

**How to Survive an Atomic Bomb: The Role of Civil Defense Films
During the Cold War, 1945-1956**

By Bradley Weekes

Thesis Advisor: Professor Kerry Smith

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Introduction

A World Destroyed and the Legacy of Hiroshima

On January 5, 1946 only a few months after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Manhattan Project member and famed physicist, Harold Urey declared “I’m a frightened man.”¹ His article in *Collier’s* magazine, was part of a larger campaign called the Scientists Movement, which aimed to garner support for international control of the atomic bomb. Urey had become deeply afraid of the atomic bomb, the weapon he helped create, and believed that it was too destructive to be in the hands of one country. Urey and his fellow Manhattan Project members had been first hand witnesses to the unmatched power of the atomic bomb. The weapon had shaken Urey to his core and infected him with a prevailing sense of fear and anxiety. He article warns that without an international control plan “the end will be deadly fear everywhere...A world of vast fear and apprehension will be our lot and that of our children...We will eat fear and apprehension will be our lot and that of our children...We will eat fear, sleep fear, live in fear and die in fear.”² Urey paints a dark vision of the future, one where peace and the existence of the atomic bomb couldn’t coexist. Urey though wasn’t alone in his genuine sense of terror. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki caused a wide array of reactions, including immense fear about the future

¹ Weart, Spencer R. *Nuclear Fear: A History of Images*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988. 114.

² Boyer, Paul S. *By the Bomb’s Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994. 278

While it definitively ended World War II, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki began an era of fear that would dominate the Cold War. The response to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki elicited sentiments of fear and anxiety that would only grow over the course of the Cold War. Paul Boyer's *By The Bomb's Early Light*, captures some of the immediate reactions of Americans to the deconstruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Noel Cousins, a writer for the *Saturday Review*, for example, four days after the Japanese surrender wrote an editorial entitled, "Modern Man is Obsolete." In the article, Cousins argued that the bomb had fueled "the fear of the unknown, the fear of forces man neither channel nor comprehend."³ On August 9, 1945, A young mother in Pelham Manor, New York wrote a letter to a radio commentator H.V. Kaltenborn, saying that after Hiroshima, she had "hardly been able to smile" and that "the future seems so utterly grim for our two boys."⁴ While talking about life for her children, in a frightening moment of foreshadowing, the nervous mother encapsulated the tension of the Cold War saying that "that it will be for them all their lives like living on a keg of dynamite which may go off at any moment."⁵ The bombings initiated a fearful reaction across the country, garnering the attention of everyone from suburban mothers to prominent writers about the glaring reality of mortality.

Before the nuclear arms race had truly begun, many Americans had already become aware of the potential of these weapons. The American people in many ways were able to predict the tension and sense the high political stakes that would plague the country for the next several decades. They saw the introduction of atomic bombs as ushering in an era of unforeseen tension

³ Boyer, Paul S. *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. New York: Pantheon, 1985. Pg. 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵ *Ibid.*

and even destruction. Much like Boyer emphasizes in his first chapter, it's "important to recognize how *quickly* Americans began to articulate them," referring to the possibility of atomic annihilation, "Years before the world's nuclear arsenals made such a holocaust likely or even possible."⁶ While fear wasn't the only emotion to come out of the bombings, with some praising the technological achievement and marvel of the weapon, it was an important and prevalent sentiment.

Americans would again be forced to come to grips with their own mortality after the Soviet's acquired atomic weapons. The brief period of the U. S's atomic bomb monopoly gave some comfort to the nation. It was projected that it would take years for the Soviets to develop their own bomb. However, the U.S. was proven wrong and on August 29, 1949, the Soviets had successfully tested their own atomic weapon. Newspapers at the time were quick to comment on the momentous event and its political implications. In *Newsweek*, commentator Raymond Moley said "The prospect of a two-sided war" meant "a towering change in the world outlook."⁷ *Business Week* echoed the same implications claiming that "an historic bridge has been crossed"⁸ with the successful testing. The U. S's reign of singular control over nuclear weapons had ended and the nuclear race had intensified.

This new chapter in the nuclear arms race opened up a series of problems for the American government and military. Historian Guy Oakes in his book, *The Imaginary War*, highlights that American national security up to that point had been guaranteed by several factors, namely "continental isolation and the protection afforded by thousands of miles of ocean

⁶ Boyer, Paul S. *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. New York: Pantheon, 1985. 15.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 336.

⁸ *Ibid.*

separated the United States from its nearest potential adversaries.”⁹ Furthermore, since the Civil War, the U.S. had their engagements limited to foreign battlefields and “did not suffer the collateral destruction that occurs in any war.”¹⁰ However, these conceptions had radically changed with the introduction of a Soviet atomic weapon. Now, “a Soviet nuclear force would destroy these traditional bases of American security and bring this period of military history, with all its advantages for the United States, to a terrifying swift conclusion.”¹¹ The Soviet bomb left the United States exposed and at risk for a potential recreation of Hiroshima on American cities. The U.S. was now in the crosshairs of the atomic bomb.

In the span of almost four years, the United States had gone from singular control over the world’s most powerful weapon to potentially engaging in atomic war with their global rival, the Soviet Union. The possibility of an atomic war erupting prompted national security planners to search for a plan to prepare the American civilian population, who had been isolated from the immediate effects of war, for the struggle with the Soviets. Eventually, one solution was found in civil defense. The Federal Civil Defense Administration would be created in December 1950 and would fully dedicate itself to act as a support apparatus for the American people, providing information about atomic survival and preparedness. Civil defense though was a multi-faceted approach including pamphlets, bombing drills, fallout shelters, etc. Within the larger umbrella of civil defense, this paper chooses to focus specifically on the role of civil defense films. Civil defense films aimed to mobilize the American public, dispel their fears about atomic weapons, and convince them of their ability to win an atomic war against the Soviet Union.

⁹ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 18.

¹⁰ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. Pg.19

¹¹ Ibid.

Literature Review

The literature on the civil defense, specifically on civil defense films is especially sparse. There are several key works within the Cold War historiography that engage with the argument that civil defense played a key role in shaping American psychological concerns and issues. In Paul Boyer's *By the Bomb's Early Light*, Boyer dedicates a whole chapter into analyzing how the atomic bomb impacted Americans psychologically. As Boyer correctly notes, the question of the bomb's psychological impact is "complicated by the fact that only a handful addressed it" in the years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki.¹² While Boyer acknowledges that in the absence of actual research, "one must turn to other kinds of evidence: allusions in poetry and fiction, passing comments by journalists, tentative speculations and predictions by cultural observers," he strangely dedicates very little on civil defense films.¹³

Laura McEnaney's *Civil Defense Begins at Home* and Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound* both address important issues within civil defense such as the growing role that women had in mobilization efforts. They both highlight how gender was a critical factor in deciding one's role within civil defense. Specifically, McEnaney and May delve into how women played a major role in mobilization efforts, such as stocking and supplying pantries in fallout shelters. Furthermore, McEnaney and May both give ample attention to how American families reacted to the mobilization efforts of civil defense and also the growing intrusion of military values in the

¹² Boyer, Paul S. *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. New York: Pantheon, 1985. 276.

household. While there is great focus on women's role in civil defense overall, neither historian sheds a light into the relation between women and civil defense films.

Other works such as Robert Jacobs' *The Dragon's Tail: Americans Face the Atomic Age* and Andrew Grossman's *Neither Red nor Dead* provide more of a cultural lens into understanding the anxieties of the Cold War. Grossman and Jacobs both discuss how popular media played a role in fueling sentiments of fear and apprehension surrounding the bomb.

Perhaps, the most complete narrative on the impact of civil defense comes from Guy Oakes' *The Imaginary War*. Oakes shows the how the mounting political and social tensions of postwar life, especially after the Soviet's acquisition of the bomb, made civil defense into an important necessity. Oakes also highlights what exact concerns civil defense planners were trying to solve, such as atomic panic and fear of fallout. Then he shows how the concept of emotional management and training one's self on how to react to an atomic attack became fundamental to civil defense. Oakes ties civil defense films to this concept, but only focuses on two films, only one of which deals with the atomic bomb.

It is clear that the historiography and existing literature has failed to shed light on how civil defense films influenced the American public during the Cold War. My thesis will use primary sources from the National Archives in College Park, Maryland that show the production aspect behind civil defense, the existing secondary literature, and wide array of civil defense films to explain why these films are important in understanding the beginning years of the Cold War.

Chapter Breakdown

In order to properly understand civil defense films, I begin in chapter one, “The Origins of Civil Defense,” by tracing the origins of the Cold War to the immediate aftermath of World War II. I explain how the two superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States became engaged in a global, ideological war. I argue that the United States had a fervent belief that the Soviets were striving for world domination and the expansion of communism. Then, I delve into the political and social contexts that made civil defense a necessity in the early years of the Cold War. Next, I focus on Cold War national security figures, John Foster Dulles and George Kennan, and their belief in the corrosion of the American will, leading to a weakened psychological home front. Finally, I explain the reasons why President Truman signed the Federal Civil Defense Act of 1950, creating a government agency that was entirely devoted into molding a vigorous civil defense apparatus.

The next chapter, “The Production and Marketing of Civil Defense Films,” investigates the inner politics that went into the creation of civil defense films. I use the film, *Pattern for Survival*, to explore the relationship between the government and private studios and how civil defense were marketed. Lastly, I explore who actually watched these films. Using the National Archives as primary source, I will shed light on the cross section of American people who went to civil defense films to find answers about atomic survival through these films.

My third chapter, “The Themes and Narratives of Civil Defense Films,” focuses on the civil defense films themselves, namely the major themes and narratives that I argue are representative of the genre. The chapter explores three particular thematic narratives present in a selection of civil defense films: the distinction between atomic panic and atomic fear, militarization of the American family, and the conventionalization of the bomb. I will show how

the films communicated with audience and convinced them of the importance of civil defense. By exploring these three major thematic narratives, there can be a better conception of the issues that civil defense planners thought were most important. Finally, the films studied are from 1950 to 1956 and only deal with atomic weapons. After 1956, there is a shift in focus on the hydrogen bomb that does not have the same narrative structure as the atomic bomb.

Overall, my thesis will aim to prove a number of key points. First, this thesis will show that to truly understand the psychological tensions that dominated the Cold War in the 1950s, one must fully understand the role civil defense films played. Civil defense films aimed to directly communicate with the American people, addressing their burgeoning anxieties and attempting to solve their concerns.

Secondly, I will argue that the unique capabilities that film had to communicate with an audience that other media such as civil defense pamphlets, failed to do. Film, I claim, had a universal language and cinematic visual power that was a powerful rhetorical tool for civil defense planners.

Thirdly, I argue civil defense films allow us to understand how the government and the American people dealt with the national anxiety presented by atomic warfare. Using the visual medium of film, the government used civil defense films to create the idea that an atomic attack was something that was not only survivable, but beatable. Through these films, we can see how the government was trying to tap into traditional sentiments and values of American willpower and strength to combat fear and panic. Unlike the popular literature and movies of the time which “painted a stark portrait of life in the nuclear age and did nothing to assuage the fears of Americans”, these documentary films presented a vision of survival that could “achieved through

sound planning, training and organization.”¹⁴ In the face of this immensely destructive weapon, these films were trying to depict an America that would not succumb to atomic war and through its preparedness would ultimately survive and thrive.

Finally, socially, civil defense films were to many Americans a barrier between safety and their uncertain future. The films were not just a list of how-to tips for survival, but rather the reassurance that survival itself was possible. Politically, the creation and thought behind civil defense illuminates the reality of an America that was realizing it was no longer unmatched. While the films showed the masses a glimpse into a new atomic future, the messages embedded within them attempted to recreate nostalgic feelings of an America that was still all powerful and fearless. This thesis provides important insight into the collusion of political hopes for the post war America and the social reality of an obliterated present, thematic that are seamlessly embedded into mantra of civil defense and the films they produced.

¹⁴ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 100.

Chapter 1

The Origins of Civil Defense

The Soviet Union's development into a superpower after World War II ushered in a new geo political enemy for the United States. The time period's specific political and social issues, such as geopolitical tensions with the Soviets and the threat of atomic war, were not the same as the concerns that shaped the World War II years. The Soviet Union's emergence as a superpower turned them immediately into a possible threat to the United States. After the war, the Soviets attempted to spread their influence and communism across Europe, and later East Asia. As early as 1946, national security planners, specifically, John Foster Dulles, would claim in *Life* magazine that the Soviet agenda aimed for world domination.¹⁵ Moreover, the acquisition of atomic weapons by the Soviets in 1949 escalated the possibility of atomic war and forced U.S. national security planners to assess the vulnerabilities of the American people, discovering their weak psychological state became a central priority.

The Federal Civil Defense Administration aimed to rectify the internal psychological issues that were plaguing the civilian population. Politically, influential national security planners like John Foster Dulles and George Kennan felt during the postwar economic boom that materialism had corroded the country's national morale and virtues, rendering them incapable of engaging in a successful geopolitical, ideological war with the Soviet Union. Socially, the technological achievement of the atomic bomb had fundamentally altered the landscape of battle. Americans were afraid that there was no way to defend themselves from an all-powerful atomic

¹⁵ Boyer, Paul S. *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994. 102.

attack and that their cities could eventually suffer the same fates as Hiroshima and Nagasaki, creating a widespread sense of anxiety. These pressing social and political fears forced the United States government to create an agency entirely dedicated to civil defense, the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA), which would not only provide solutions for survival from an atomic attack, but fundamentally reshape the psychological reactions and narratives surrounding atomic weapons and consequently mobilize the home front.

The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate how the Soviet Union's ascendance to power challenged the United States' position in the world. Using primary documents, such as 1950's pivotal NSC 68, I conclude that the United States saw the Soviets as threat to their superpower status and believed that the spread of communism needed to be contained.

Secondly, I will show how the struggle for geopolitical power with the Soviet Union led national security planners, such as John Foster Dulles and George Kennan to discover the vulnerabilities of the American civilian population. I will also explain why Kennan and Dulles felt that the country's vulnerabilities were linked to a lack of national morale and will, which they argued were the result of the consumerism and materialism of the postwar economy.

Thirdly, I will argue that the assessment of the dangers of atomic war led to a greater emphasis of the psychological concerns surrounding the atomic bomb. The focus on the bomb's ability to cripple the will of nations would lead President Truman to establish the Federal Civil Defense Administration. The agency would ensure that the American people would be psychologically prepared for the perils of atomic war.

National Will and Morale

The United States viewed the Soviets as a grave threat to democracy and freedom across the world. After World War II, both the Soviet Union and the United States emerged as the two sole two competing superpowers. In 1950, the joint Pentagon and State Department study, NSC 68, argued “The Soviet Union, unlike previous aspirants to hegemony, is animated by a new fanatic faith, antithetical to our own, and seeks to impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world.”¹⁶ According to national security planners, the Soviets were an unprecedented enemy that threatened the entire global order with its “antithetical” communism ideals. The U.S. already had strong anticommunist sentiments before the Cold War that influenced their perception of the Soviets. President Truman himself had a long history of ardent anticommunist sentiments. After Germany invaded Russia in June 1941, he said to a reporter that “If we see that Germany is winning we ought to help Russia and if Russia is winning we ought to help Germany and that way let them kill as many as possible.”¹⁷ NSC 68 would become the foundation of the foreign policy agenda for the country. It represented a clear assessment of the Soviets as a global threat that needed to be contained by the U.S. However, in this global, ideological struggle, national security planners would need the support of the American people to defeat the Soviets.

National security planners discovered the country was woefully unprepared for the psychological and emotional demands of a potential atomic war. In a 1946 secret report to President Truman, his national security planners concluded that “even a cursory examination of the characteristics of the American people and of the cultural and material fabric of their national life invites the conclusion that this nation is much more vulnerable to the psychological effects of

¹⁶ Herken, Gregg. *The Winning Weapon: The Atomic Bomb in the Cold War, 1945-1950*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. 328.

