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# 'Nuclear Savage': A powerful new documentary on U.S. hydrogen bombs

by [John Dear S.J.](#) | Oct. 30, 2012

On the Road to Peace

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Recently, I saw a powerful, disturbing new documentary about the U.S. hydrogen bomb explosions in the islands in the South Pacific, the U.S. government's campaign to keep the indigenous people on those contaminated islands and the U.S. government's secret program to monitor the effects of radiation on them.

"[Nuclear Savage: The Islands of Secret Project 4.1](#)," a film by former Greenpeace activist Adam Horowitz, uses recently declassified government film footage of the hydrogen bombs we dropped in the South Pacific and recent interviews with survivors to tell this nightmarish nuclear tale.

In old black-and-white footage, we see excited white, U.S. military men speaking somberly into the camera about the glories of the hydrogen bomb and describing how well "the savages," his term for the people of the Marshall Islands, were responding to our nuclear bomb explosions. The combination of militarism, U.S. imperialism, nuclear weapons, environmental destruction, sheer racism and total disregard for these gentle, impoverished people is shocking, to say the least.

Of course, the real savages are the Americans who built and dropped these bombs and who maintain our nuclear weapons industry today.

Sixty-seven U.S. hydrogen bombs were exploded in the 1950s in the Marshall Islands -- the equivalent of more than 7,000 Hiroshima bombs. They vaporized several small islands, poisoned the land and sea, destroyed natural life and caused immeasurable suffering to thousands of people across generations, bringing thyroid cancer, genetic defects, miscarriages and various other illnesses.

"Nuclear Savage" demonstrates how the U.S. government used the Marshall Islanders as human guinea pigs for more than three decades to study the effects of radiation sickness. As I watched the film and heard the heartbreaking testimony of the islanders, I kept thinking how the U.S. military doctors resembled the Nazi criminal doctors who experimented on human beings. Then, at the end of the film, we're shown footage of the Nazi doctors, and are told clearly how the U.S. military violated U.S. law, international law, the Nuremberg Principles and Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which states that "no one shall be subject without his free consent to medical or scientific experimentation."

The largest U.S. hydrogen bomb explosion was the March 1, 1954, Bravo Test. Unlike previous explosions, the U.S. did not evacuate residents of the Rongelap and Rongerik atolls. Residents were told their islands were safe, then suffered direct exposure to nuclear fallout and serious health consequences that linger to this day. Later, they were relocated to another island.

At the nuclear labs in Los Alamos, N.M., U.S. government officials launched their top-secret "Project 4.1" to monitor the effects on the Marshallese people. In 1957, the residents of Rongelap were returned to their beloved paradise island and told again that everything was safe. In fact, their atoll was severely contaminated. U.S. doctors were brought to the island and ordered not to treat the people medically, but to study them so the government could learn more about the effects of nuclear fallout on human beings. As the years went by, more and more people became seriously ill and never received serious treatment.

Over several decades, the U.S. organized 72 "research" trips to the Marshall Islands to "study" 539 Marshallese men, women and children who suffered the effects of radiation. As the decades passed, the sick Marshallese complained to the doctors, the military and the government, arguing that their worsening illnesses were related to the U.S. hydrogen bomb explosions. They were told there was no such connection and no need to evacuate Rongelap.

After watching this documentary, author Barbara Rose Johnston, a leading research fellow at The Center for Political Ecology, wrote:

The U.S. knowingly and willfully exposed a vulnerable population to toxic radioactive waste as a means to document the movement and degenerative health outcomes of radiation as it moves through the food chain and human body. This human subject experiment extended over the decades with profound consequences for individual subjects and the Marshallese nation as a whole. The Marshallese have become a nation whose experience as nuclear nomads, medical subjects, citizen advocates and innovators is shared by many citizens, communities and indigenous peoples around the world. Their experiences, consequential damages, and their struggles to restore cultural ways of life, quality of life, intergenerational health, and long term sustainability, are especially salient to a nation and to a world concerned with the lingering, persistent, and invasive dangers of nuclear [weapons and power]. ... There is a moral and legal obligation for the United Nations community to assist in the remediation, restoration and reparation due to the environment, health, and dignity of the Marshallese nation. International attention to this history and experience is long overdue, and sadly and sorely relevant to a post-Fukushima world.

