

A large, billowing mushroom cloud from a nuclear explosion, with a bright yellow and white core and a reddish-orange outer layer, set against a dark, smoky background.

First We Bombed New Mexico
a film by Lois Lipman

“A few people were probably overexposed,
but they couldn’t prove it, so we assumed we got
away with it...”

Dr. Louis Hempelmann, Medical Director,
Manhattan Project

A feature-length documentary to be released in 2023

Directed and Produced by Lois Lipman

Edited by Joel Marcus

In post-production





J. Robert Oppenheimer and General Leslie Groves, architects of the Manhattan Project.

Oppenheimer later came to regret designing the bomb. But Groves, while addressing congress stated, "Radiation is a pleasant way to die."

Overview

First we bombed New Mexico is the untold story of Trinity, the world's first nuclear bomb detonated in New Mexico one month before the bombing of Hiroshima.

It is a story of government betrayal with tragic consequences.

Thousands of New Mexicans - mostly Hispanic and Native American - were exposed to catastrophic levels of radioactive fallout, never warned, never acknowledged and never helped afterwards. Generations of cancers followed.

Latina businesswoman and cancer survivor, Tina Cordova ignites a grassroots movement in New Mexico and demands justice exposing what the Government knew and covered up with an indifference to the poisoning of its own citizens.

This film is witness to the people's narrative for voices not-heard...



Children of Tularosa.
Three of these children died from cancer and another five
have battled with it.

"Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds"
J. Robert Oppenheimer quoting Krishna from the Bhagavad-Gita



Tina Cordova, Leader and Co-Founder of the Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium



THE STORY

77 years ago, the U.S. military detonated the world's first atomic bomb, codenamed Trinity, in preparation for bombing Japan. Irradiated fallout dropped like snow over New Mexico contaminating the soil and water.

They knew radiation was hazardous and considered evacuating residents, but more concerned about liability and secrecy, they quickly left the area. Thousands, primarily Hispanic and Native Americans, were exposed to catastrophic levels of fallout: never warned, never acknowledged, never given any assistance.

Tina Cordova has seen too many suffer and die from bewildering cancers in her small town, Tularosa. When she is diagnosed with thyroid cancer, her doctor asks how and when she was exposed to radiation. Connecting the dots, Tina ignites a grassroots movement fighting for justice.

The CDC acknowledges radiation from Trinity exceeded 10,000+ times today's safety limits. Tina discovers that Nevada Downwinders, poisoned by America's later Cold War nuclear tests have been compensated since 1990 through special legislation.



But New Mexican Downwinders were forgotten, Tina believes this is because the victims were mainly Hispanic and Native American.

Tina travels to Washington DC with 12 mothers and cancer survivors to urge the U.S. government, to amend RECA (Radiation Exposure Compensation Act), so New Mexicans can finally get compensation for generations that suffered... and perhaps an apology. They are overwhelmed with the support they get from the visibly shocked senators in Washington DC.

Then their claim is denied.

The Downwinders reignite the fight, forming close alliances with uranium miners also paying an unbearable price from exposure to radiation. Will the U.S. finally acknowledge its legacy of nuclear colonization and the poisoning of its own citizens, or will they keep obfuscating?



WHY NOW?

New Mexico is the most diverse state in the nation – primarily Hispanic and home to the Navajo Nation and many other tribes. The town of Tularosa is only 45 miles from where Trinity was detonated in 1945, one month before the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan. Other civilians lived as close as 12 miles from the blast. Most Americans know the scientific and military story of Trinity, but the narrative of communities who lived and still live in Trinity's backyard has never been told on film.

In 2005, cancer survivor and Tularosa native, Tina Cordova formed the Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium to fight for reparations and justice. Lois Lipman, a journalist and filmmaker who moved to New Mexico discovered the story and was shocked that Nevada "Downwinders", poisoned by America's Cold War nuclear tests have been compensated since 1990 through special legislation (RECA). But New Mexican Downwinders continue to be disregarded, Tina believes, because the victims were primarily Hispanic and Native American.

Our film exposes archival documents and consequences concealed for decades. Getting the facts takes perseverance and time. Tina and the TBDC continue to confront the government. They will not stop until that change is made, the timing is urgent.

The New Mexico Downwinders have been given only two more years - July 2024, before any chance of legislation sunsets and the opportunity for success evaporates. The challenge of vulnerable voices to tell the truth is no small feat.