¹⁷ Winkler, Allan M. *Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety About the Atom*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999. 42.

the bomb than certain other nations.”¹⁸ In June 1947, President Truman would receive another top secret briefing detailing the state of the country. He was told by his advisors that “Any target study must include a critical consideration of the vulnerability of this country to atomic attack and should lead to the study of ways...of reducing this vulnerability...by suitable training and indoctrination.... of the civilian population.”¹⁹ The “cultural and material fabric of their national life” had made the American people more susceptible to the effects of the bomb. It would become clear to national security planners, such as George Kennan and John Foster Dulles, that the civilian population’s vulnerability largely stemmed from a general lack of morale and will needed to engage in an atomic war with the Soviets.

While preparing for an ideological and psychological war against the Soviets, national security planners became focused on the corrosive effect of materialism and consumerism on American morale and will. Historian Guy Oakes argues that people like Kennan and Dulles felt that the United States’ ability to engage on a global scale with the Soviet Union “depended on its ability to project a credible threat to fight a nuclear war. The plausibility of this threat was based on the moral resources of the American people.”²⁰ The importance of maintaining a strong, mobilized home front would be highlighted in civil defense by both planners, Dulles and Kennan, who believed that the American people had to project an image of strength and resilience against the Soviet Union.

George Kennan felt the United States’ success in the Cold War depended on rebuilding the virtues of the American people. Referred to as “the ‘father’ of containment,” the policy of

¹⁸ Grossman, Andrew D. *Neither Dead nor Red: Civilian Defense and American Political Development During the Early Cold War*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 44.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

trying to contain the global threat of communism, and later a U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, Kennan played a fundamental role in crafting the national security policies of the Cold War. ²¹ In his famous Long Telegram in 1946, he described the importance of pursuing every effort to grow “the self-confidence, discipline, moral and community spirit of our own people” as a “diplomatic victory over Moscow is worth a thousand diplomatic notes and joint communiqués.” ²² In the eyes of Kennan, the real war would be fought on the home front which depended on the virtues of the people. Furthermore, he believed in the tense international struggle against communism and the Soviets, it was paramount that the American people had a potent sense of virtue, which meant being devoid of the avarice of the postwar life. Without a virtuous home front, Kennan argued that the nation would be defenseless against the Soviet Union.

Kennan’s idea of a morally fragile U.S. would be reinforced through his travels across the country. Kennan came face to face with the rapid modernization and widespread consumerism of postwar life. Specifically, his 1950 trip via train from Washington D.C. to Mexico allowed him to witness how American cities had become, as Guy Oakes describes it “a place of unqualified corruption.”²³ While Kennan thought that traditionally rural areas and farm life represented true “humility”, he saw American cities like St. Louis as the embodiment of “grotesque decay” and moral degradation. ²⁴ Consumerism and modernization had brought Americans to the city, but, in the process, created vices of greed and excess, which ultimately

²¹ Wenger, Andreas. *Living with Peril: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Nuclear Weapons*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997. 24.

²² Kennan, George. "George Kennan's "Long Telegram"." George Kennan's "Long Telegram". Accessed January 04, 2017. <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm>.

²³ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 26.

²⁴ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 26.

“enfeebled the moral faculties,” as described by Oakes.²⁵ The revealing trip across the country would cement Kennan’s distraught feelings surrounding the morality of the country and would further his Cold War policies. Kennan, though, was not alone on his feelings towards the current state of the nation.

John Foster Dulles saw communism and the Soviet Union as not only a political threat, but as enemies threatening the entire global order. John Foster Dulles was one of the major voices in formulating national security policies and the response to communist expansion during the early years of the Cold War, working with President Eisenhower as his Secretary of State from 1953 to 1959. Dulles claimed in May 1953 that in “the world chess game, the Reds today have the better position.”²⁶ The Cold War thrust the nation into the middle of that global chess match and losing it to the Soviet Union meant not only the spread of communism, but possibly also the threat of atomic warfare. Historians Craig Campbell and Fredrik Lovegall focus on how Dulles argued in a 1954 essay in *Foreign Affairs* that the United States should answer any communist aggression “not by responding in kind and developing large armies to the scene but rather by attacking the source of aggression.”²⁷ Dulles’ blunt language would eventually give way to massive retaliation becoming a key policy of the Eisenhower administration, essentially claiming that any aggression towards the United States by the Soviets would be met with full force, possibly even atomic weapons. Dulles’ emphasis on atomic weapons as a form of possible retaliation demonstrated the radically new world national security planners were operating in. Atomic weapons were now part of national security policies. Additionally, atomic weapons had

²⁵ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 26.

²⁶ Wenger, Andreas. *Living with Peril: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Nuclear Weapons*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997. 23

²⁷ Campbell, Craig, and Fredrick Logevall. *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009. 145-146.

the sheer capability for utter destruction unlike any other weapons in history. Dulles strategically used the weapon's immense power to influence and deter Soviet actions. For example, during the course of the Korean War, Craig and Logevall note how massive atomic retaliation was used "as a general threat to deter the 'Sino-Soviet bloc' from sponsoring further Koreans."²⁸ National security planners were using the power of the atomic bomb and the threat of an attack as a deterrent against any hostile Soviet acts. Much like Kennan, Dulles saw the real battle of between the Soviets occurring within the civilian population, believing that American's weakness developed from a lack of religious faith and morals.

A lifelong member and believer in the Presbyterian Church, Dulles drew his inspiration for his blunt national security policies and anticommunist sentiments from his spiritual background. Dulles viewed the battle between the Soviets and the U.S., according to Campbell and Lovegall, as "fundamentally a struggle between good and evil, in which there could be no middle way, and that it was necessary to frame American foreign policy accordingly."²⁹ More than just a battle between two superpowers, the Cold War was a confrontation between two distinct ways of life, communism and democracy, that would definitively shape the world. The Soviets were not merely just a geopolitical foe, but a representative of pure "evil." In his 1950 book, *War or Peace*, Dulles remarked that Americans had lost their spiritual vitality and had become "less concerned with conducting a great experiment for the benefit of mankind and to be more concerned with piling up for ourselves material advantages."³⁰ In Dulles's framework, Americans need to be spiritually and morally prepared to sustain a long term global power

²⁸ Campbell, Craig, and Fredrick Logevall. *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009. 145-146.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 140.

³⁰ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 24.

struggle with the “evil” Soviets. In an interview with *Life* Dulles would cast “the struggle as a test, an hour of reckoning—a moment to prove oneself.”³¹ He would argue that the United States would defeat the Soviet Union because of the country’s rooted “righteous faith.”³² Again, Dulles returns to faith and religion as integral to the strength of the American public. Both Kennan and Dulles were focusing in on the moral corruption of the country following the postwar economic boom. In their eyes, America had become a consumerist, materialistic culture, weakening its morality and willpower. The country’s weakened home front left it to susceptible to Soviet threats and unable to sustain the needed support for the geopolitical power struggle of the Cold War.

Both national security planners had focused on the weak psychological state of the country, in this case, willpower, as a major detriment in preparing for an atomic war with the Soviets. Oakes claims that the national security planners had developed serious doubts about the current state of the American character. Oakes argues that the planners believed Americans were “childish and selfish” and that “a life of mindless consumption had led to moral corruption and decadence.”³³ ³⁴ Finally, Americans were “lacking the toughness needed to oppose a powerful and ruthless enemy in the hazardous world of the Cold War.” ³⁵ After the national security planners reached the conclusions on the weakened state of the country, they shifted their focus on understanding the psychological elements of the atomic bomb

³¹ Shibusawa, Naoko. *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010. 89.

³² *Ibid.*, 90.

³³ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 24.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

The idea of an American society weakened morally and spiritually by consumerism and materialism led national security planners to conclude that the Cold War would also have to be fought and prepared for on a psychological front. On June 30, 1947, the Joint of Chiefs of Staff Evaluation Board submitted a final report on the results of their top-secret tests in the Marshall Islands and found that the main function of the atomic bomb as weapon was to “break the will of nations of people.”³⁶ The bomb had transcended being merely a conventional weapon of destruction into a psychological weapon able to “break the will of nations.” A 1948 report by the War Department’s Civil Defense Board called *A Study of Civil Defense*, would make the same argument, concluding that an atomic bomb could effectively destroy “the will and ability of the people to resist.”³⁷ By focusing on the “will” of the people, the report highlights the same concerns of Dulles and Foster. Beyond the potential psychical destruction, Americans had to be mentally prepared to respond to an attack. Civil defense during World War II focused on mobilizing the population, but in the Cold War context, it had to now focus largely on how best to mentally prepare Americans for the psychological strains of a potential atomic attack.

Psychological Concerns

Atomic panic emerged as the most pressing issue for civil defense planners, indicating the increasing focus on the psychological concerns over the direct physical effects of the atomic

³⁶ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 35.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

bomb. Val Peterson, the first administrator of the FCDA, in 1953 wrote an editorial in *Collier's* magazine entitled, "Panic: The Ultimate Weapon?" In the editorial, Peterson hones in on the ability for mass panic in the aftermath of an atomic bombing to create far more danger and destruction than the direct effects of the bomb itself. Peterson opens the editorial claiming that in an atomic war "the whole country's survival could depend on your reaction to disaster...because mass panic may be far more devastating than the bomb itself."³⁸ He goes on to say that "If there is an ultimate weapon, it may well be mass panic—not the A-bomb. Mass panic—not the A-bomb—may well be the easiest way to win a battle, the cheapest way to win a war."³⁹ The implication of Peterson's argument is that the Cold War was less about the initial effects and physical damage of an atomic attack, but how a country would react psychologically in the medium to long term period after a disaster that made the ultimate difference. The nation's ability to respond and rebuild in the face of adversity would determine the true winner of the Cold War. A major factor in much of the atomic panic that existed came from mass media.

Mass media's fearful and bleak reporting on the atomic bomb played a key role in introducing American to atomic panic. One of the first examples of coverage of the destruction of the atomic bomb came from *Life* magazine. Historian Paul Boyer points out that "the most important print medium through which the American people formed their initial impressions of the atomic bomb was Henry Luce's photo magazine, *Life*, with its five million plus circulation."⁴⁰ Mere weeks after the atomic bombings in Japan, *Life's* August 20, 1945 issue contained "full page photographs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki" with many Americans

³⁸ Peterson, Val. "'Panic---The Ultimate Weapon?'" by Val Peterson, *Collier's Weekly*, Friday, August 21st, 1953. UNZ.org. Accessed January 04, 2017. <http://www.unz.org/Pub/Colliers-1953aug21-00099>. 99.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴⁰ Boyer, Paul S. *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. New York: Pantheon, 1985. 8.

encountering “for the first time the towering mushroom-shaped cloud that would become the quintessential visual symbol of the new era.”⁴¹ The language and reporting of the events were told in a visceral, intense manner. The magazine said that Hiroshima had literally been “blown...off the face of the earth” and Nagasaki had been “disemboweled” by the bomb.⁴² *Life* had provided the nation a visual and verbal representation of the destruction that overtook Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After being visually exposed to the bomb, Americans were trying to find ways to both cope and combat against the power of this weapon. News magazines like “*Time*, *Newsweek*, and *United States News*; general publications such as *Life*, *Collier’s*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*” to even “specialized magazines for educators, businessmen, women, ministers, and countless others were publishing “so many articles on the subject” to fill the public’s need for answers.⁴³ The wide coverage on the bomb’s horrific effects of Hiroshima and Nagasaki played an influential role in cementing the nation’s sense of atomic panic. When the Soviet’s acquired their bomb four years later in 1949, these images were still powerful and pertinent to enough resonate with Americans.

Unlike the conventional weapons of World War II, the technological power of the atomic bomb had the power to induce panic and cripple the will of a nation, prompting a response from civil defense that had to focus on responding to the psychological warfare at hand. Civil defense planners like Peterson came view the atomic bomb as weapon wholly unique and different from the conventional weapons civil defense planners faced in World War II. Supporting Peterson’s position, historian Laura McEnaney refers to another historian, Ellen Herman, arguing that “war ‘had been reconfigured into a profoundly psychological format’” with the “belief that ‘morale’

⁴¹ Boyer, Paul S. *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. New York: Pantheon, 1985. 8.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 31.

was as much a part of victory as weapons.”⁴⁴ Much like Kennan and Dulles, the arguments being made by civil defense planners were focusing on the specific psychological elements of the American people such as, morale, willpower, spirituality, that would be the decisive factors in an atomic war with the Soviets. With the responsibility of civil defense shifting during the Cold War into a tool for psychological defense, civil defense planners moved towards incorporating the opinions of social scientists in their decisions on how best to help the American people.

Social scientists, mainly, psychologists, were beginning to gain rapid influence in national security planning as the role psychological warfare would play in atomic warfare became evident. One of the most notable psychological studies came in 1949 from a study by Yale professor Irving L. Janis. In “Psychological Aspects of Vulnerability to Atomic Bomb Attacks” Janis concluded that “As the attention of the American public becomes focused more upon international tensions and the possibility of another war, the increasing realization that our cities may be destroyed and that millions of American civilians may be killed or mutilated can in itself become a powerful stimulus capable of arousing intense emotional reactions.”⁴⁵ Janis’s study captured the widespread trauma that civil defense planners expected to be involved in atomic war. The American public would be exposed to unforeseen horrors and death that had the possibility to shatter the nation physically and psychologically. In a later report by Janis, “Psychological Problems of A-Bomb Defense,” he concluded “How can inappropriate, disorganized, and maladaptive responses be prevented? To some extent the prior training of the general population will be useful in preparing people to act intelligently in a disaster.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ McEnaney, Laura. *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. 31.

⁴⁵ Jacobs, Robert. *The Dragon's Tail: Americans Face the Atomic Age*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2010. 55-56.

⁴⁶ Jacobs, Robert. *The Dragon's Tail: Americans Face the Atomic Age*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2010. 55.

Essentially, Janis looked to civil defense as the solution to the psychological dimensions of atomic war. Janis believed that atomic panic could be prevented through sufficient training and preparation. Civil defense's responsibility would be to provide the necessary training that would prevent atomic panic and create a rational emotional response to an atomic attack

The fear of civil defense planners was that panic had a direct correlation with the breakdown of social order. The belief was that panic could cause Americans to turn on each other, leading to violence and turning into a complete frenzy. Especially with the racial tensions of the early 50s, which will be discussed fully in the third chapter, civil defense planners were afraid of ethnic and even religious conflicts emerging. ⁴⁷ Effectively, panic destroyed the social fabric of the country. Both Guy Oakes's *The Imaginary War* and Andrew Grossman's *Neither Dead nor Red* highlight civil defense planners' two step solution to fixing the psychological problems plagued by atomic war. The solution was found in educating the public about "an imaginary nuclear reality in which nuclear weapons and their effects are transformed into conventional weapons, and then the systematic marketing of this contrivance to the public." ⁴⁸ Paradoxically, civil defense would strike a unique balance of conventionalizing the atomic bomb and its effects, while also reminding Americans of its sheer destruction to promote mobilization. Planners would use public education to show Americans how to survive an attack and focus on the psychological elements of the bomb, specifically how to ease panic. The growing need for a sufficient civil defense response eventually gave way to the creation of its agency, the Federal Civil Defense Administration.

⁴⁷ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 40.

⁴⁸ Grossman, Andrew D. *Neither Dead nor Red: Civilian Defense and American Political Development During the Early Cold War*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 45.

