



Physicians for Social Responsibility
10 Dumfries Court
Sacramento, California 95831
www.sacpsr.org • info@sacpsr.org
916-955-6333

Third Place Winner* (\$2,000 Scholarship)

Jenna Pimenta

Saint Francis High School
Sacramento, California

Untitled

The story of nuclear weapons had a beginning like this: in the first three decades of the 20th century, hopes about unseen energy arose among scientists as the nature of atoms became clearer and clearer. H.G. Wells' 1914 novel *The World Set Free* explored the not yet realized idea of atomic weapons; Winston Churchill spoke on the implications such a weapon might have on the military. In January 1939, the first nuclear fission experiment within the U.S. took place in the basement of a hall at Columbia University. Roosevelt began pouring funds into a Uranium Committee as the country entered the Second World War; the U.S. brought together the infamous Manhattan Project.

On August 6th, 1945, Little Boy detonated over Hiroshima. Three days later, Fat Man laid waste to Nagasaki. The lives of 140,000 civilians and military personnel alike were destroyed--immediately or from related complications--and to this day, cancers, radiation, and environmental destruction plague the cities. The Russell-Einstein Manifesto, which arrived 10 years later and detailed the pressing danger that nuclear weapons posed, was the start of a fervent, global campaign to ban nuclear weapons. For a moment, it seemed there might be an ending to the story that didn't end with war.

Then came the Cold War. A harrowing series of nuclear tests from various superpowers around the world ensued, involving close calls and lost missiles. The most recent chapter in the nuclear story was written in September 2017, when North Korea reported testing a hydrogen bomb that could be fitted on top of an intercontinental missile. As rifts between countries like the United States and Iran grow, the danger of an all-out nuclear war becomes more and more relevant. And if that war ever comes, it will undoubtedly, irrevocably scar the face of the planet and humanity alike. Hiroshima and its hellish horrors--radioactive rain, ground temperatures of 4000 degrees Celsius, bodies buried beneath 6.7 square kilometers of rubble--were only a taste of what could befall us. There are no contingency plans. There is only work to be done to prevent it from happening in the first place, work that's being done by direct action, environmental, and professional groups under the banner of the anti-nuclear movement, organizations who have taken it upon themselves to ensure the ending of this story is the good one.

And progress is being made. Many historians believe that public backlash against the building of nuclear arsenals have successfully pushed public policy in the anti-nuclear direction. In 2017, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the first legally binding agreement with the goal of eventually eliminating all nuclear weapons, was signed with 122 out of 124 countries in favor. And every year since 1996, the UN has called all nations to fulfill their disarmament commitments. Slowly but surely, efforts like these can push the direction of this story away from the destruction of humanity and towards its preservation, away from war and towards hope, away from tragedy and towards peace.

*Two students tied for third place.