In the mid-1980s, after decades of complaint, Greenpeace came to the rescue, boarded all the residents of Rongelap onto the Rainbow Warrior, and took them from their still-contaminated island to Ebeye, another island, where they remain today, living in crowded slums in total poverty. Recently, the U.S. bought off the Marshall Islands for \$150 million and sealed our military presence for the next 75 years. Here's how journalist Robert Koehler described the situation in his review for The Huffington Post:

*Nuclear Savage* is the story of what we did to the Marshall Islanders

throughout the Cold War with our nuclear testing program. Not only did we expose many thousands of them to ghastly -- often lethal -- levels of radiation with 67 nuclear blasts, with glaring evidence that at least some of the exposure was intentional, done for the purpose of studying the effects of radiation on human guinea pigs; not only did we wreck the Marshall Islanders' way of life and pristine paradise, creating a nation of internal refugees confined to a Western-style slum on the island of Ebeye; not only did we cower, as a nation, from any real responsibility for what our fallout did to these people, settling our genocidal debt to them with \$150 million "for all claims, past, present and future"; but also, throughout our dealing with them as nuclear conquistadors, we displayed a racism so profound, so cold-blooded, its exposure must forever shatter the myth of American exceptionalism.

And we're still doing it. The tiny, impoverished Republic of the Marshall Islands recently signed a 75-year lease agreement with the United States, guaranteeing that the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site on Kwajalien Atoll, where Star Wars testing is still being conducted (for unfathomable billions of dollars), will be operational at least through 2086.

"Nuclear Savage" is one of the most powerful films I have ever seen. I urge everyone who cares about our world to see it. We may feel powerless to do anything, but we need to learn about the evil our nation has done and hear the testimony of the powerless victims of our nuclear savagery.

Of course, the United States should dismantle its nuclear weapons and bombs, close Los Alamos, get rid of nuclear power, make massive reparation to the Marshallese, end the insane Star Wars program and ongoing Vandenberg nuclear tests, and clean up the world from our radioactive waste. This film tells the truth about ourselves, about our nuclear savagery, and calls us to repent of our nuclear violence and do what we can for the Marshallese, the environment, disarmament, human rights and justice, that one day we might have a world without hydrogen bombs and war.

\*\*\*

John Dear will speak today at Springfield College in Springfield, Mass., and lead a day of reflection, "Peace and Justice Rising!: On the Resurrection Accounts of Jesus" on Nov. 9 at the Call to Action conference in Louisville, Ky. To see John's 2012 speaking schedule, go to [John Dear's website](#). His new book, [Lazarus, Come Forth!](#), explores Jesus as the God of life calling humanity (in the symbol of the dead Lazarus) out of the tombs of the culture of war and death. John's talk at last year's Sabeel conference in Bethlehem is featured in the new book [Challenging Empire](#). John is profiled with Dan Berrigan and Roy Bourgeois in a new book, [Divine Rebels](#) by Deena Guzder (Lawrence Hill Books). This book and other recent books, including [Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings](#); [Put Down Your Sword](#) and [A Persistent Peace](#), are available from Amazon.com.

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 **Wardog00** • 13 days ago

Quote:Of course, the United States should dismantle its nuclear weapons and bombs, close Los Alamos, get rid of nuclear power, make massive reparation to the Marshallese, end the insane Star Wars program and ongoing Vandenberg nuclear tests, and clean up the world from our radioactive waste. Unquote

There are two things with which I can agree with Fr Dear. 1. Reparations to the Marshall Islanders and 2. clean up the nuclear waste.

I don't agree with the other suggestions, but we should not avoid or ignore our (US) responsibilities to those who were harmed by the nuclear testing.

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 **Charles Scanlon** → Wardog00 • 12 days ago

but, then again, you are no Roman Catholic moral theologian, are you?

The Reverend Father John Dear SJ has long been our most moral and ethical voice for decades, courageously calling for nonviolence and living truly, completely, integrally the full implications of this nonviolent Gospel of Jesus Christ

We do well to follow along this hard Road to Peace

0 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

 **Wardog00** → Charles Scanlon • 11 days ago

Rational people can disagree, and work to collaborate on areas where there is agreement as a foundation for future work together.

Thank you for identifying yourself as a non rational person.