Creation of the Federal Civil Defense Administration

The exact role of civil defense was unclear during World War II, with people like Eleanor Roosevelt viewing it as a social service and Fiorello LaGuardia wanting to use it as a paramilitary apparatus. During World War II, the director of the Office of Civil Defense (OCD), Fiorello LaGuardia once called the work of civil defense as “nonprotective” activities and described its work as “sissy stuff,” implying that it should instead feature protective measures against air raids and other enemy attacks.^{49 50} Ostensibly, LaGuardia saw civil defense acting as a pseudo militia, protecting the citizens from enemy danger. During the same period of time, Eleanor Roosevelt, founder of the Civilian Protective Branch of the OCD, had a radically different interpretation of civil defense, believing that it was an opportunity for New Deal policies such as nutrition programs, daycare services, consumer education and fitness activities to be implemented.⁵¹ Roosevelt’s interpretation of civil defense was more resource oriented, providing goods and services for people in need. These conflicting visions show how the role and identity of civil defense was very much up for debate during World War II. The war had failed to make a clear distinction of what exactly the function of civil defense was and the role it would play during a wartime effort. During the Cold War, however, these competing conceptions and divisions on civil defense from World War II would meld together to form the foundation of later civil defense policies and agencies, including the National Security Resources Board.

⁴⁹ McEnaney, Laura. *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. Pg. 17.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 17.

⁵¹ Ibid.

The National Security Resources Board laid the foundation and the policies, such as continuous mobilization, that would define later civil defense agencies, including the Federal Civil Defense Administration. The first agency designed to respond to the needs of civil defense and preparedness, the National Security Resources Board (NSRB) was created in 1947 by the National Security Act. The NSRB's central goal was assisting the Department of Defense in the mobilization of goods, resources, and troops during times of war, and it only dedicated a small section of its responsibilities to the issue of civil defense. The NSRB nevertheless would set the foundational tone that would become pivotal to later iterations of civil defense agencies. Central to the programs within the NSRB was the focus on continuous mobilization. The NSRB adopted "continuous mobilization planning—to assure continual adjustment to changes in strategy, tactics, and the weapons of warfare"⁵² as one of its central policies. Historians Guy Oakes and Andrew Grossman focus on how this consistent mobilization and increasing militarization was connected to the belief that after Pearl Harbor the nation had to be prepared for any attack.^{53 54} The idea of the threat of an attack consistently looming would soon dictate how government agencies would approach civil defense in relation to the atomic bomb.

As noted in the introduction, the Soviet's successful testing of an atomic bomb in September 1949 greatly influenced Truman's decisions related to civil defense. After the test Truman was pressured by Congress to create some assurance of safety and protection for the American people. For example, in an ominous, foreboding letter to Truman on October 8, 1949 Representative John F. Kennedy warned that without a sufficient civil defense apparatus from

⁵² Grossman, Andrew D. *Neither Dead nor Red: Civilian Defense and American Political Development During the Early Cold War*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 35.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵⁴ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 124.

the Soviets, the country was at risk for “an atomic Pearl Harbor.”⁵⁵ Kennedy was not alone in his opinion, garnering the support from numerous congressmen, most notably, Senator Brien McMahon, chairman of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, who led a study in October 1949 exploring the nation’s civil defense capacities.⁵⁶ The bleak political rhetoric from politicians such as Kennedy only intensified emotions and concerns on the home front. The Soviet’s acquisition of the bomb was being portrayed as a direct threat to the livelihood of Americans and their safety.

Truman responded to this political pressure by creating an independent government agency whose sole purpose was civil defense. In July 1950, Truman worked with NSRB chairman Stuart Symington to expand their civil defense program. The NSRB would produce a report unofficially known as the *Blue Book* that recommended the creation of an agency independent of the NSRB focused solely on civil defense. Truman approved the plan and on December 1, 1950 the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) was created. The agency’s purpose would be creating a wide spread civil defense program across the nation. The mounting political pressure along with the increasing anxiety on the home front created the momentum and outcry that was needed for the creation of the FCDA. The new agency from the start aimed to address specific problems within the nation, namely strengthening national will and morale, managing atomic panic, and addressing psychological woes. The FCDA’s leadership understood their role to include selling civil defense to Americans. Ultimately, one of the most powerful marketing tools and weapons civil defense planners would utilize was film.

⁵⁵ McEnaney, Laura. *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. 14.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 2

The Production and Marketing of Civil Defense Films

The political and social circumstances of the events of 1949 and 1950 made civil defense films feel like an urgent necessity for the American people. While 1949 introduced in the obvious threat of the Soviet's acquisition of atomic weapons, the global spread of communism also loomed large. China had fallen to communism under Mao Zedong and U.S. national security planners believed in a domino theory in which countries in the nearby area could well follow suit. This theory led Americans to enter into the Korean War in 1950 to prevent the spread of communism from North Korea to the South.

While war was breaking out in East Asia, another source of concern for Americans came from the increasingly powerful atomic bomb tests in the Pacific and in remote areas of the U.S. One test in Nevada was so powerful that its glare could be seen from Boise, Idaho, 500 miles away.⁵⁷ Moreover, news publications were covering the tests, making the atomic bomb visible to everyone, not just local witnesses. A *Newsweek* report on February 19, 1951, wrote about the same testing in Nevada, describing one woman's house whose screen door had been ripped off and two windows smashed.⁵⁸ David Bradley's bleak book, *No Place to Hide*, depicted his experiences viewing atomic bomb tests in the Pacific. The book was a *New York Times* bestseller, selling a quarter of million copies by the end of 1949 and reaching a wide audience.⁵⁹ In the book, Bradley argues that there is ostensibly "no real defense against atomic weapons" and

⁵⁷ Miller, Richard L. *Under the Cloud: The Decades of Nuclear Testing*. The Woodlands, TX: Two-Sixty Press, 1991. 105.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

“the devastating influence of the Bomb and its unborn relatives may affect the land and its wealth—and therefore its people—for centuries.”⁶⁰ These various political incidents and moments led civil defense planners to embrace civil defense films as a possible solution to the problems they realized they now faced. The results of that engagement are discussed in chapter three. In order to understand how these films attempted to engage with the American public, it will be helpful to first explore how civil defense films were made.

The story of the production of *Pattern for Survival* provides useful insight into that process. That story includes an in depth look into civil defense marketing and the role of the government in communicating to the public tactics Americans could use to protect themselves from an atomic attack. The film was influenced by the 1950 civil defense pamphlet, Survival Under Atomic Attack, and replicated its role as an informational “how-to” on protection from the bomb. The film is an early representative of the civil defense genre, devoid of much narrative, but focused on presenting a factual understanding of atomic weapons and its possible threats. *Pattern for Survival* is unusual in that sources describing its production are extant; I found few other collections of similar quality. However, the National Archives in College Park, Maryland does provide substantial background information and primary sources on 1951’s *Pattern for Survival*, by Cornell Film Industry. While *Pattern for Survival* is only one of many civil defense films produced around this time, the process that went into creating and making the film itself provided a template for later films to come. It can be safely assumed that similar processes were used during the time period explored in this thesis. As a result, this chapter will use *Pattern for Survival* as a case study into understanding the process behind creating civil defense films

⁶⁰ Winkler, Allan M. *Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety About the Atom*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999. 91.

overall. From general marketing to engaging with audiences, *Pattern for Survival* provides well needed insight into the assumptions and thinking that went into producing these movies.

It is also important to consider the fact that in 1950 the Federal Civil Defense Administration was the first formal agency fully dedicated to civil defense. Therefore, films like *Pattern for Survival*, which came out soon after its creation, were produced in an era where there were no formal procedures or guidelines to tell movie makers what federal or local agencies wanted. The process explored in this chapter shows film makers still searching for the best way to market and distribute their films. The escalating political circumstances of war erupting in Korea and the atomic bomb emerging as a greater threat to the safety of the U.S. made it absolutely pivotal for civil defense planners to find the best way to efficiently and effectively produce these films to respond to these crises. By studying the making of these films, we can study and see how civil defense aimed to market itself to the American people and how much involvement the government had in shaping the narratives about the atomic bomb.

First, this chapter will shed a light on the variety of factors that went into producing a civil defense film. This chapter will show how agencies like the FCDA took on the creation of civil defense films without the help of a previous template. Using *Pattern for Survival* as a key example, I will also provide a look at how the movie studio system operated in relation to civil defense and give insight into the inner politics that drove the creation of these movies. My chapter will also show how the complicated relationship between the U.S. government and private movie studios became fundamental in the process of distributing and marketing civil defense films to the public. Furthermore, it will explore the different reasons that movie studios felt compelled to help make civil defense films.

Finally, this chapter will demonstrate how civil defense films engaged and interacted

with the American public during the political and social tensions of the Cold War, specifically around the events of 1949 and 1950. The strong interest in civil defense films in this time era suggests that they were an important part of the American Cold War experience. Their screenings in schools, workplaces and in other settings too suggest that the films appealed to a wide cross section of American society. However, domestic racial tensions in the 1950s deeply complicated civil defense plans. In terms of creating public shelters and engaging with the African American community, race became inseparable in the discussion of civil defense and civil defense films. The chapter's focus on African Americans and civil defense will illustrate the internal racial strife that prevented some communities of color from fully being involved in the mobilization effort.

Production Studios and Civil Defense

The early correspondences between government officials and private film studios, specifically the Cornell Film Company, show attempts by studio heads to market and sell their civil defense films. The holdings in the National Archives focus on the Cornell Film Company, which released *Pattern for Survival* in 1950. Reviewing these documents can help us understand some of the thinking that went into creating the film, and offer some insight into the inner workings of the movie studio itself.

Cornell, which left little in the way of a historical footprint, was housed in New York's Paramount Building in the 1940s and 50s.⁶¹ Private film studios like Cornell and government

⁶¹ At the time, Paramount Pictures, the owner of the building, was one of the most popular and profitable movie

agencies had a complicated relationship in the early years of civil defense film production. With no formal procedures or guidelines established before 1950 on how production should operate, private film studios early on often made their own films related to civil defense, after which they and would try and promote their films to government agencies. The studios hoped that through working with the government their films could gain more traction and even an endorsement. An endorsement from someone within the government or a prominent scientist lent legitimacy and authenticity to the film. Cornell's president, J. Milton Salzburg, devoted a great deal of effort into getting an expert endorsement and "proof" that the *Pattern for Survival* was technically accurate. For example, in a September 21, 1950 letter to Roger Gleason, the Coordinator of Civil Defense Plans in Connecticut, Salzburg points out that the movie features William L. Lawrence, who he described as "the only newspaperman assigned to officially cover the entire atomic project" and the "best scientific writer in America."⁶² By mentioning Lawrence and the accolades associated with him, Salzburg is attempting to give credibility to his film. In a time where there was no established procedure on how these films should be made (the FCDA wouldn't come into existence until Truman's executive order creating the agency in December 1950), Salzburg also tried to promote his film by emphasizing its technical accuracy. This relationship between an endorsement and a film's success would continue to be integral into how a civil defense film would be evaluated by studio heads such as Salzburg.

Cornell Film Company's correspondence with the government about *Pattern for Survival* shows how government approval and endorsement was essential to the validity of early civil defense films. Salzburg reached out to numerous government officials, especially figures associated with civil defense, to get their support for *Pattern for Survival*. In a letter to Harold L.

studios in the country, still operating under the traditional Hollywood studio system.

⁶² National Archives, Record Group 304, Entry 31 A, Box 1: Records Relating to Civil Defense, 1949-1953.

Goodwin, a member of the National Security Resources Board (NSRB), on October 18, 1950, Salzburg raves about how the film “has been shown in and around New York as well as some of the New England states and the praise for this picture has been unanimous.”⁶³ On October 25, 1950, a week after the Goodwin message, Salzburg also contacted Jack De Chant, future Director of Information for the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA), about possibly organizing a screening for anyone in “Washington who...might care to see the picture” as well as Stuart Symington, the chairman of the NSRB. ⁶⁴ In his letter to Symington, Salzburg claims that a Commissioner Wallander of the New York City New York State Civil Defense groups praised it as one of “the finest films they have ever had the pleasure to see in a great many years.”⁶⁵ Salzburg sends both of these letters within a week in an attempt to screen the movie to governmental departments and gain more press. The idea was that more press would help the film get more request for screenings in places such as schools and local civil defense chapters. *Pattern for Survival*, for example, was screened at a local high school in Kansas City, Missouri at its request for a school assembly.⁶⁶ Beyond schools, in 1950 the National Association of Manufacturers requested the film after hearing positive reviews. ⁶⁷ Salzburg even discusses his hope that once the FCDA is fully operating he can act as an “asset to the government” with his movie. ⁶⁸ If Salzburg could show that his film had received rave reviews from government officials like Symington in the NSRB, it would make his film appear to be a legitimate resource on civil defense. As studios started to enter the market for civil defense films, they sought out the

⁶³ National Archives, Record Group 304, Entry 31 A, Box 1: Records Relating to Civil Defense, 1949-1953.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Scheibach, Michael. *Atomic Narratives and American Youth: Coming of Age with the Atom, 1945-1955*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2003. 91.

⁶⁷ National Archives, Record Group 304, Entry 31 A, Box 1: Records Relating to Civil Defense, 1949-1953.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

approval and validity of government officials to make their films more marketable.

The internal politics and procedures of government agencies, like the NSRB, prevented them from being truly involved in the promotion of civil defense films. In a response to Salzburg on December 28, 1950, De Chant reveals that while he appreciated the “anxiety to sell copies of the film.... that promotion and advertising of this sort is distinctly unethical and in violation of our verbal agreements. If it continues, we will be forced...to repudiate your statements publicly.”⁶⁹ Again, this response comes right before the creation of the FCDA, which would eventually work with private companies to promote their films. It can be inferred that in the absence of a fully dedicated agency to civil defense, the NSRB wasn’t as involved or prepared in facilitating the work involved in civil defense. In the post FCDA era, government endorsement and partnerships are consistently noted and highlighted in the civil defense films mentioned in the next chapter. In contrast, in this pre FCDA era officials are still resistant about having government agencies cooperate with private studios and help promote their films.

Regardless, Salzburg’s claims about the popularity and the wide marketability of *Pattern for Survival* in his letters to De Chant and Symington do have some support. In the archive is a collage of three pages of press clippings, favorable reviews, and general impressions of the film from October and November of 1950. That document suggests that the film was shown to a wide array of different businesses, communities, organizations, etc., throughout the country. L. Robert Oaks, director of the Motion Picture Department Public Relations Division said he thought *Pattern for Survival* was “an excellent job for the purpose of inspiring interest in civilian defense.”⁷⁰ The College of Pharmacy in Fordham University claimed that their students “found it to be most useful in every respect for instructing the laity on the precautions that must be

⁶⁹ National Archives, Record Group 304, Entry 31 A, Box 1: Records Relating to Civil Defense, 1949-1953.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

observed in preventing injuries from atomic bombing.”⁷¹ The Institute of Life Insurance in New York showed the film “twice to a total of about 100 people”⁷² and it made a “tremendous impression”⁷³ on everyone. While obviously a self-selected array of reviews, the document shows the appeal these films had and that there definitely was a growing market for them. Despite not having the endorsement from the NSRB, the film was still able to market itself and find a sufficient audience. There clearly was an audience who wanted to be educated and learn more about the atomic bomb.

In terms of who worked on the films, a look at Depicto Films shows a brief glimpse into what the role of writing teams was. In a December 22, 1950 letter to the Civilian Defense Agency in Washington, D.C., Depicto Films described itself as a “New York State corporation...completely equipped under one roof to produce motion pictures in with 35mm or 16mm, black and white or color.”⁷⁴ The production company had its own equipment, including a 35mm camera, a projection room, dark rooms, and its own cutting room. Within the memo is also the company providing information about its own staff, listing their accomplishments and backgrounds. Depicto’s writing staff included Charles Han, who had “twenty years’ experience...earlier connected with Paramount Pictures,” William Alley, an “all-around writer, specializing in sales and other training type productions. Also well-known throughout the field.”⁷⁵ In promoting itself, Depicto highlights the importance of having technical experience in the field of civil defense. Much like Cornell, Depicto is trying to document its technical background, qualifications that were sure to rub off on the film *The Companies Making Civil*

⁷¹ National Archives, Record Group 304, Entry 31 A, Box 1: Records Relating to Civil Defense, 1949-1953.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

defense films strived to get writers who had experience in “training type productions” to accurately convey the messages of the film. These films didn’t have major Hollywood writers or particularly robust budgets. They couldn’t market their films on the reputations of the actors who appeared in them. Instead, the makers of civil defense films had to convince schools, local civil defense chapters, and other potential audiences of their validity through their technical expertise which was highlighted through their government endorsements, various experts, and experienced writing staff.

