Sites of the Manhattan Project
Women and the Manhattan Project

The Manhattan Project had sites all across the United States and the bomb was tested in the Pacific Islands (Bikini Islands). Each of these sites had a different function in the ultimate goal of building an atomic bomb. They were typically selected due to their geographic isolation, which led to the workers and their families feeling the desolation. Because the women interviewed in the oral histories featured in the lesson worked in multiple locations, the background and purpose of some locations may need to be explained with a lecture and/or readings using the descriptions given below or those given in Further Reading.  

Los Alamos: Originally code-named “Site Y,” was chosen by J. Robert Oppenheimer in late 1942 to be the major site of the Project where the nuclear weapons would be designed and assembled. Oppenheimer selected this location because he had visited frequently as a young man and it offered both isolation and opportunities for recreation. The location of the site was kept so secret it had only one mailbox for the entire town: PO Box 1663. By war’s end the site was home to 5,000 people including many current or future Nobel laureates.  

Hanford: Hanford Engineering Works or the Hanford Site was established in 1943 as part of the Manhattan Project on almost 600-square-miles of shrub-steppe grassland. Prior to World War II, the land where Hanford would be built was inhabited by Native Americans of the Yakima, Nez Perce, and Umatilla tribes. The Wanapum band of the Yakima nation were displaced by the Hanford Site and relocated. Starting in 1943, the land was acquired by the federal government for the purposes of producing plutonium, a crucial ingredient in the creation of the atomic bomb. The site was the home of the world’s first full-scale plutonium production reactor called the “B Reactor.” The plutonium manufactured at Hanford was used in the first nuclear bomb detonated in the Trinity test as well as the bomb that landed on Nagasaki.  

Oak Ridge: The Clinton Engineering Works, at first known only as “Site X” and now known as Oak Ridge, was established in late 1942 when General Leslie Groves approved the purchase of 59,000 acres of land approximately 20 miles east of Knoxville, Tennessee. Prior to WWII, the land was owned by many families who were told with very short notice that they needed to vacate their property and were offered a very small compensation. The site was established for the purposes of enriching uranium. The site came to house three plants, which utilized electromagnetic, gaseous diffusion, and thermal diffusion methods. At its peak the site housed 75,000 people and consumed

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2 For more information, see an interview with Rex Buck, a member of the Wanapum Indian tribe who grew up near the Manhattan Project site at Hanford. [http://www.manhattanprojectvoices.org/oral-histories/rex-bucks-interview](http://www.manhattanprojectvoices.org/oral-histories/rex-bucks-interview)
1/7 of all the electricity in the United States, more than the city of New York. The uranium enriched at Oak Ridge was used in the bomb dropped on Hiroshima.