

Wednesday, 20 October 2021

12:00-1:00 p.m. (EST)

A Zoom Webinar: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82231534062>

History of the Health Sciences Lecture

**Atomic Doctors:
Conscience and Complicity at the Dawn of the Nuclear Age**

James L. Nolan, Jr.

Chair and Washington Gladden 1859 Professor of Sociology

Justin B. Mutter MD MSc, moderator

After his father died, James L. Nolan, Jr., took possession of a box of private family materials. To his surprise, the small secret archive contained a treasure trove of information about his grandfather's role as a doctor in the Manhattan Project. Dr. Nolan, it turned out, had been a significant figure. A talented ob-gyn radiologist, he cared for the scientists on the project, organized safety and evacuation plans for the Trinity test at Alamogordo, escorted the "Little Boy" bomb from Los Alamos to the Pacific Islands, and was one of the first Americans to enter the irradiated ruins of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in September 1945.

Participation on the project challenged Dr. Nolan's instincts as a healer. He and his medical colleagues were often conflicted, torn between their duty and desire to win the war and their oaths to protect life. Called upon both to guard against the harmful effects of radiation and to downplay its hazards, doctors struggled with the ethics of ending the deadliest of all wars using the most lethal of all weapons. Their work became a very human drama of ideals, co-optation, and complicity.

Co-presented with Historical Collections, Claude Moore Health Sciences Library and by the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at UVA (<https://iasculture.org/>)

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

1. Bradley, David. *No Place to Hide*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1948.
2. Hacker, Barton, C. *The Dragon's Tail: Radiation Safety in the Manhattan Project, 1942-1946*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.
3. Liebow, Averill. "Hiroshima Medical Diary," *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine*, Vol. 38 (October 1965), 60-239.
4. Lindee, M. Susan. *Suffering Made Real: American Science and the Survivors at Hiroshima*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
5. Nolan, James L. Jr., *Atomic Doctors: Conscience and Complicity at the Dawn of the Nuclear Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
6. Welsome, Eileen. *The Plutonium Files: America's Secret Medical Experiment in the Cold War*. New York: The Dial Press, 1999.


Professor Nolan's teaching and research interests fall within the general areas of law and society, culture, technology and social change, and historical comparative sociology. His most recent book, [*Atomic Doctors: Conscience and Complicity at the Dawn of the Nuclear Age*](#), was published with Harvard University Press in 2020. His previous books include *What They Saw in America: Alexis de Tocqueville, Max Weber, G.K. Chesterton, and Sayyid Qutb* (2016); *Legal Accents, Legal Borrowing: The International Problem-Solving Court Movement* (2009); *Reinventing Justice: The American Drug Court Movement* (2001); and *The Therapeutic State: Justifying Government at Century's End* (1998). He is the recipient of several grants and awards including National Endowment for the Humanities fellowships and a Fulbright scholarship. He has held visiting fellowships at Oxford University, Loughborough University, and the University of Notre Dame.

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