While private movie studios had numerous motivations for getting involved in producing civil defense films, a prevailing and powerful impulse was the power of film to accurately convey the importance of civil defense. The National Archives contain correspondence from movie production studios to various politicians and community leaders. The letters reveal certain movie studios’ deep belief in film being the best medium for connecting with audiences. For example, in a letter to Senator William Knowland of California, Frederick K. Cockett, president of his eponymous film company, provides a passionate argument on the value and role film could play in the promotion of civil defense. Written on September 5, 1950, Cockett explains that there “is no medium so quickly and thoroughly understood as a motion picture demonstration.”⁷⁶ Film could convey a message or a point, in this case, the importance of civil defense, with a visual language that was easy to understand and decipher, especially in comparison to something like an informational civil defense pamphlet.

Cockett’s assumptions about the power of film can be seen clearly in the popular science fiction films of the 1950s. 1958’s *The Blob* and 1954’s *Them!* in particular capitalized on the fears of atomic weapons, creating widely popular narratives about genetic mutation and

⁷⁶ National Archives, Record Group 304, Entry 31 A, Box 1: Records Relating to Civil Defense, 1949-1953.

monsters. Allan Winkler's *Life Under a Cloud* writes about these films being "often financially successful films and others they inspired left viewers with the message that such creatures were the norm in the atomic age."⁷⁷ Film makers were arguing that the same cultural impact of science fiction films could be recreated by civil defense planners and their films, but instead of stoking fears, they could calm them. Finally, films could be distributed to mass audiences with relative ease, as noted by Cockett. He notes that "16mm prints may easily be run outdoors, on a darkened street so that multitudes may absorb the lesson right now."⁷⁸ Its flexibility and reach made film an easy sell for movie studios to civil defense planners.

Cockett's urgent language reflects the lingering political tensions of 1949 and 1950. Cockett moves from saying that "somebody should be producing this picture right now" to declaring that "we either win or lose according to what we do with our TIME," capitalizing his words to emphasize the pressing political context.⁷⁹ In a way, he captures the emotional instability and unpredictability of the era. After the successful testing of the bomb by the Soviets in 1949 and the global spread of communism into North Korea and China, the possibility of an atomic attack felt like a greater possibility. Moreover, as explained earlier, the atomic bomb was becoming a more visible presence in popular media due to increased coverage of atomic bomb tests. As a result, there was a desperate need to create some sort of apparatus or infrastructure to protect the nation and hopefully alleviate fear. Cockett's solution to this problem rested in the medium of film due to its ability to disseminate information rapidly to a mass audience and in an easily digestible form.

⁷⁷ Winkler, Allan M. *Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety About the Atom*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999. 98.

⁷⁸ National Archives, Record Group 304, Entry 31 A, Box 1: Records Relating to Civil Defense, 1949-1953.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

There were other movie studios, such as Film Production Services, that wanted to get involved with civil defense because they saw its value and significance. In a letter from Film Production Services, for example, its president reflects on his own experiences in World War II. Lawrence Croilus describes his own experience with war and explains how it has informed his relationship with civil defense. He remarks in a 1950 letter to James Wadsworth in the Office of Civil Defense that he served in the Navy during World War II and spent “many unhappy days in England during the bombing of London.”⁸⁰ Croilus saw the British people deal with the consistent barrage of attacks and “wondered how our own people would react under similar circumstances.”⁸¹ Croilus’s reference to England during the bombing raids of World War II provides an interesting look into how civil defense was adopted in contrast to the U.S.

In England, Croilus saw the importance of managing and controlling terror, along with the potential for the same lessons to be learned in the United States. Other than the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. itself had largely been isolated from the devastation of both World War I and World II. Americans had avoided the anxiety and perils of consistent bombing threats that Europe underwent during both World Wars. He ends by saying, “Knowing what to expect takes away much of the terror of the unknown, and knowing what to do will save millions of lives”.⁸² Beyond educational purposes, the films were also supposed to remove the element of panic and terror from atomic warfare. By knowing and learning about what the bomb was, films were supposed to alleviate the terror that the new Atomic Age had ushered in and along with this new, unprecedented era of warfare. Croilus believed deeply in the role of civil defense to initiate self-preparedness that would be critical for survival, motivating him to get involved with the

⁸⁰ National Archives, Record Group 304, Entry 31 A, Box 1: Records Relating to Civil Defense, 1949-1953

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

production of civil defense films.

There is also a clear reminder of the high stakes nature of the Cold War within the correspondence. Truman and his administration made the FCDA to create a formal apparatus to support civil defense and educate the American populace so they could survive an atomic attack. As the geopolitical tensions of 1949 and 1950 ramped up, producers like Cockett tapped into these very real sentiments. When Cockett ends his letter by saying that films could “possibly save thousands of lives or tens of thousands of lives, or even millions of lives,” it is a stark reminder that these films had a lot of responsibility and weight to them, according to people like Cockett.⁸³ They had to be a viable resource for Americans in a time when a world ending atomic war looked more and more possible. Coupled with the time sensitive nature of creating civil defense, the possibility of destruction and death was unprecedented, creating an urgency to find real, definite solutions and ways of survival. Civil defense films were described by studio heads and civil defense planners alike as a potential learning tool for the American public

While studio heads were concerned with government endorsements attributing validity to their films, a major factor to their interest still rested in making a profit. The aftermath of the Soviet acquisition of the atomic bomb in 1949 and the outbreak of war in Korea in 1950 created a profitable market for civil defense. As anxiety about the Cold War escalated, movie studios must have sensed that they had an opportunity to capitalize on these fears and make a profit. Even Cockett mentioned in his letter his own possible “selfish purposes” as a film producer for wanting to incorporate film into the country’s civil defense plans, highlighting the obvious financial biases that studio executives were capitalizing on.⁸⁴ Although sentiments of patriotism

⁸³ National Archives, Record Group 304, Entry 31 A, Box 1: Records Relating to Civil Defense, 1949-1953

⁸⁴ Ibid.

and the sheer urgency of possible atomic warfare were central to the Cold War, the possibility for profit and capitalism cannot be divorced from the Atomic Age. Once again, *Pattern for Survival* provides an avenue into exploring the production of civil defense films with its reliance on marketing to sell its film. The earlier marketing ploys by Cornell further emphasize the substantial role that money played in relation to these movies. Cornell not only wanted to inform the public, but make sure that the film was a financial success as well. Those who entered civil defense as a whole, viewed it not only as an important function, but also as a way to make an earning.

Film also had the ability to reach the widest possible audience in comparison to other media. Civil defense information did exist in areas like pamphlets and booklets at the time, but unlike other media, film had a universal visual language that could express the significance of civil defense and the seriousness of the atomic bomb. The image of a massive mushroom cloud was a powerful weapon in instigating urgency. Furthermore, the simplified instructions of survival and preparation offered by a narrator in a film distilled civil defense down into an easily accessible package. While studio heads obviously benefited financially from the partnership, the relationship between film and civil defense was driven by its ability to reach the widest possible audience with the greatest efficiency. While there is a lot to uncover about the process of making and selling these movies, the people who actually watched and wanted these films is just as important as how the films were made.

The Civil Defense Audience

Civil defense films were requested by a wide array of Americans, all searching for some

sort of guidance and direction on how to protect themselves from an atomic attack. Within the National Archives is a large assortment of letters from people requesting access to civil defense films. The people range from local civil defense planners to hospital workers, eager to get their hands on some sort of civil defense material. The common factor uniting all these people is a pervasive anxiety and apprehensions about the atomic bomb, hoping to find some sort of guidance on survival.

It is hard to once ignore the increasing political and social tensions of the time as a remarkable influence on the American public's perception on the atomic bomb. Dating back to the immediate aftermath of the successful atomic bomb testing by the Soviets in 1949, the letters convey the mounting political tensions of the time. The threat of an attack and the visibility of atomic bombs would only increase in the years after 1949, becoming central to American everyday life. Historian Peter B. Hales uses the image of a mushroom cloud to describe the ubiquity of the atomic bomb in American society and popular culture. Hales argues that "the central icon of the atomic culture is the mushroom cloud...it has become so deeply imprinted in the myths...of the postwar era that it has come to seem natural, a fundamental, even a necessary aspect of everyday life."⁸⁵ The atomic bomb had effectively become interwoven in American life and a constant in popular culture. The American people went to civil defense films to find out some way they could ease their fears and manage to live with the atomic bomb.

In 1949 and 1950, politicians in American cities attempted to use civil defense films to educate themselves about atomic bombs and explore how best to protect their constituents. The pressure to provide answers was a tense reality for many, especially for politicians during the Atomic Age. As early as 1946, American cities were being depicted as threatened by atomic

⁸⁵ Jacobs, Robert A. *The Dragon's Tail: Americans Face the Atomic Age*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010. 9.

weapons. The argument from certain civil defense planners was that cities needed to eventually become decentralized in order to survive. In 1946, Edward Teller, a participant in the Manhattan Project, wrote in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* “a country like the United States with a large part of its population concentrated in big cities along the eastern seaboard is particularly vulnerable to the devastating impact of atomic bombs.”⁸⁶ Physicist Ralph Lapp, another veteran of the Manhattan Project, would make the same assumption that urban “dispersion is the only really effective answer to the atomic bomb.”⁸⁷ As the messages from scientists about the vulnerability of cities began to become a major worry, politicians had to find some way to assuage their constituents’ concerns and used these films as a possible tool. In a letter originally intended for Louisiana Senator Russell B. Long, but forwarded to the Administrator of the Federal Civil Defense Administration, Millard F. Caldwell, Lieutenant Governor and State Director of Civil Defense W.J. Dodd, wrote that he hoped to use civil defense films as a way to educate his constituents and help alleviate their apprehensions. The letter, dated on December 15, 1950, only two weeks after the creation of the FCDA, is a salient example of the desperation for information on ways of surviving an atomic attack.

Dodd’s letter shows the keen interest of those in power in providing answers to their constituents about the threat that atomic weapons posed, and how to protect oneself from that threat. In the letter, Dodd explains how he has been “exerting every effort to obtain and keep a copy” of the Air Force film called *Medical Aspects of Atomic Bomb*.⁸⁸ However, the film has been declared obsolete due to its inaccurate information on atomic weapons. Dodd responds writing that he is not specifically looking for a film that gives the latest technical information on

⁸⁶ Winkler, Allan M. *Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety About the Atom*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999. 112.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁸⁸ National Archives, Record Group 304, Entry 31 A, Box 1: Records Relating to Civil Defense, 1949-1953.

the atomic bomb, but, more importantly, something that “helps us sell civil defense.”⁸⁹ Dodd praises the film itself, claiming the “commentator is excellent, background music superb, subject matter presented splendidly, and end of film presents forceful argument for organizing for civil defense.”⁹⁰ Dodd realizes the important social role the films play in maintaining morale and perpetuating a sense of hope. His praise of the quality of the film draws from the prior comments from Cockett on the universal technological power of film as a medium to demonstrate the importance of civil defense. More importantly, he realizes the necessary function that civil defense must play in protecting Americans. He emphasizes the point by saying that if the film is obsolete and the Air Force is considering destroying the film to “please give the film to us” because “we need it.”⁹¹ Dodd uses a striking metaphor to describe the impact these films can have. He claims the people of Louisiana are “like a carpenter trying to build a house without tools, or farmer trying to till soil without plow. This film is the tool we need to work.”⁹²

The letter from the Lieutenant Governor captures how many Americans felt about atomic weapons. Dodd’s metaphor establishes two critical points about the state of many areas throughout the country. First, the metaphor showcases the lack of information or any sense of guidance Americans had in relation to protection against the bomb in the period after the Soviets detonated their first atomic device. The lack of a sufficient “tool,” in this case, a civil defense film, showed a widespread deficiency of knowledge about the atomic bomb and methods to protect against it. Secondly, Dodd is so anxious to provide his constituents with some sense of guidance and information that he is willing to accept outdated information. These films acted as a simple entry way into understanding self-defense against the atomic bomb, one that most

⁸⁹ National Archives, Record Group 304, Entry 31 A, Box 1: Records Relating to Civil Defense, 1949-1953.

⁹⁰ National Archives, Record Group 304, Entry 31 A, Box 1: Records Relating to Civil Defense, 1949-1953.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

Americans could easily understand. In compact fifteen minute films, like *Pattern for Survival*, Americans could learn basic skills surrounding self-defense and gain some sense of agency. Essentially, by pleading for access to even factually inaccurate films as a learning “tool,” Dodd realizes the film’s cinematic qualities, such as the commentator, background music, and overall presentation of the material in a compelling light are more important than necessarily an accurate film.

Dodd’s letter is not unusual. The archive is home to many such letters, illuminating a wide array of people who wanted to get their hands on civil defense films, desperate to learn how to defend themselves. Clement Conole, the director of Public Relations for the Philadelphia County Civil Defense Council, reached out in early November 1950 (even before Dodd’s inquiry), to ask for access to a civil defense film. Conole contacted W. Stuart Symington, who at the time was the chairman of the NSRB, to ask for civil defense movies to show to “employees of industrial and commercial concerns, and service organizations.”⁹³ Conole’s letter shows the wide appeal and growing market of these civil defense films. Civil defense was becoming an integrated part in the workplace among the industrial and commercial sectors. The Philadelphia County Medical Society would later contact the NSRB, “concerning the subject of Civil Defense especially for the consumption of the medical profession.”⁹⁴ Even the head of the Protection and Security Division of Rockefeller Center in New York City was interested in potentially receiving “training films which have specific application to the current Civil Defense program.”⁹⁵ Civil defense films managed to market themselves to an audience that varied from local civil defense planners to factory workers. These films also managed to reach beyond the workplace and local

⁹³ National Archives, Record Group 304, Entry 31 A, Box 1: Records Relating to Civil Defense, 1949-1953.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

civil defense chapters and into the school curricula.

Finally, there was an attempt to create a robust civil defense program at the most fundamental level of society, children. Perhaps the best known civil defense film is 1951's *Duck and Cover*. The short nine-minute film was designed as entry point for children to learn about atomic weapons and was the focal point of civil defense for schoolchildren in the U.S., showing them the basic facts about methods of self-defense. The actual messages within the film will be explored in greater depth in the next chapter. However, even before *Duck and Cover*, there were already serious talks about creating an even stronger civil defense program for schools. A company in New York, Atom Lab, reached out to De Chant and NSRB about creating a civil defense and atomic education program within New York City. The city had already "called together its high school physics and chemistry teachers to cooperate in... civil defense programs."⁹⁶ However, the teachers had found the "visual aids and instructive material on hand...were either lacking or inadequate."⁹⁷ Atom Lab wanted to intervene and assist by preparing "a one-half hour television program on Station WOR-TV, which will deal with the simple physics of the bomb, radioactivity, radiological protection and reassuring defense preparedness."⁹⁸

While it is not clear what eventually happened with the program, it is evident that civil defense was not restricted to any one age group. There was a widely held belief that the entire American populace needed to be educated on self-defense and the atomic bomb, even at the youngest age, showing that anyone was potentially vulnerable in an atomic attack. In the following chapter, the thesis will explore in greater depth the specific tactics these films utilized

⁹⁶ National Archives, Record Group 304, Entry 31 A, Box 1: Records Relating to Civil Defense, 1949-1953.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

to engage and sell civil defense to a young audience.