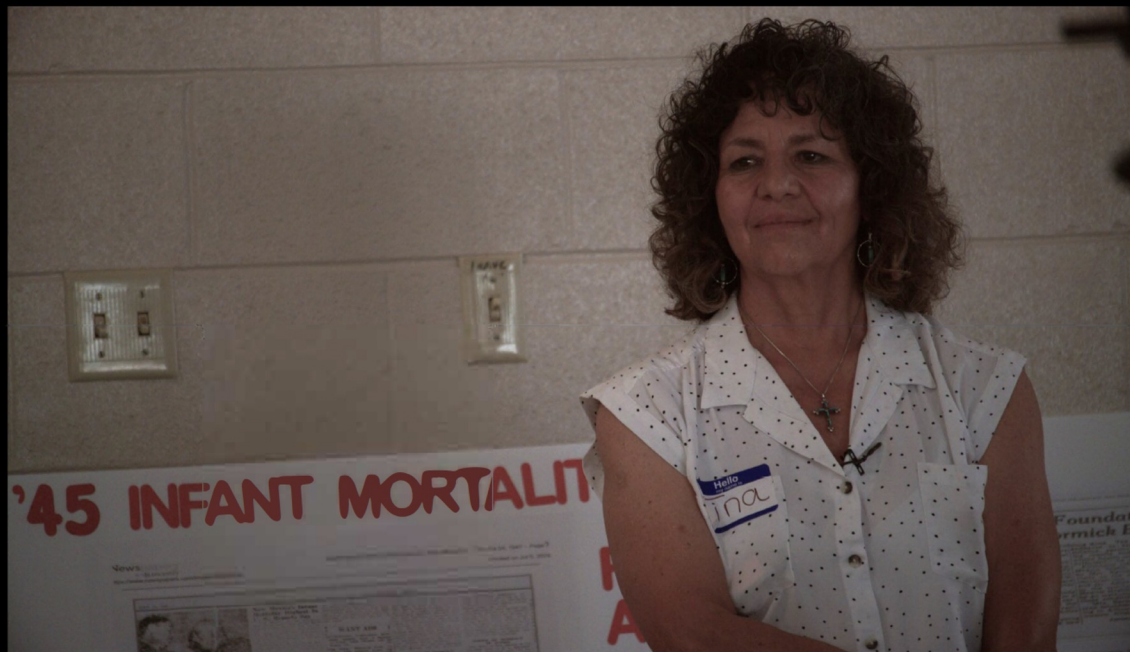
WHO IS TINA CORDOVA?

Tina Cordova is a seventh generation native New Mexican born and raised in the small town of Tularosa in south central New Mexico.

In 2005 Tina co-founded the Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium (TBDC) with the late Fred Tyler. The mission of the TBDC is to bring attention to the negative health effects suffered by the unknowing, unwilling, uncompensated, innocent victims of the first nuclear blast on Earth that took place at the Trinity site in south central New Mexico. Ultimately, the goal is the passage of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act Amendments to bring much needed health care coverage and compensation to those people of New Mexico suffering from the health effects of the Trinity test. Tina is a cancer survivor, having been diagnosed with thyroid cancer when she was 39 years-old.

Tina has a Masters of Science degree in Biology and minored in Chemistry. She is the past Chair of the Board of the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

Tina has been widely honored as a civic leader across many fields, statewide and nationally.



Others

Paul Pino former school principal and a Downwinder provides soulful musical relief outside the Trinity site on the 75th Anniversary of the bomb. Paul is enraged by the government's obfuscation.



Lesley Begay is on oxygen 24 hours a day and is awaiting for a lung transplant due to damage from working in the mines. He is part of the Uranium Miners' Coalition working with Tina.

"When will someone listen to us?"



Laguna Pueblo-Jackpile Paguate Open Pit Uranium Mine

The landscape and locations in New Mexico are vital to the telling of the story.



Supporting Cast



The Downwinders welcomed by Peter Sellars, director of the opera *Dr Atomic*.



Myriah Gomez, professor, author, activist and Downwinder. Her grandparents were evicted from their land to make way for the Los Alamos labs and the Manhattan Project.



Doris Walters, five generations of her family and entire blocks of her hometown are plagued with cancers.



Josh Wheeler, seventh generation New Mexican, journalist, professor and author, has been championing the Downwinders for 5 years



Jeni Alexander was 13 when Trinity's ash fell on her family. She has buried 11 siblings and three children, who all died from cancer.



Dr. Arlene Brown practiced medicine in southern New Mexico for 37 Years, her father was a physicist on the Manhattan Project.



Dr. Joseph Shonka co-author of a ground-breaking report published by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in 2010 revealed top-secret documents.



Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez working to amend RECA, was also a lawyer for the Laguna Pueblo for 30 years.



Dennis Carroll-Journalist who broke the original story about the Downwinders. Published in the *Santa Fe New Mexican*.



Kate Brown, MIT professor, investigative multi-award winning author, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families in Atomic Cities and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters*. Receiver of Guggenheim and Carnegie fellowships.



Professor Luis Campos, Baker College Chair in the History of Science, Technology and Innovation at Rice University. Author of *Radium and the Secret Life*.