0 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

 **William Glenn** • 13 days ago

Fr. Dear: We don't live in the Garden of Eden. There's a real world out there, and it's dangerous. Perhaps when you get the Japanese and Germans to pay reparations for what they did to us, we can consider paying reparations to others.

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**ilasenla** → William Glenn • 13 days ago

William my friend –

Before you get into criticizing Fr. Dear's ideas.....I would “dare you” to make yourself sit through one of these Documentaries, on the horrors of nuclear weapons.....I myself didn't see this one, but I made myself sit through another one called “Atomic Mom”.....and my thinking changed forever, on nuclear weapons.....These documentaries are hard to sit through, but necessary.....

Here are some LINKS:

<http://frdennismoviereviews.bl...>

<http://atomicmom.org/>

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt15...>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v...>

<http://documentarychannel.com/...>

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt20...>

<http://peaceonearthfilmfestiva...>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v...>

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**aileenlowe** → William Glenn • 13 days ago

I am shocked, saddened and deeply frightened at the dangerous ignorance of william and people like him.

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**rwarnell** → William Glenn • 13 days ago

While worshipping the idols of nuclear weapons and embracing the myth of "redemptive violence " may be the way of the world - followers of The Way are called to follow Jesus of Nazareth on the path of redemption and reconciliation.

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**ilasenla** → rwarnell • 13 days ago

Here's an interesting Article Excerpt {Adam refers to former Greenpeace activist Adam Horowitz} .....The Film is being shown all over the world.....

LINK:

<http://www.kindleproject.org/b...>

First Excerpt:

The people of the Marshall Islands have faced similar catastrophic fates as the victims who underwent Nazi medical tests during WWII. Adam was there to tell the world about it. These days, his perseverance comes from the success of the film – not just from the attention it's getting from the international circuit but from what's

attention is getting from the international circuit, but from what is happening in the Islands themselves. When I asked Adam if the film was being screened in the South Pacific, he said: "They've been showing it every day on television for months. They showed it at the Pacific Island conference of Presidents – now they're broadcasting the film in several Pacific Island Nations....."

.....In my conversation with Adam it was clear that for audiences in North America and Europe that have seen the film there is an increasing interest in awareness building around hidden issues such as these.

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 **ilasena** → ilasena • 13 days ago

Here is a Second Excerpt about how "his film was made for the islanders".....

LINK:

<http://www.kindleproject.org/b...>

Second Excerpt:

No matter to Adam, his film was made for the islanders and it is from there that the possibility of political change is most possible.

.....I think people are asking all over the world what we can do. When the American drones blow up our village, what can we do?

..... this film is making these rounds at the perfect time. The U.S. government is pushing the Marshall Islanders to move back to the contaminated island. When I asked why, Adam explained that if the islanders do move back to the currently radioactive island, the government can close the book on this issue and sweep any responsibility for the contamination and experiments under the rug. "This film coming out there gave them a big life boat in their fight to not repatriate."

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 **Peggy** → William Glenn • 13 days ago

An eye for an eye? I thought our Saviour gave His life to overturn that particular policy. Were our cities firebombed? Our innocent women, children, old folks vaporized? O ye of little faith! We have War Colleges, Can you name any Peace Colleges or sermons from the pulpit advocating Pro life peace initiatives? Americans simply don't want to believe that we are as cruel and self serving as our enemies.

0 ^ | 1 v • Reply • Share ›

 **Charles Scanlon** → William Glenn • 12 days ago

what did they do to us?

one sunk a few battleships poised provocatively to invade their island, climaxing firebombing their capital and our dropping nuclear annihilation upon other cities where women and children were sheltered in relative peace, untouched; the other fought our military defensively to thwart our invasion of their soil. .

but what did they do to us, William?

0 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Emily Balls** • 10 days ago

Hi John, great informative blog on an under reported issue. I worked in the Marshall Islands as a teacher for a year and also volunteered at the Nuclear Claims Tribunal when there. I am really pleased to see that Nuclear Savage is bringing some media attention (and raising awareness in the general public) about this important issue.

Unfortunately, the nuclear issues in the Marshall Islands are still being exploited even today in 2012, most recently by a haunted house in Maryland which actually themes itself around Project 4.1 to create 'a realistic bloody, bio-hazardous warehouse filled with attacking zombies, decaying bodies, vicious military men' - see their website at <http://www.hallowinc.com/>.