Race and The Bomb

Finally, in terms of marketing civil defense, racial relations played a fundamental role in who civil defense aimed to reach, and how. While it is impossible to ignore the global political tensions as an influence on civil defense, the same applies for the domestic political and social issues within the United States, specifically increasing racial tensions. As the domestic movement for civil rights for African Americans and the fight against Jim Crow intensified in the 1950s, civil defense planners began to address and attempt to deal with these tensions. In late 1950, after assessing a report on civil defense efforts in Britain, two NSRB consultants remarked “It is awesome to reflect on what would happen if colored people and white people were forced into close association in shelters, in homes and even evacuation reception centers.”⁹⁹ It was clear that civil defense would not be immune from internal racial tensions and the racist policies of Jim Crow. In an era in which public transport and public spaces in general were racially segregated, there was no reason to think that civil defense planning would not also reflect those very same practices. Civil defense planners had to be aware that atomic panic could create chaos across the country, perhaps manifesting itself in racial violence.

During World War II, civil defense planners did have some early success in engaging and

⁹⁹ McEnaney, Laura. *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000. 123.

involving the African American community in civil defense efforts. During World War II, around 15 million people moved out of their home counties, seeking work and employment.¹⁰⁰ Many of these migrants happened to be African Americans moving into cities, fracturing racial boundaries and as historian Richard Polenberg argued, acts that as a result “disrupted certain features of the American caste system.”¹⁰¹ Racial integration within the cities, in other words, was underway at more or less the same time as the push for increased civil defense measures. Planners had to react to the increasing African American migration and find ways of communicating their message to a new demographic. One of the first major instances of an attempt to include race within civil defense came from Eleanor Roosevelt, who during the war through the Office of Civil Defense pushed for a race relations division. Outreach towards the African American community continued and began to focus on atomic bomb protection around the creation of the FCDA. The agency established special committees and groups to engage with the black community, including Alfred Smith, a black man whose job, according to the FCDA, was to “perform an essential public relations service with Negro organizations, institutions, and Negro public relation facilities throughout the country.”¹⁰² Other efforts included screenings of civil defense films, such as a public showing in Harlem that attempted to educate African Americans on methods of protection from the atomic bomb.¹⁰³ These outreach attempts showed a considered effort by civil defense planners to try and involve African Americans in the civil defense mobilization effort. It also furthered the idea that film had a universal language that would be effective at communicating with African Americans. The era of World War II and the

¹⁰⁰ McEnaney, Laura. *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000. 125.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 137.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

creation of the FCDA saw a major push to engage with the African American community and get them involved in civil defense efforts. Nevertheless, these integration civil defense efforts were negated by the racist policies and sentiments of the Jim Crow era.

The racial tensions in civil defense became most apparent during debates on public shelters and the appointment of Millard Caldwell, former Governor of Florida, to head the FCDA in December 1950. Caldwell's history with race relations made him a controversial pick. He was a reflection of the Jim Crow era politics that exacerbated racial tensions throughout the country. Caldwell had a poor history on civil rights, supporting the white primary, which excluded African Americans from voting in general primaries, and a deep believer in states' rights, including pro Jim Crow policies.¹⁰⁴

The nomination drew the ire of many African Americans and even garnered public outcry from the NAACP. It was seen as a direct betrayal of the progress made in supporting African Americans with civil defense and an endorsement of the contentious racial policies of the era. Caldwell's appointment marked a major fracturing point with civil defense that would only escalate with the debate over segregation in public shelters. With cities being viewed as prime targets for an attack, civil defense planners were already in 1950 beginning to think about establishing public shelters to protect those in more vulnerable areas. However, segregation and racial tensions still remained at the forefront of domestic politics in the early 1950s. There was still a lingering fear that within cities, blacks and whites would be unable to share a shelter. McEnaney perfectly captures this tension, writing "the problem of how to provide nuclear protection for a racially segregated...society seemed unsolvable in a social sense because it would require different populations to share public and private spaces in ways that broke with

¹⁰⁴ McEnaney, Laura. *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000. 142.

structural inequality and social custom.”¹⁰⁵ The idea of public shelters, something that was promoted early on in civil defense films, was not only logistically difficult, but ultimately socially impossible. White Americans were still not ready to share spaces with blacks, even in the event of atomic attacks. Civil defense planners pushed for private shelters instead, which were only affordable to a certain sect of middle and upper class Americans, ignoring the concerns of lower income African Americans. The appointment of Caldwell and the issue of public shelters halted for many years any progress with engaging African Americans with civil defense.

In short, while former FCDA director Val Peterson described civil defense by saying in a 1953 speech to the American Society for Public Administration, “We are Americans in trouble together,” civil defense itself was not immune from the racial tensions of the era.¹⁰⁶ The domestic political context of 1949 and 1950 is as important to understanding the emergence of civil defense in the U.S. as the geopolitical context. The global threat of communism and the racial tension in the early 50s put remarkable pressure on civil defense planners. The documents in the National Archives show no specific mention of race or an attempt to reach out to people of color. While its mere absence isn’t enough to make the claim about the lack of a racial outreach, it should be noted the lack of it within the Archives. Civil defense aimed itself to be marketable to all Americans, but a glance at civil defense films shows something to the contrary. In the films explored in the next chapter, there is hardly any representation of African Americans. With no visual representation of their group in these films, African Americans were subtly excluded from the messages of civil defense and were no longer their target audience. Caldwell himself would

¹⁰⁵ McEnaney, Laura. *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000. 146.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

declare that the bomb “does not discriminate.”¹⁰⁷ Later adding, that everyone would be “equal under suffering.”¹⁰⁸ While this may have been the ideal strived for, the appointment of Caldwell and the push toward private shelters demonstrated that civil defense and protection against the bomb was not a universal message.

Conclusion

The production and marketing of civil defense films was a complicated, fraught process, one in which producers were still figuring out in 1950 how best to engage with their audience and how to present civil defense. The conversations between studio heads and government agencies show that there was still no clear guideline on how the two should interact. With studio heads wanting government officials to help sell their films and agencies needing studios to make their films, there was a need for both, but the expectations for each had not been established yet. Over time, the relationship would be solidified, leading to a clear, streamlined process of movie production and state support, but, initially, there was tension about how much the two should interact. At the same time, there was a clear demand and audience for these films. As the political circumstances of the Cold War intensified, Americans sought out ways to understand the transformative nature of the atomic bomb and how best to quell their fears. However, it is clear that civil defense films were not a universal message for all. African Americans saw themselves slowly pushed out of the narrative of civil defense due to the domestic, racial issues of the time. While civil defense aimed to protect all Americans, it was clear that not all were included in this vision.

While these films were sold as educational, their main function was not necessarily to

¹⁰⁷ McEnaney, Laura. *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000. 145.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.

provide Americans with factual evidence and information about the bomb and its effects. In reality, the films demonstrated a much more nuanced, psychological approach. In an era where the bomb was still being portrayed as an all powerful weapon, which the Soviets had just acquired, most Americans had no idea how to even fight or survive an atomic attack. When Dodd makes the metaphor of the carpenter and the tools, it is a plea to give Americans some sense of hope that there is a way to survive this new, frightening atomic era. For the audience of civil defense, these films ended up doing more than merely displaying facts about atomic energy and fallout. They also conveyed hope and a sense of American exceptionalism that went along with surviving the bomb. In Guy Oakes's, *The Imaginary War*, he describes this phenomenon as strengthening the national will. Oakes argues that "the solution to the problem of national will...was the only truly indispensable objective of civil defense."¹⁰⁹ Oakes pushes this idea even further, noting that "it was necessary only for Americans to believe that they could be protected...Appearance and not reality.... were the critical desiderata of the strategy that linked civil defense, national morale and national security."¹¹⁰ Dodd's earlier letter, pleading for access to a civil defense film regardless of its inaccuracy, best embodies the actual mission of civil defense--to maintain American will regardless of the harsh reality.

The next chapter of this thesis analyzes how civil defense films conveyed their messages. How exactly did these films aim to quell sentiments of fear and anxiety? How did these messages change and evolve depending on the audience watching the movie? What are the prevalent themes and messages layered within these movies? Looking at civil defense films will show us how civil defense planners attempted to engage and educate Americans.

¹⁰⁹ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 165.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

Chapter 3

The Themes and Narratives in Civil Defense Films

An analysis into the civil defense films genre provides insight into how civil defense planners tried to solve the psychological issues surrounding the atomic bomb in the U.S. The current scholarship on civil defense, I argue, lacks an in-depth analysis on the specific psychological role civil defense films played in influencing the narratives around the atomic bomb. Nor has the field provided an examination into the prevalent themes that dominated the genre, or a general exploration into the wide array of civil defense films available. While books such as *Civil Defense Begins at Home* by Laura McEnaney and *The Imaginary War* by Guy Oakes engage with the role civil defense played in the beginning of the Cold War, the literature overlooks the specific role that film played in influencing people's perceptions about atomic weapons and war. Additionally, their works largely focus on only two films, *Duck and Cover* and *Operation Alert*, neglecting the wide array of other civil defense films made for a range of audiences and with different messages in mind.

As argued in the "Introduction," by only focusing on two films, the existing literature fails to account for the rest of the civil defense film genre, which tackles the issues of civil defense in widely different approaches. Other works such as Paul Boyer's *By the Bomb's Early Light* and Allan Winkler's *Life Under a Cloud*, do focus briefly on the psychological effects of the atomic bomb, but once again fail to examine how civil defense films attempted to engage and mold public perception. Instead, the authors focus broadly and generally on civil defense, using pamphlets, shelters, and other mobilization efforts as a lens into understanding the era. By

engaging specifically with civil defense films, this chapter will analyze how civil defense planners attempted to use the visual power of film and rhetoric to quell sentiments of anxiety and mobilize the American home front. Instead of focusing generally on civil defense, a closer look at these film allows for a deeper probe into how planners wanted to alter American perceptions about the bomb and mobilize the populace. Civil defense films are a mistakenly ignored gateway into understanding how the government, specifically, national security and civil defense planners, attempted to transform how Americans thought about the atomic bomb.

The films explored in this thesis were released between 1950 and 1956 and tackle the issue of the atomic bomb and its psychological and physical effects. Most of the films produced after 1956 deal with the hydrogen bomb, ushering in a new narrative and tonal shift within civil defense films. The films considered in this thesis act as a way of understanding three prevalent thematic messages that I argue are representative of the genre: the distinction between atomic fear and atomic panic, militarization of the American household, and conventionalization of the atomic bomb.

Civil defense planners made a clear distinction between atomic panic and fear. The films show atomic panic as reckless, irrational actions, leading to violence, death, and anxiety. Instead, they try and show the merits of what I would label atomic fear, on the grounds that fear can be utilized to mobilize people so that they will take sufficient efforts to prepare themselves for an atomic attack. Secondly, civil defense films show the nuclear family and the household becoming increasingly militarized, adopting a warlike mentality. In the films, knowledge of military tactics and psyche attitudes are presented as necessities in surviving an atomic attack, regardless of gender or age. Furthermore, the films show that this militarization had unique effects on the American household, putting more pressure on women to protect the home as

caretakers, forcing children to engage with the perils of the Atomic Age, and making men take an active approach in defending their cities. Finally, civil defense films tried to present a paradoxical message through what I would call the conventionalization of atomic warfare, by suggesting both that atomic weapons were immensely powerful and destructive, yet similar enough to conventional weapons that survival through proper preparation was viable. These three common messages provide the necessary lens into understanding what civil defense planners were trying to achieve through their civil defense films.

Atomic Fear and Preparation

Civil defense planners wanted to harness and normalize the widespread public feelings of atomic fear and use them to motivate Americans to take an active approach towards learning about how to protect themselves and their families from an atomic attack. In the thesis' first chapter, I highlighted the experts' concerns with the corrosive effect that panic could have on the home front. Atomic fear, on the other hand, was used consistently throughout civil defense films to motivate Americans to take action and become prepared. Films such as 1950's *Protection Against the Atom Bomb* and 1956's *Operation Alert* incorporated many of the themes and messages of atomic fear that would be explored in the 1952 Project East River report, a pivotal study in civil defense that shaped the approach towards emotional management during an atomic attack. Commissioned by the FCDA, NSRB, and Department of Defense and later referred to as "the bible of civil defense" by civil defense planner Katherine Howard, who will be discussed fully later in this paper, the study was aimed at exploring comprehensive plans for civil defense

and national security. ¹¹¹ It concluded in a section entitled “Panic Prevention and Control” that if emotions were not sufficiently managed, it could lead to the “consequent danger of paralysis, panic, and senseless reaction.” ¹¹² More importantly, it tried to rationalize fear as a natural emotional response to atomic warfare. The report claimed that “Civil defense education must make people aware that a considerable degree of fear under attack is normal and inevitable.” ¹¹³ The message in the study quickly shifts to emphasize the ability for fear to be harnessed and controlled to create constructive emotional responses. By 1952, this study suggests, civil defense planners had decided that it was no longer frowned upon to have fear about an atomic attack, instead, what mattered was “what you do when you are afraid...The fear you experience will make you more alert, stronger, and more tireless for the things that you and your neighbors can do to protect yourselves.” ¹¹⁴ The message of fear being a natural response and a motivating factor for preparedness would be continuously highlighted in civil defense media. Historian Guy Oakes sums up this distinction best, claiming civil defense planners tried to convince the American public that “Nuclear terror is abnormal and uncontrollable. Nuclear fear is a normal and manageable response to the bomb.” ¹¹⁵ As the importance of controlling atomic fear became clearer to civil defense planners, the possible dangers of atomic panic were also increasingly hard to ignore.

Civil defense planners focused their rhetoric of civil defense on viewing the terror and panic of an atomic attack as the ultimate weapon, not fear. Ostensibly, the new message of civil

¹¹¹ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 47.

¹¹² Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 65.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

defense was akin to Franklin Delano Roosevelt's old adage that we have nothing to fear but fear itself. Within Project East River, the conclusion reached was that civil defense must tell people "it isn't whether you feel afraid, but what you do when you are afraid that counts."¹¹⁶ The war would be decided by how the population reacts to an attack, not by the attack itself. Instead of trying to face the atomic bomb head on, planners translated survival into a more self-help approach with the responsibility falling on Americans to train themselves on how to react to an attack. According to civil defense planners, it was not the physical damage of an atomic bomb that would be the deciding factor in atomic survival, but the psychological response that would be critical.

Even in classroom settings, the distinction between panic and fear was being fine-tuned. In the November 1954 edition of the *Journal of Education*, Dr. L.J. Mauth remarked that "panic is contagious and in times of emergency the teacher must be emotionally prepared to assume a confident air."¹¹⁷ The responsibility was widespread, even in the role of teachers, to exude confidence and dispel myths of atomic panic to young elementary school children. In short, civil defense planners had concluded by the mid-1950s that atomic panic must be avoided at all cost. They looked to its films as a solution to this problem.

1950's *Protection Against the Atom Bomb* laid the groundwork for future civil defense films by exploring key issues and messages that would become emblematic of the civil defense genre, specifically, the key distinction between atomic panic and atomic fear.

¹¹⁶ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 64.

¹¹⁷ L.J. Mauth, "Prevention of Panic in Elementary-School Children," *Journal of Education* 137, No. 2 (November 1954): 10-11.

The National Archives holds only a few civil defense film screenplays. One of the them happens to be for 1950's *Protection Against the Atom Bomb*. While I was not able to locate a copy of the film online, the actual screenplay of *Protection Against the Atom Bomb* provides a tangible way of understanding how civil defense planners intended to convey their message to an audience.