Carletta Garcia activist, cancer survivor, Laguna Pueblo.

Downwinders, gathering strength in Washington DC.



Filmmaker Statement

I was astonished to discover the untold tragedy of the Trinity bomb- that communities in the near vicinity to the world's first nuclear test were exposed to catastrophic levels of radiation, not evacuated, and for 77 years the government has denied responsibility, continuing to block reparations for those affected.

This propelled me to investigate further, and when I met the formidable Tina Cordova and members of her coalition, I was inspired to bring this story to light. This film is to witness the people's narrative for voices not yet heard; we should not just let the US government's scientific achievements be the only picture in the frame about Trinity.

As the filming has progressed, we realize this story has far wider implications, that of environmental racism and a prevailing attitude towards persons of color who were once considered "unsophisticated, uneducated and unable to speak up for themselves."

By shining a lens on this tragic story, the affected communities will get the recognition and justice they deserve. Tina's Coalition's efforts illustrate a powerful story about persevering in a dark time, about finding one's voice, engaging the political process, and believing it is never too late to fight for justice.

Lois Lipman



Tina Cordova, Loretta Anderson, Arlene Jacinto at the Laguna Pueblo

EL MACHETE ILLUSTRATED
CUTTING THROUGH THE BULLSHIT

1945, White Sands
Missile Range, New Mexico



Lois Lipman

Director | Producer



Lois Lipman – Director/Producer - is an Emmy Award-winning documentary filmmaker who has field-produced stories around the world for the CBS News “60 Minutes” and field-produced its Peabody Award-winning, “Arthur Mitchell and Dance Theatre Harlem: From Harlem to the Barcelona Opera House”. Lipman’s exposé, “Til Death Do Us Part – Dowry Deaths in India” was awarded Best Documentary by American Women in Film and Television. The power of Lipman’s storytelling in this film led to first time-ever convictions in India. In addition, her film about BBC Radio, “The Beeb” won her an Emmy. While based in London, Lipman field produced hour-long documentaries for the BBC, Channel 4-UK, and PBS in locations globally, including Cuba, Guantanamo Bay, Israel and the West Bank, India, Europe. Lipman won her university department’s Capstone Award for Best Film during her MFA Fellowship at American University in DC. “A Place to Belong” also won Best Student Documentary Peer Award, a CINE Golden Eagle Award and was broadcast on PBS. Lois Lipman has been a professor at the Universities of Maryland and Toledo.

THE TEAM



Joel Marcus - Editor

Edited and produced acclaimed documentary *As I Am: The Life and Times of DJAM*, Tribeca Premiere - 2015. Wrote and edited *Bad Reputation: The Life and Music of Joan Jett*, 2018 which premiered at Sundance 2018. Co-Produced, *Music is my life, The life and Times of Joseph Sbabalala*. Premiered Encounters Festival, 2022. Joel started as a sound editor at the BBC, working on dramas and documentaries. Joel's unique aesthetic has seen him shape many brand identities including Nike, Vans, Tommy Hilfiger, Mercedes Benz and craft music videos for U2, Oasis, Nick Cave, Paul Weller, Elton John and more. He has edited for the BBC, ZDF, ARTE and more. To harness his passion for social justice and ability to use his craft to affect change, Joel has returned to documentary filmmaking.



Clive Edwards - Story Consultant

Former Commissioning Editor of BBC Current Affairs Documentaries; Editor and Producer of *Panorama* - BBC's flagship investigative documentary programme; Editor of *The Money Programme*; BAFTA Award for Best Factual Programme for Andrew Marr's *History of Modern Britain*. Fleetwood investigative journalist. Cambridge University Law graduate.



Doug Blush Consulting Editor

Doug is a renowned editor/producer who has worked on more than 100 documentaries, including Oscar, Emmy, and Peabody Award-winning projects, and 18 Sundance Film Festival features. He was editor of Oscar and ACE Eddie Award-winning *Twenty Feet from Stardom*; coproducer/consulting editor of *Icarus*, *Period. End of Sentence* – an Academy Award-winning Documentary Short 2019; and *Dark Money, Chasing Coral, On Her Shoulders*. A lifelong educator, Doug teaches at USC Cinematic Arts.

**Downwinders is an independently made documentary,
primarily self-financed.**

We are grateful for support of the:

Gale Family Foundation

Con Alma Health Foundation

Santa Fe Community Foundation

Robin Lloyd Foundation

Kind World Foundation

Santa Fe Film Institute

Docs in Progress

~~~

**To make a tax deductible contribution through our 501c3 fiscal sponsor, Women Make Movies.**

<https://www.wmm.com/sponsored-project/downwinders/>

---



We Are All  
*Downwinders*

*75 Years  
and Waiting*

1945-2020

Tularosa Basin  
Downwinders Consortium

THANK YOU | GRACIAS