This has been condemned in the Marshall Islands government, hundreds of emails have been sent, an online petition currently standing at 605 signatures has been set up, but Hallow Inc's response has basically been to ignore all criticisms and to continue making money out of this tragedy. Although they have since put up a disclaimer, it is full of incorrect information as they have not reached out to the RMI ambassador ([dc8o8.blogs.civilbeat.com/post...](http://dc8o8.blogs.civilbeat.com/post...) and they haven't been in touch with the RMI NGOs that they claim they are donating to.

As I'm sure you are aware, many people in the Marshall Islands today are still affected by the nuclear testing, and most people have a relative who had/has cancer or was affected in another way. This is a serious ongoing issue, medically and politically but also in terms of human rights. It has also hugely shaped the situation of the Marshall Islands today, and some islanders (such as the Bikinians) remain displaced, can never return to their island, and have to live on other people's land (a major issue in a culture where land is more than something you own). I'm absolutely disgusted that Hallow Inc would think it was appropriate to create a Halloween attraction based on the nuclear testing, and also at their complete lack of response to the many complaints they have received.

I urge you to sign our petition which calls for Hallow Inc to rebrand their haunted house <http://www.change.org/petition....> You can also find out more on our Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/group....> Many thanks!

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**JimmyOlsenCubReporter** • 13 days ago

I saw this documentary at it is quite both shocking and disgusting to realize how so many of the "big brains" of American medical research had basically the same mentality and the same contempt for what they considered "inferior" or "savage" human life as did the Nazi doctors who performed horrifying "experiments" on the inmates in the concentration camps. The infamous Tuskegee study on syphilis is perhaps the prime example of this.

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**ilasenta** → JimmyOlsenCubReporter • 6 days ago

I think it's safe

I THINK IT'S SAFE

to say, that the people of the Marshall Islands are people who have been poor "and oppressed" by the U.S. Government.....Well here is an Excerpt from Fr. Dear's Book: The Questions of Jesus.....related to Jesus and people who are "poor and oppressed" .....

First, the Excerpt below, is related to this Passage of Scripture:

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/bi...>

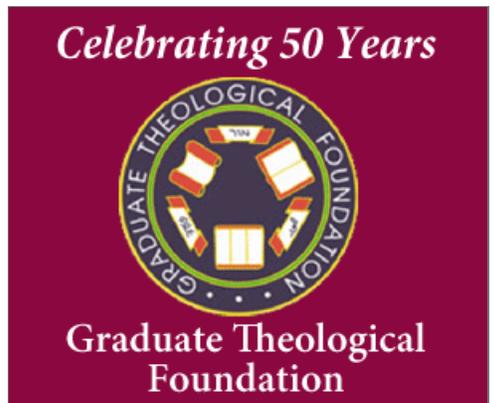
Luke 2:40-52

Excerpt, The Questions of Jesus, p.21-22:

"Instead, he turned his attention to the poor and oppressed and gathered disciples and apostles from them. If we dare embrace our loving God with the same steadfast, faithful, intimate love that Jesus did, we would find ourselves more and more turning back to God, living life in the presence of God, loving others equally as God's children, reconciling with all human beings as God's own children.....We would question our own relationship with God and discover what it means to be God's sons and daughters, and brothers and sisters of one another. The spiritual life begins as we let go of our earthly attachments, turn to our loving God, and find our home in God. Once we discover our true home in the house of God, we begin to live as Jesus did, loving and serving everyone, leading others to God's house, and looking forward to one day returning home."

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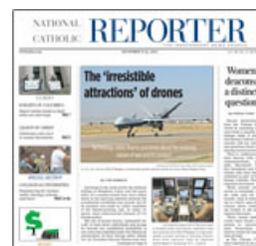


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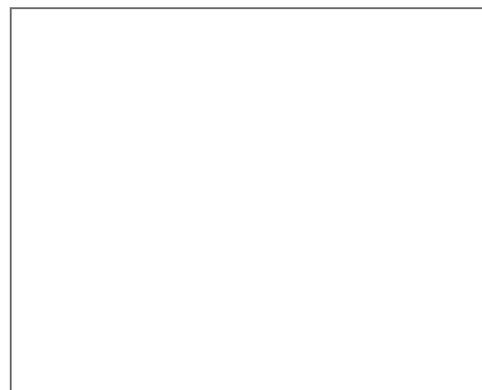
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