The film itself takes place in what is described as a small, typical suburb in the United States. Our introduction to the suburb is provided by an omnipresent character referred to only as "The Narrator." The character of The Narrator is someone who appears in a majority of the civil defense films explored within this chapter. Narrators are all knowing advisors, aware of the importance of civil defense and knowledgeable about the effects of atomic weapons. Most importantly, though, narrators act as a guide, explaining concepts and ways of survival step by step. In the case of *Protection Against the Atom Bomb*, The Narrator guides the audience through this idyllic suburb and shows how woefully unprepared these townspeople are for the dangers of a possible atomic attack. The film has a range of characters who are supposed to represent typical Americans, all ignorant of the basic procedure of what to do in the event of an attack. As the film progresses, The Narrator talks about the effects of fallout and an atomic bomb on a suburb and how best to protect one's self. Finally, the film ends with The Narrator leading a Q&A with the townspeople, answering their lingering questions about the bomb and what to do. The film's most central message, though, is about the manageability of fear.

Films like *Protection Against the Atom Bomb* and, later, *Operation Alert*, provided a direct look into the fundamental role that fear played in civil defense and in the image of preparedness that the United States wanted to project both domestically and globally. *Protection Against the Bomb* documents the fear of the townspeople on its very first page. The audience is

supposed to overhear the townspeople expressing their concerns, with one woman claiming she heard that if “you touch anything that those rays have touched and you start bleeding to death inside.”¹¹⁸ Another man exclaims that “if they ever drop that atom bomb here...that’s all brother.”¹¹⁹ The audience is supposed to understand and sympathize with the very real fears of these average townspeople.

While talking over footage of the first successful atomic bomb testing in Alamogordo, New Mexico, The Narrator explains the difference between atomic fear and atomic panic. He states that “fear...may help you learn some of the ways you can defend yourself. But fear which is panic may kill you.”¹²⁰ Fear harnessed in preparation for an atomic attack would, in theory, motivate Americans to embrace civil defense. The same townspeople who were terrified about what the bomb could do in the beginning of the film were supposed to channel their very fears into action. The challenge then fell upon the civil defense films to visually show what true preparedness looked like. It goes without saying that the attempt to depict preparedness in these films results in a starkly unrealistic portrait of utter calm in the face of an atomic attack.

Although a later film, 1956’s *Operation Alert* demonstrated the image of a prepared United States that the government wanted to showcase both on a domestic and international level. *Operation Alert* represented a unique period in civil defense history due to its ambition and wide scale. Beginning in 1954, the government started annual rehearsals for mock atomic attacks in a program called Operation Alert in order to “test preattack plans for survival by fabricating an imaginary nuclear reality that approximated, within the limits of feasibility.”¹²¹ These atomic

¹¹⁸ National Archives, Record Group 304, Entry 31 A, Box 1: Records Relating to Civil Defense, 1949-1953.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 85.

rehearsals were supposed to get the masses mobilized and familiar with what an atomic attack might be like. Operation Alert became so ambitious and far reaching that in 1955 it was a national political event with a mock attack that hit fifty cities, including the capitol. The result was a full scale mobilization effort with President Eisenhower, his cabinet and 15,000 government employees participating and relocating to secret rural locations in Virginia.¹²²

Operation Alert represented civil defense at its most spectacular, embodying a national moment where the country attempted to mobilize as one. In 1956, that year's Operation Alert exercises were filmed and eventually incorporated into a civil defense film. Through recording these exercises of Americans responding orderly to an attack, the film attempts to demystify the concept of atomic panic. *Operation Alert* showed a restrained, calm, and, most importantly, prepared nation. However, in the film's attempts to dispel ideas of atomic panic, it also shows Americans reacting unnaturally calm in the event of an atomic attack. Oakes even points out the exceedingly tame, orderly depiction of evacuation of New Yorkers, who "legendary for their volatility and mercurial tempers, carry out a faultless evacuation of the city.... Perhaps even more astonishing to New Jersey commuters, there is no congestion at the entrance to the Lincoln Tunnel."¹²³ While these images do feel exaggerated and highly unrealistic, it is important to put the film's scenes and images in their appropriate Cold War political contexts. Globally, images of calm, orderly, and prepared Americans refer directly back to the issues of morale brought up by Kennan and Dulles.

¹²² McEnaney, Laura. *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. 50.

¹²³ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 96.

Americans had become weakened by consumerism and needed to recreate a strong home front. As established in the first chapter, influential national security planners, such as Kennan and Dulles, believed that the nation's morale and will had been severely damaged after World War II. Civil defense films, much like *Operation Alert*, had the task of conveying the image of a strong, unified American home front ready for a battle against the Soviets. The people in the film react almost instinctively, as though they have been extensively trained, but they also appear devoid of emotion. Oakes describes the film as trying to achieve a goal of showing that an "attack can be reduced to routine problems that can be solved by the exercise of managerial rationality."¹²⁴ Additionally, it was supposed to construct a unique conception of atomic reality, where there wasn't chaos or violence, but an emotionally prepared, sane, and, responsible American populace that was not fazed by Soviet scare tactics. The lesson of the film was that fear didn't equal mass panic or chaos. In fact, atomic fear could create an American populace that could be mobilized and prepared for nearly anything, including the possibility of an atomic attack. Domestically, *Operation Alert* was trying to give Americans the ability to "see themselves on movie and television screens responding to a nuclear attack in accordance with the requirements of the Cold War conception of nuclear reality."¹²⁵ By seeing actual Americans respond to an atomic attack, the rest of population was able to see that civil defense was a sane, responsible, and fundamental part of surviving an atomic war.

The difference between atomic panic and atomic fear was a major focus within the narratives of civil defense films. It was absolutely paramount to project an image of a psychologically strong nation in a Cold War that depended so much on the use of panic as a

¹²⁴ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 96.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

weapon. The civil defense films in this thesis are entirely devoid of characters who react to a siren or a flash with fear, panic, or any sort of emotional outburst. It was important to utilize these films almost as a piece of propaganda with a specific political and social function. While in hindsight it may seem like an unusual distinction to make, the difference between atomic panic and atomic fear was critical to the function of civil defense films. With atomic panic becoming a major concern for civil defense planners, it was important to project an image of preparedness and calmness. In relation to atomic fear, planners realized the significance of normalizing people's emotions and then using them to initiate preparedness. I would argue that these films had a transformative effect of American households, training them to adopt the psyche of a soldier and increasingly militarizing the nuclear family.

Militarization of the Household and the Nuclear Family

A consistent emphasis on the military exists within the civil defense film genre and more specifically on the hardened psyche of a soldier. The military narrative promoted throughout civil defense films is that those who best adopt the mindset of a soldier are the ones most likely to survive an atomic attack. Civil defense films often used World War II veterans to focus viewers on the mental skills that would be needed to psychologically survive an atomic attack. The value placed on the necessities of developing a war-like mindset in these movies arguably promoted a militarization of the American household and the nuclear family. Oakes discusses this militarization, arguing that "like soldiers who have been disciplined to exploit their fear of death in order to execute military assignments despite the hazards of combat," American could

be “trained to advantage of their fears....to perform useful civil defense work.”¹²⁶ *Protection Against the Atom Bomb* provides a direct lens into the rhetoric civil defense films used to convince Americans about the merits of thinking and acting like a soldier.

Civil defense films like *Protection Against the Atom Bomb*, explicitly show the durable mindset of a veteran to illustrate the point of the mental strength and preparedness needed to survive atomic war. During the Q&A section of the film, The Narrator character brings the former soldier, Jack, to the front of the audience to demonstrate how someone should react when a bomb drops. Jack explains and later demonstrates that people should drop to the ground if they hear a noise. The Narrator proclaims “most of us would find it pretty hard to do just the simple thing he did just now. Fall flat on our face” and Jack responds claiming, “In Italy, we never worried much about how it looked. We got down.”¹²⁷ The memory of World War II and the experiences of Jack are used by the film to exhibit the necessary steps viewers must take to survive in the Atomic Age. In this new era, Americans would have to adopt this new war ready mentality that Jack developed during World War II. Civil defense films would continue to use World War II as an analogy to what the American home front could quickly become.

1950’s *Self-Preservation in an Atomic Attack* also pushed forward the narrative that the American home front would be transformed into a World War II battlefield and the idea that people would have to respond like war veterans. The film’s narrator in this case is literally a World War II veteran, lecturing to other soldiers about the importance of utilizing their experiences for the Atomic Age and its perils. The decision to make the all-knowing narrator a World War II veteran is a deliberate one that shows the knowledge and experience of soldiers.

¹²⁶ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 96.

¹²⁷ National Archives, Record Group 304, Entry 31 A, Box 1: Records Relating to Civil Defense, 1949-1953.

The film tries to argue that their time in World War II made them the people most likely to understand the severity of the atomic bomb and best equipped to respond to it. While talking over old footage of World War II bombing sites, The Narrator insists that during the Cold War people will have to “hit the dirt, like men did in World War II.”¹²⁸ By hearing a World War II veteran talk about the importance of dropping to the ground and reminding the audience of the destruction of the war through stock footage, the film wants the audience to understand firsthand from a soldier the direness of responding quickly and the life and death scenarios. Finally, civil defense films advanced a narrative that the home front was no longer a safe location and was in fact under the constant threat of attack.

Civil defense films argued that in order to survive Americans needed to think and operate like soldier. It was the rigorous military training that made Jack able to get over worrying “about how it looked,” and simply drop to the ground in order to survive. In the most direct acknowledgement of the benefit of military experience, the Narrator says in *Protection Against the Atom Bomb*, “I asked Jack to come up here because he’s had something most of us haven’t. Training in keeping himself alive. We have to learn it!”¹²⁹ The film is implying that military training and experience in combat might make the difference between survival and death. Americans needed to adopt the qualities of a soldier, specifically the mental and psychological fortitude, to survive an atomic attack. By having a military character like Jack provide key advice on surviving an attack to residents of an average, suburban neighborhood, *Protection Against the Atom Bomb* further blurs the line between militarization and home life. The same message is echoed in the 1951 film, *Our Cities Must Fight*. While *Protection Against the Atom*

¹²⁸ *Self-Preservation in an Atomic Attack*.

¹²⁹ National Archives, Record Group 304, Entry 31 A, Box 1: Records Relating to Civil Defense, 1949-1953.

Bomb is very much directed at people who live in the suburbs, *Our Cities Must Fight* focuses its attention on city dwellers, specifically men.

The message in *Our Cities Must Fight* is highly gendered, and implies that American men, who instead of fighting and staying to defend their city, end up “taking to the hills,” are weak.¹³⁰ The film opens with two newspaper editors receiving a letter from an angry reader claiming that he will take his “family to a place in the country where they’ll be safe” and that he is “as patriotic as the next guy,” but would be “pretty dumb to remain in this city once those bombs start falling.”¹³¹ The two newspaper men immediately condemn the letter as cowardly. In fact, the film goes as far as to equate running away with “treason,” like a soldier abandoning his unit.¹³² By using the analogy of war, cities are transformed and imagined into a possible battleground where soldiers need to stay and fight. The film tries to tap into the sentimentality and even the notions of patriotism and heroism associated with World War II, applying it anachronistically to Cold War civil defense. In turn, the film also demonizes those who abandon their city and choose “taking to the hills,” equating them with deserters during wartime. The film is also directed towards a specific male audience. It chooses to focus on the industrial aspect of the cities and that men must stay to not only defend cities, but to ensure that factories are still functioning and producing to support rebuilding efforts. *Our Cities Must Fight* fails to address any of the roles that the family unit or even women in general play in the mobilization effort.

Civil defense films themselves are a reflection into how life on the American home front was slowly being indoctrinated with military values during the Cold War. In this new Atomic Age, in order to survive, Americans needed to fully adopt the psyche of a soldier. These values

¹³⁰ *Our Cities Must Fight*.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

and requirements of militarization had a substantial impact on the nuclear family. In Civil Defense Begins at Home, Laura McEnaney addresses this very militarization that civil defense is promoting. McEnaney describes the early years of the Cold War as eroding the traditional battle lines, summarizing her argument as “the front lawn was now the front line.”¹³³ McEnaney’s quote embodies how an atomic attack made every possible front lawn or landscape into a potential battle zone. No longer was the American household immune from the immediate harm of war. As a result, families would have to play a role in the Cold War that was much more direct and involved than ever before. It created the “new ideal that positioned the family not as the object-prize of military struggle, but as the engine and soldier of the battle itself,” McEnaney writes.¹³⁴ Civil defense planners wanted to use the stability and guidance of the family unit to inculcate values, such as self-help and preparedness, that would be critical for survival in this new era of warfare. The result would be a reinforcement of traditional gender roles, leading to the inclusion of more women into the FCDA and civil defense, along with long term psychological effects on adolescents growing up militarized. The distinction between military and civilian would become so fraught and strained that even school children were given dog tags in the early 1950s to identify their bodies in case of an attack, much like with traditional soldiers.¹³⁵ The geo-political Cold War with the Soviets implied that, as McEnaney claims, “home protection represented not another temporary state of emergency but a permanent realignment of family priorities.”¹³⁶ Cold War politics saw each family member become mobilized and assume a new, more engaged role as demonstrated in civil defense films.

¹³³ McEnaney, Laura. *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. 70.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Rose, Kenneth D. *One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2004. 133.

¹³⁶ McEnaney, Laura. *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*. Princeton,

Women and Civil Defense

With the home front looked at as the next battleground in the Cold War, civil defense turned to women to lead the charge in protecting the home. The decision to include women in the civil defense mobilization effort began in June 1950 during the outbreak of the Korean War.¹³⁷ Civil defense planners focused on ways to mobilize Americans as the Cold War was heating up and saw the potential women could have in transforming the American home front. As cited by historian Elaine Tyler May, women had already demonstrated their immense capability for mobilization during World War II, with the number of employed women increasing 60% from 1942 to 1945.¹³⁸ Civil defense planners were hoping to tap into the same mobilization efforts of women during World War II and use them towards civil defense. As more women became involved, historian Kenneth Rose argues a “feminized” depiction of civil defense emerged “to the extent that links would be suggested between a woman’s home and her fallout shelter, and between her domestic responsibilities and civil defense preparedness.”¹³⁹ McEnaney suggests that the FCDA was trying to make “the bomb familiar by making it *‘familial’* during the slow process of militarization,” using the traditional role of women as caretakers to help prepare their homes for a potential atomic attack.¹⁴⁰ The FCDA turned to women to help take a larger role in

NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. 74.

¹³⁷ McEnaney, Laura. *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. 90.

¹³⁸ May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 2008. 50.

¹³⁹ Rose, Kenneth D. *One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2004. 141.

¹⁴⁰ McEnaney, Laura. *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. 69.

this transition of mobilizing the family unit. In an effort to mobilize the family, women, such as Katherine Howard, attained a critical, influential role in the FCDA.

Civil defense planners, such as Katherine Graham Howard, used traditional gender roles in the 1950s as a way to mobilize women. Katherine Graham Howard best embodies the sentiments that civil defense planners were trying to appeal to among suburban women. Howard was the Deputy Administrator of the FCDA in 1953 and played a fundamental role in integrating women into civil defense efforts. After seeing a film of a hydrogen explosion, she later recounted, she felt overwhelmed and went to church and prayed. In June 1953, she was quoted saying that she believed it was her job to “prepare people to *live through* an atomic attack, not to die in one.”¹⁴¹ Howard made civil defense a gendered issue, believing that women would play an essential role in preparation and educating the populace. She felt that the responsibility came upon women to make sure that the home, the new site of a potential battle ground, was best prepared for defense. Howard went as far as to say that “the personal defense of our homes is...being rated as co-equal in importance with our military defense.”¹⁴² Howard projected the home and family as central to the survival of the nation. At a meeting of civil defense volunteers, including women, Howard proclaimed the home as “the new stronghold of national security.”¹⁴³ In the changing front lines of battle, the defense of the home was seen as pivotal to national security. In light of the traditional gender roles of the 1950s, women gained a much larger role in the civil defense effort due to their responsibilities within the home. Elaine Tyler May describes the changing roles of women during the early Cold War as making “women’s homemaking

¹⁴¹ McEnaney, Laura. *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. 3.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 72.

duties...purposefully” in relationship to civil defense planning. ¹⁴⁴ Katherine Graham Howard supported this claim, suggesting that atomic survival depended on distinctly “feminine courage” and “motherhood qualities.” ¹⁴⁵ Howard and other women in civil defense, such as Jean Wood Fuller, a FCDA official, created opportunities specifically for women such as 1956’s Grandma’s Pantry, a mobilization effort to get private shelters stocked with food and supplied. ¹⁴⁶ Civil defense planners, including Howard, were strategically using the gender roles of the time to mobilize women and use their experience as caretakers to ensure preparedness.

