by “**Little Boy**” and “**Fat Man**,” nuclear bombs borne on the aircraft **Enola Gay**.

On this **76th anniversary** of the birth of the atomic age, which influences us to this day, there are many demonstrations, panels and other commemorations regarding those fatal days.

There have been over 100 films touching on or extrapolating these big bangs. Here are the six that most affected me.



Peter Sellers in Dr. Strangelove – Image: Columbia Pictures, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

## Doctor Strangelove (1964)

This black comedy that satirizes the cold war was made by **Stanley Kubrick**, and is loosely based on **Peter George**'s 1958 novel **Red Alert**. Now considered one of the funniest films of all time, it featured **Peter Sellers** in a triple role (the U.S. president, a former Nazi scientist and a British captain), **Sterling Hayden** as a mad U.S. commander, and **George C. Scott** as an aggressive U.S. general.

It envisions the madness of the Mutual Assured Destruction doctrine as a nuclear bomb is launched without authority against Russia, triggering an automatic Doomsday Machine.

## Hiroshima, Mon Amour (1959)



Scene from Hiroshima Mon Amour- Image: courtesy of IMDb

This French-Japanese co-production, directed by **Alain Resnais**, with a screenplay by **Marguerite Duras**, and its non-linear storyline and flashback sequences, heralded a new wave in French Cinema.

An impossible love story as French “Elle” (her) had been ostracised from Nevers, France, for having loved a German soldier in WW II and “Lui” (him), a Japanese architect and Hiroshima native but away on military duty during the bomb, felt he was the embodiment of Hiroshima.

A very impressionistic and surreal film, quite different from Resnais’ earlier documentary on Hiroshima, ***Night and Fog*** (1956).

### **The War Game (1966)**

This BBC pseudo-documentary TV film by **Peter Watkins** posits a nuclear war between the Soviet Union and Britain. Even though it won an **Academy Award in 1967 for Best Documentary Film**, it was not televised in the U.K. until 1985.

The whole is done in the style of a news magazine. Interwoven are stylized interviews with establishment figures, such as an Anglican bishop and a nuclear strategist, which seem to justify nuclear weapons, based on actual interviews. The highly regarded cinematic approach resonates with me of Phillip Roth’s 2004 novel, *The Plot Against America*.



Scene from *Fat Man and Little Boy* – Image: courtesy of IMDb

## **Fat Man and Little Boy (1989)**

Not as highly regarded cinematically as the above three films, this one depicts the **Manhattan Project**, the secret U.S. project to develop the first nuclear weapons during WW II, ahead of Germany.

The film is named after the first two bombs so developed – “Fat Man,” a large heavy plutonium design and “Little Boy,” a thin, lighter uranium bomb. The test worked at the Trinity site at Los Alamos in the Alamogordo Desert of New Mexico on July 16, 1945, only a few weeks before actual deployment.

**Paul Newman** was miscast as Colonel Leslie Groves, the U.S. Army engineer heading the construction, as was **Dwight Schultz**, who played head physicist Robert Oppenheimer. Critics also felt that the theatrical license for this high drama was reduced to childish Hollywood stereotyping.

Some suggest CBS’ TV film ***Day One*** (1989) as a better bet on the same subject. It won an Emmy that year.



Children's illustration from White Light/Black Rain – Image: Farallon Films

## White Light/Black Rain (2007)

This HBO documentary was released on the 62nd anniversary of Hiroshima. Written, directed and produced by **Steven Okazaki**, who met with over 500 survivors before whittling them down to 14 filmed subjects. The ages of a dozen of these at the time of the bombs ranged from 6 to 16, with two more in their 20s. Most lost parents or siblings, or needed major surgery for burns.

Okazaki also managed to locate four Americans who were involved. Onboard the Enola Gay aircraft for both missions were weapons test officer **Morris R. Jeppson** and navigator **Theodore Nan Kirk**. On the Hiroshima mission, scientific observer **Harold Agnew** was also aboard.

**Lawrence Johnston**, a physicist at Los Alamos, was on a B-29 aircraft shepherding the Enola Gay and seems to be the only person to have witnessed both the Trinity test and the Japanese explosions.

## No More Hiroshima (1984) and No More Hibakusha (1983)

These two Canadian NFB documentaries were made by prolific director/editor/photographer **Martin Duckworth**. The Hibakusha are survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 80 of whom visited New York from Japan in June 1982 to join peace demonstrations during the U.N. Special Session on disarmament.

Instead of focusing on their physical suffering, they urged the world to prevent nuclear war. The 1983 film, only 55 minutes, was followed by the shorter 1984 version of 25 minutes.



Watch them on the NFB site:

[nfb.ca/film/no\\_more\\_hiroshima](http://nfb.ca/film/no_more_hiroshima)

[nfb.ca/film/no-more-hibakusha](http://nfb.ca/film/no-more-hibakusha)

Feature image: scene from *Fat Man and Little Boy*, courtesy of IMDb

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**Byron Toben**, a past president of *The Montreal Press Club*, has been *WestmountMag.ca*'s theatre reviewer since July 2015. Previously, he wrote for since terminated web sites *Rover Arts* and *Charlebois Post*, print weekly *The Downtowner* and print monthly *The Senior Times*. He also is an expert consultant on U.S. work permits for Canadians.

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