The campaigns to involve more women into the civil defense effort were soon reflected in the films themselves. Within the films, it is evident the increasing amount of responsibilities that women take on, namely within the home. In the 1954 FCDA produced film, *The House in the Middle*, there is a clear message about the value and importance of a well prepared house in the Atomic Age. Although the audience never actually sees any people, the film first and foremost is a direct appeal to the gendered responsibilities for women as the caretakers of the home. The narrator for the film informs the viewer that “a house that is neglected may be doomed in the Atomic Age.” ¹⁴⁷ However, in this case, a neglected house is not necessarily one that doesn’t have a proper shelter or food stored, but one that is simply unclean. The Narrator shows us three houses; two have trash in the backyard, unkempt living rooms, and are lacking a proper paint job. The house in the middle, though, has fresh, reflective white paint exterior, a neat, tidy living room, and a well-trimmed lawn. The Narrator then explains that the heat from an

¹⁴⁴ May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 2008. 90.

¹⁴⁵ Rose, Kenneth D. *One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2004. 141.

¹⁴⁶ Winkler, Allan M. *Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety About the Atom*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999. 122.

¹⁴⁷ *The House in the Middle*.

atomic bomb spreads quicker in dirty, unpainted houses. Essentially, the film is trying to argue that a clean house will lead to a higher chance of survival, putting the responsibility on housewives to maintain a well-kept house. The film even goes as far to demonstrate the heat from an atomic bomb on all three houses and then showing the audience the houses being destroyed in super slow motion. The audience sees from the test blast footage the houses on the left and right explode in dramatic fashion, immediately catching on fire, while the house on the middle is described as remarkably only having “slight charring of the outer surface” and no fire whatsoever.¹⁴⁸ While the reality of a well-kept house correlating to a better chance of survival seems like a silly concept, the film makes a powerful attempt at trying to show the role women had in ensuring survival. The film literally asks the question “which of these houses is yours?” as fire blazes from the ruins of the two other homes, putting even more pressure on women to defend the house through their care.¹⁴⁹ Women as caretakers had an obligation to keep their house as clean as possible as a form of civil defense preparedness. With the house as a potential target, women had to bear the responsibility of maintaining a prepared house with one of the main ways being ensuring it was always clean.

However, it must be noted that while women did garner more responsibilities, their general role was still restricted to the household. While men are shown in films as local volunteer policemen and firemen, women are still held to their traditional spaces tasked with either ensuring that rations are available in a bunker or ensuring the cleanliness of the home. The traditional gender roles of the Atomic Age also extended towards men as well, with a growing emphasis to ensure that men had strong, masculine characteristics to defend themselves against

¹⁴⁸ *The House in the Middle*.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

communism. In Elaine Tyler May's Homeward Bound, May explains that the logic was men needed to remain as strong patriarchs in order to defend themselves against communist infiltration. Unlike weak, subversive men, strong men would be able to "stand up to the communists" and "be able to prevent the destruction of the nation's moral fiber."¹⁵⁰ May's argument is reminiscent of the same logic utilized earlier by famed national security planners John Foster Dulles and George Kennan. As shown in the first chapter, the home front, they argued, specifically American morale and willpower, needed to be strong in order to fight the war against communism. Civil defense films reinforced these same political messages within the fabric of American society. This was the same argument that *Our Cities Must Fight* was making. By deserting your city, you were acting in a cowardly, emasculated light and devoid of the American morale that Dulles and Kennan highlight. In short, women were still bound to and responsible for maintaining and managing the household, while men were expected to defend it from Soviet threats.

Children and Civil Defense

In an effort to fully mobilize the population, American children were taught the values of civil defense at their public schools. In JoAnne Brown's "A is for Atom, B is for Bomb," Brown shows how civil defense practices and drills were integrated into the U.S. public school curricula. After the successful test of an atomic bomb by the Soviets, Brown describes

¹⁵⁰ May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 2008. 85.

Americans losing the “illusion of safety” and facing “the grim new reality” of a weapon that had the capability of destroying the America mainland.¹⁵¹ For the first time, the most vulnerable of the American population, children, were put directly in harm’s way. As a result, children had to become mobilized as well, meaning they had to learn the same information about atomic bombs, fallout, shelters, etc. that adults were learning. In his book, *One Nation Underground*, historian Kenneth Rose describes the introduction of civil defense in classrooms, as the moment “the Cold War began to intrude into American education just as it had into other segments of American society.”¹⁵² This intrusion of the Cold War into American classrooms meant that children were exposed to the civil defense propaganda, fear, and anxiety of the era. The atomic bomb became a nearly impossible reality for most American children to escape. On top of being educated and taught about the atomic bomb in schools, it was present in everything from the 1956 Disney film *The Walt Disney Story of Our Friend the Atom* to a comic book called *The H-Bomb and You*.¹⁵³ Even for a child, the atomic bomb permeated every aspect of entertainment and life in general. Children would soon become indoctrinated with the same messages about the importance of civil defense that adults were getting, but packaged in a different, more subversive fashion.

Civil defense planners hoped to indoctrinate and train children at an early age with films specifically targeted at them. While the most notable example is *Duck and Cover*, there is an earlier film, *Atomic Alert*, that showcases how these films attempted to communicate to and depict children. *Atomic Alert* was released in 1951, a full year before *Duck and Cover*, and was produced by Encyclopedia Britannica to help aid teachers in teaching the atomic bomb to their

¹⁵¹ Brown, JoAnne. "'A Is for Atom, B Is for Bomb': Civil Defense in American Public Education, 1948-1963." *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (1988): 69.

¹⁵² Rose, Kenneth D. *One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2004. 126-127.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 127.

students. Factually, the film covers most of the basic information of the atomic bomb that other civil defense films usually do, such as fallout and the science behind the atom. *Atomic Alert* also presents children as an integral part of civil defense, giving them a sense of purpose, explaining that the way for survival is for each community member, including themselves, to do their respective parts. However, what is most unique about the film is the depiction of how the children respond in the event of an atomic attack. The film makes a concerted effort to show responsible, reliable, and, often, unrealistically calm responses to an atomic attack, especially from kids. In the film, when the first atomic siren goes off, a group of kids who were originally playing, immediately stop what they are doing and are shown calmly running away to get to cover. In one particularly noteworthy scene, the audience follows Ted and his younger sister, Sue, into their house as a real atomic attack happens. Both kids immediately duck and cover then retreat to their atomic shelter and proceed to wait until help comes. While in the shelter, none of the kids seem even remotely scared or even wonder if their parents managed to find cover and are still alive. Instead, there is an unsettling calmness and robotic nature to the scene. Once again, the film tries to avoid any depiction of panic and, instead, shows the polar opposite, total preparedness. When help finally comes from the block warden, Ted doesn't even ask about his parents' whereabouts. In fact, it is the block warden who casually mentions that Ted's mom is fine. Much like *Operation Alert*, *Atomic Alert* is trying to project an image of responsiveness and calmness that seems highly unlikely to last long in the event of an attack. Again, it is clear that even among children, establishing the difference between atomic panic and atomic fear is critical, even if the image of children in the movie comes across as fake and forced.

Duck and Cover is stylistically different from most other civil defense films of its era, using animation as a direct appeal to children while also discussing the tremendous effects of the

atomic bomb, creating an unsettling tone. The film's main character is Bert the Turtle. It is through Bert that the audience, mainly children, learn the importance of "ducking and covering" when they hear a noise or see a flash from an atomic bomb. Accompanying Bert is a song also called "Duck and Cover", that explains to the audience how one should act during an attack. The song claims that "by acting calm and cool," Bert "proved he was a hero, too. For finding safety is the bravest, wisest thing to do."¹⁵⁴ The film's use of an animated figure and catchy, childlike theme song juxtaposed with the terrifying facts of the atomic holocaust create a tonally mixed message. By using a friendly animated figure like Bert, civil defense is trying to shape children's perception of atomic reality. For example, the movie moves from its catchy number and animation of Bert to a nearly apocalyptic line declaring that the atomic bomb "explodes with a flash brighter than any you've ever seen. Things will be knocked down all over town and, as in a big wind, they are blown through the air."¹⁵⁵

Duck and Cover, despite its tonal imbalance and false message of survival via ducking and covering, left a lasting impression of American culture and the psyche of many children. The phrase "duck and cover" has entered the lexicon of American mainstream culture and become a central part of the Cold War narrative. It also furthers the militarization of children by forcing them to learn duck and cover, much like Jack did in *Protection Against the Atom Bomb* when he was in World War II. While in a cute, animated package, *Duck and Cover* is advocating the same techniques used by soldiers in World War II for school children.

While *Atomic Alert* and *Duck and Cover* were supposed to alleviate children's fears, they ended up having the opposite effect. The results of civil defense practices on children from

¹⁵⁴ "Glen Phillips." Glen Phillips - Duck and Cover Lyrics | MetroLyrics. Accessed March 07, 2017. <http://www.metrolyrics.com/duck-and-cover-lyrics-glen-phillips.html>.

¹⁵⁵ *Duck and Cover*.

various narratives showed that many of these films actually contributed to panic and anxiety. *One Nation Underground* provides a few pieces of insight from teachers and children on how children really reacted to practices of duck and cover and civil defense drills. Sociologist and political writer, Todd Gitlin, noted that as a kid “under the desks and crouched in the hallways, terrors were ignited, existentialists were made...we could never quite take for granted that the world we had been born into was destined to endure.”¹⁵⁶ A teacher at the time felt that during these drills “ You could feel the tension in the air, fear. The kids are fidgety and jumpy and talking—whispering—but then there would be absolute silence. You never knew if it was a drill—a test—or the real thing.”¹⁵⁷ Instead of providing a sense of calmness and reassurance, civil defense practices and films seemed to cause more panic and anxiety, even forcing young children to come to grips with their mortality.

The long term effects of atomic weapons and civil defense can even be noticed through a quick glance of popular cold war fiction. Writers have used the atomic bomb and civil defense practices to tell stories about American youth growing up and its effects on them. In Tim O’ Brien’s *The Nuclear Age*, the protagonist William Cowling talks about the way images of the bomb impacted his childhood: “The year was 1958 and I was scared.... Maybe it was all that CONELRAD stuff on the radio, tests of the Emergency Broadcast System, pictures of H-bombs in *Life* magazine, strontium 90 in the milk, the times in school when we’d crawl under our desks and cover our heads in practice for the real thing.”¹⁵⁸ Through both fiction and nonfiction, the traumatic nature of both the atomic bomb and these civil defense practices is evident.

¹⁵⁶ Rose, Kenneth D. *One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2004. 131.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 132.

Civil defense films aimed at a younger audience failed in trying to assuage fears of atomic panic and actually had an opposite effect. Historian and political commentator Doris Kearns Goodwin confessed that as a kid, “I could never figure out how my flimsy desk, with its worn inkwell and its years of name-scratching, could protect me from the atomic bomb.”¹⁵⁹ Even kids were aware of the impractical nature of tactics like duck and cover. The simple messages of atomic preparedness and self-defense failed to resonate with its targeted demographic. Furthermore, these narratives from people such as O’Brien, Gitlin and Goodwin directly contradict the images seen of calm, resourceful children in films like *Atomic Alert*. Much like *Operation Alert*, *Atomic Alert* was trying to project an image of civil defense minded, utterly calm children, which turns out not to be the reality at all. The memories of the children from this era directly contradict this narrative. Children were in fact frightened and the images of civil defense films instilled in them a deep seeded anxiety and awareness about the atomic bomb. Their stories act as proof that civil defense films weren’t entirely successful in calming the fears of children and youth. During one school assembly at Southwest High School in Kansas City, Missouri, students were watching *Pattern for Survival*. A high school reporter commented on the screening, claiming “Gasps in the audience demonstrated the reaction to the pictured results of an explosion. Tension was at a level seldom seen in a school assembly.”¹⁶⁰ The film had an adverse effect of actually creating more panic and fear. As Historian Michael Scheibach argues in his book, *Atomic Narratives and American Youth*, “Rather than eliminate or at least minimize fear, however, films such as *Our Cities Must Fight*...projected what might be called atomic fatalism. One movie merely advised that the best defense against the atomic bomb was to be

¹⁵⁹ Rose, Kenneth D. *One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2004. 132.

¹⁶⁰ Scheibach, Michael. *Atomic Narratives and American Youth: Coming of Age with the Atom, 1945-1955*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2003. 91.

somewhere else when it bursts.”¹⁶¹ These films failed their intended goal of creating a reassuring message about atomic survival and instead perpetuated more narratives about atomic fear, panic, and fatalism. While these narratives only provide a small sample of children’s experiences during the Cold War, it is safe to say that in many cases civil defense failed to fully mobilize children and prepare them for the psychological warfare of the Cold War.

Conventionalization of Atomic Weapons

Conventionalization was an attempt to depict atomic weapons as no more destructive or harmful than conventional weapons. Conventionalization’s intended effect was to “suppress nuclear terror by reconceptualizing nuclear arms as ‘normal’ instruments of military policy, by portraying the atomic bomb as a very powerful conventional weapon.”¹⁶² The message of conventionalization though walked a narrow, and often, paradoxical path of both convincing Americans that the atomic bomb was an unprecedented, deadly weapon worth taking serious measures to prepare yourself for, yet also similar enough to conventional weapons to be survived. Regardless, atomic weapons were fundamentally different from conventional weapons. Historian Paul Boyer explores this distinction, contending that the atomic bomb represented “death of a new kind, death without warning, death en masse.”¹⁶³ The atomic bomb’s swiftness and capability for such instantaneous, immediate destruction made it an unprecedented weapon.

¹⁶¹ Scheibach, Michael. *Atomic Narratives and American Youth: Coming of Age with the Atom, 1945-1955*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2003. 100-101.

¹⁶² Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 51.

¹⁶³ Boyer, Paul S. *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994. 278

Additionally, the atomic bomb was viewed as an existential weapon, threatening the very existence of humanity. In 1950, Reverend Edward L. Long Jr. declared that “there was comfort in the fact that the life of humanity was bound to outlast that of the individual,” but in the Atomic Age, once could “no longer take history for granted.”¹⁶⁴ The bomb’s ability for sheer catastrophic destruction and humanity altering capabilities transformed it into a weapon for more dangerous than any other conventional weapon in history. As a result, civil defense had to create a new approach to protection and self-preparedness for this distinctly new weapon.

Civil defense planners utilized conventionalization tactics in their pamphlets to alter the image of atomic bomb and make it less threatening. Beyond civil defense films, planners also used educational pamphlets and booklets to educate Americans. They were simple, instructional how to manuals on what to do during an attack. The most famous of all civil defense pamphlets was 1950’s *Survival Under Atomic Attack*. Within a year, over 20 million copies of the pamphlet were in circulation.¹⁶⁵ The booklet opened with the boisterous claim that “You can live through an atomic bomb raid and you won’t have to have a Geiger counter, protective clothing, or special training in order to do it. The secrets of survival are: KNOW THE BOMB’S TRUE DANGERS. KNOW THE STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO ESCAPE THEM.”¹⁶⁶ The booklet was supposed to be all one needed to know about how to survive an atomic attack. Intended to offer easy and simple steps, the booklet essentially reduced atomic attacks to “three general problems: blast,

¹⁶⁴ Boyer, Paul S. *By the Bomb’s Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994. 280.

¹⁶⁵ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 52.

¹⁶⁶ *Survival Under Atomic Attack*. Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1951. 1

heat, and radiation.”¹⁶⁷ The solutions offered to these problems though were deeply flawed and failed to reflect the true danger of the weapon.

For example, like many civil defense films would later do, the booklet portrayed fallout as essentially a harmless phenomenon. In one case, the booklet states fallout is said to “act much the same as ordinary, everyday dust” and that radioactive clouds “are so widely and so thinly spread that they are very unlikely to offer any real danger to humans.”¹⁶⁸ The facts within the booklet are now known to be inaccurate, and the attempt to conventionalize fallout would have put Americans at considerable risk in the event of an actual attack. In perhaps the most damning statement on the pamphlets and their inaccuracy, McEnaney says “Nothing was as it seemed in civil defense literature: fallout was dust, family fire drills were ‘games,’ and blast or fallout shelters were ‘family,’ ‘family-type’ or ‘home’ shelters. *Survival’s* authors even admitted an ulterior motive in distributing an educational pamphlet that had so little scientific foundation, noting that its dissemination was useful ‘if for no other reasons than its psychological value.’”¹⁶⁹ Conventionalization attempted to trivialize the bomb in many respects, still making it an imposing weapon, but one that could be outsmarted and defeated through preparation and emotional management. The earliest civil defense films would adopt not only the messages of these civil defense pamphlets, but also their informational, factual style.

1950’s *Pattern for Survival* represents the earliest iteration of civil defense films in terms of its style and presentation as well as the most obvious example of conventionalism as well.

While later films like *Protection Against the Atom Bomb* and *Our Cities Must Fight* would adopt

¹⁶⁷ Oakes, Guy. *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 52.

¹⁶⁸ *Survival Under Atomic Attack*. Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1951. 21-22

¹⁶⁹ McEnaney, Laura. *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. 74.

a more narrative style, *Pattern for Survival* evoked a more instructional approach, not unlike what readers would have encountered in the civil defense pamphlets. Drawing on much of evidence from earlier civil defense booklets, *Pattern for Survival* makes the same inaccurate claims and attempts at conventionalization about the impact of the bomb and fallout. Early on, the film cuts to journalist from the *New York Times* and coiner of the phrase the “Atomic Age,” William Laurence. Laurence states that “The atomic bomb is the most powerful physical destructive weapon history has ever known!... Does this mean that we are helpless against an attack? There is most definitely a defense against the Atomic bomb!”¹⁷⁰ Laurence’s statement again focuses on the inherent paradox and problem with conventionalization. The bomb is both depicted as “the most powerful physical destructive weapon,” but yet something that remains absolutely survivable. These lines only exemplified the contradictory nature of civil defense practices and the façade of security that they tried to create.

As a result of conventionalization, the civil defense genre overall is plagued with factually inaccuracies and trivialization. Using *Pattern for Survival* as a case example, it is obvious that civil defense planners wanted to dispel any fears of atomic weapons, and in that process, ended up trivializing and even offering factually unproven statements about atomic survival. Every civil defense film discussed in this thesis has its share of factually inaccuracies that are hard to overlook. Perhaps, the most famous civil defense film ever, *Duck and Cover*, at its core is a clear example of conventionalization. Portraying the atomic bomb as something that could be survived by merely following the mantra of “duck and cover,” is a gross simplification to kids given the all-powerful nature of the weapon. The same conventionalization logic is used for women in *The House in the Middle*. The film offers reflective white paint and maintaining a

¹⁷⁰ *Pattern for Survival*.

clean yard as solutions to an atomic attack, a weapon that managed to wipe out and instantaneously kill tens of thousands in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. While these messages of conventionalization can appear to be silly and absurd, they played a fundamental role in shaping American perceptions of the bomb and easing psychological woes.

Even with these early iterations of civil defense films, the focus was less on informing the public than on assuaging their worries. Easing the psychological woes of Americans had always been one of the central goals of civil defense films. By trivializing and normalizing atomic weapons, *Pattern for Survival* was trying to eliminate any potential sense of atomic panic. It didn't necessarily matter that the information was wrong to a certain extent. What mattered most was creating the appearance that civil defense had all the necessary answers early on.

Much as in civil defense literature, fallout is also conventionalized in civil defense films. *Protection Against the Atom Bomb* proves itself to be widely inaccurate in its depiction of fallout, simplifying its dangerous effects. In the film, The Narrator describes removing fallout from one's self as being the same as removing "dirt or soot" with "soap and water."¹⁷¹ In another instance, he mentions that fission products can be washed off the skin itself and is actually easier to remove than poison ivy.¹⁷² While the film's obvious intention is to make the fear and treatment of fallout manageable and less intimidating, it actually has a dangerous inverse effect. By comparing fallout particles to dirt and poison ivy, the film fails to acknowledge the real danger of fallout. Its sanitization of the real effects of fallout transmits misinformation to its viewers. The most dubious claim the film makes in relation to fallout is a scenario The Narrator creates where an atomic bomb is dropped near a lagoon. He describes how while the lagoon and

¹⁷¹ National Archives, Record Group 304, Entry 31 A, Box 1: Records Relating to Civil Defense, 1949-1953.

¹⁷² Ibid.

the fish inside of it would be contaminated, if someone ate a fish that had eaten radioactive material, they would still be fine. Those who watched the film could think that by simply washing their clothes they could remove particles, unaware of fallout's ability to lead to cancer and other long term health issues.

Through trivializing the effects of fallout, civil defense was potentially putting Americans in danger. Historian Allan Winkler's Life Under a Cloud dedicates a whole chapter in exploring the immense fear Americans had surrounding fallout. Winkler cites an 1896 case about Clarence Dally, who suffered from skin ulcers after trying to produce X-Rays inside a calcium tungstate-coated tube and eventually got cancer and died.¹⁷³ It was obvious that radiation was not the harmless phenomenon that *Pattern for Survival* attempted to depict. In terms of the scientific community, there was already by 1950 a push to try and explain the dangerous effects that fallout could have on individuals. In 1949, David Bradley, a physician and member of a radiological monitoring team, wrote in his bestselling book, No Place to Hide, that “the devastating influence of the Bomb and its unborn relatives may affect the land and its wealth—and therefore its people—for centuries through the persistence of radioactivity.”¹⁷⁴ Another physicist, Ralph Lapp, wrote that fallout was something that “cannot be felt and possesses all the terror of the unknown...like a bubonic plague.”¹⁷⁵ Scientists had long seen the silent, lingering threat that fallout presented to American safety, yet civil defense films chose to completely downplay its impact. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has a section of its website entirely dedicated to Emergency Preparedness and Responsiveness in relation to an atomic attack. A 2014 CDC definitively showed the effects of fallout, proving that “exposure to

¹⁷³ Winkler, Allan M. *Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety About the Atom*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999. 87.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

very large doses of external radiation may cause death within a few days or months.”¹⁷⁶ It also mentions that even “lower doses of radiation and internal exposure from breathing or eating food contaminated with radioactive fallout may lead to an increased risk of developing cancer and other health effects.”¹⁷⁷ The research done by the CDC directly contradicts the trivialization of fallout presented in nearly every civil defense pamphlet and film.

Although serious experiments and tests of the effects of fallout would not be done until the end of the 1950s, these films had no way of proving they were right in the first place. Essentially, they were filling their films with uncorroborated facts about the atomic bomb and its aftermath. The same argument could also be said of all the ways civil defense planners recommended that people use duck and cover to survive; in other words, it wasn’t just the threat of fallout that was being downplayed, but many of the messages of civil defense.

Conventionalization was not only restricted to reframing the effects of atomic weapons, but also included reshaping and defining the history of atomic weapons. Historian Robert Jacobs in *The Dragon’s Tail*, delves into how the success of civil defense depended on ignorance of the reality of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Films such as *Protection Against the Atom Bomb*, while initially offering a bleak picture of the hazards Americans faced, provided hope and survival through means of preparation, education, and proper emotional management. They were made to demonstrate how preparedness was the deciding factor in surviving. In an eerie reminder of what unpreparedness looks like, civil defense film often harkens back to images of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to illustrate a point. The argument made by many films is that if the Japanese had been prepared and had practiced civil defense, more people would have survived the atomic bombings

¹⁷⁶ "Frequently Asked Questions About a Nuclear Blast." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. October 17, 2014. Accessed March 07, 2017. <https://emergency.cdc.gov/radiation/nuclearfaq.asp>.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

and there would have been less destruction. While the logic of this train of thought is obviously flawed due to the fact that the Japanese had no warning about an atomic attack to begin with, the reminder about Hiroshima and Nagasaki still remained incredible powerful and resonant. In a direct acknowledgement of this point, over footage of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, The Narrator in *Protection Against the Atom Bomb* claims “And from Hiroshima and Nagasaki comes one other lesson perhaps the most important of all. That if the Japanese had known what was coming, and the ways they could protect themselves, their casualties would have been only a fraction of what they were.”¹⁷⁸

However, even a summary study of the experiences of the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki makes it evident that American civil defense solutions were inadequate. In 1955, Americans once again had to face the harsh reality of the bomb. On the May 11 episode of the NBC show, *This is Your Life*, two survivors of the Hiroshima bombing were the focus of the episode. The women were only shown in silhouette because as host, Ralph Edwards, explained they were both severely disfigured and burned. The harrowing episode showed the reality of what life really looked like for a survivor of an atomic attack. Although the women claimed they were happy to be in America, the image of disfigured, scarred survivors refusing to be on TV, directly contradicted the message presented in civil defense films. To quote historian Robert Jacobs, the two women “hardly presented the image of the prepared and gutsy survivors who would inhabit the core of the iconology of American survival narratives.”¹⁷⁹ More than just convincing Americans they could survive an atomic attack, civil defense films had to fundamentally alter the general perception of atomic weapons. However, this task was hard to

¹⁷⁸ National Archives, Record Group 304, Entry 31 A, Box 1: Records Relating to Civil Defense, 1949-1953.

¹⁷⁹ Jacobs, Robert A. *The Dragon's Tail: Americans Face the Atomic Age*. Amherst, Mass: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010. 82.

accomplish due to the prevalence of media like *This is Your Life* that challenged the simplified, conventionalized images of the atomic bomb. Movies ranging from *Protection Against the Bomb* to *Operation Alert* were undermined by the bleak narratives that emerged from the media like *This is Your Life*.

These films also had to combat narratives that were being perpetuated by anti-war activists, including those in the scientists' movements and popular media. In *By the Bomb's Early Light*, Paul Boyer dedicates a whole chapter to the political agenda of the scientists' movement mentioned in the "Introduction" and their efforts in trying acquire international control of atomic weapons. Scientists began to use scare tactics in the aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, highlighting the destructive powers of the bomb to change public perception of it. One atomic scientist said "Only one tactic is dependable—the preaching of doom" in order to stop the creation of more weapons.¹⁸⁰ As established earlier, the American government needed the support of the American people to embark on the global power struggle with the Soviets, which meant finding powerful narratives to combat the scientists' movement. Even more powerful than the scientists' movement were the explosion of bleak media surrounding the atomic bomb. Popular works such as *On the Beach*, *Godzilla*, etc. had the power to create negative conceptions of the bomb in people's imaginations.

Kenneth Rose best described the function of conventionalization and civil defense media at the time as presenting atomic war "in terms as mundane as possible, with only muted references to death, destruction, and dismemberment."¹⁸¹ Much like the lack of atomic panic,

¹⁸⁰ Boyer, Paul S. *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994. 70.

¹⁸¹ Rose, Kenneth D. *One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2004. 130.

civil defense used conventionalization to project a specific, curated atomic reality. Civil defense planners used these films to craft an atomic reality, where atomic bombs posed a serious threat, but one that could be survived through the most basic of practices and preparation.

Conclusion

While civil defense films, I argue, had three distinct thematic narratives, they all had the same function of trying to craft an atomic reality where Americans felt they could survive an atomic war with the Soviets. These films built their own worlds where Americans were no longer afraid of the bomb or felt helpless. Instead, in these movies, Americans projected an acute sense of self preparedness, an awareness of the severity of the bomb, and a confidence in their survival.

Conclusion

Legacy and Effects

It cannot be overstated how much the postwar years, specifically, 1945 to 1956, the focus of the majority of the National Archives and the literature discussed in this thesis, are enshrouded in uncertainty and instability. The messages of psychological concerns are fraught with such dismal, despondent visions of the future. Historian Lewis Mumford wrote a series of passionate responses to the atomic bomb during this time period. In an essay from 1947 in the international journal *Air Affairs*, Mumford captured how hopeless and dark the depictions of the future could get. Mumford saw the world erupt in atomic war with “the disintegration of civilization...on a world-wide scale” and humans surviving as “an animal with merest remnant of his intelligence, by eliminating every other capacity that identified him as human.”¹⁸² The atomic panic that civil defense planners had feared was a real possibility, especially with the spread of these terrifying narrative about the future. The task at hand for civil defense planners was not just to sell the viability of civil defense, but to simultaneously alter the psychological reaction to the bomb. The films discussed in this thesis were the mechanisms that planners used to sway American public opinion, achieving success with many throughout the country.

As evident by the wide assortment of letters in the National Archives, there was a cross section of the country who found these films to be profoundly powerful. They managed to offer some sort of comfort and assurance as the political and social tensions of the era became bleaker

¹⁸² Boyer, Paul S. *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. 1994. 286.

and harsher. When W.J. Dodd is pleading in his letter from chapter two for an outdated civil defense film because they are “like a carpenter trying to build a house without tools,” it comes from a genuine want to provide answers and help to his people. These films marked a building block for communities to engage with civil defense materials and find some way to ensure their protection. The cross section appeal of these films demonstrated that there was an audience who wanted and needed reassurance and answers. While it has been shown that many of the answers within these films were riddled with factual inaccuracies and the conventionalization of atomic weapons, they still provided the American public with some sort of resource at a time where knowledge was scarce. As argued by this thesis, these films were effective in providing a sense of hope to many Americans about the possibility and the ability to live in a new atomic reality.

However, it is important to acknowledge the adverse effect some of the films had on the American populace. While these films had the intention of helping Americans feel reassured and safer during the Atomic Age, in some cases, it actually ended up escalating sentiments of anxiety and panic. Michael Scheibach’s *Atomic Narratives and American Youth* is entirely devoted to how children and their coming of age was deeply impacted as a result of the atomic bomb. As evident by the stories from the book, children were able to see past the façade of civil defense films, such as *Duck and Cover*, and understand the real danger of the era. In actuality, many of these kids were forced to analyze issues of mortality, destruction, and war at young age as a result.

Although civil defense films aimed to ensure protection and self-preparedness for all Americans, it failed to fully include all. In many ways, civil defense films were a reflection of their time period, specifically, the 1950s. Women saw gender determine their role in civil defense efforts While they gained greater responsibility in mobilization efforts, such as

Grandma's Pantry, there were still bound to maintaining the house. The film *The House in the Middle* only reinforced the gender expectations for women to remain as caretakers during the Atomic Age. Despite a looming uncertain future, the reality for women still resided within the status quo. The same could be said for African Americans as well.

In terms of racial relations, civil defense as a whole fell victim to the racist policies of segregation and Jim Crow era politics. African Americans saw themselves slowly pushed out of civil defense efforts and removed from their outreach efforts, after the government rejected plans for public shelters partly due to segregation and Millard Caldwell became appointed head of the FCDA. While civil defense films emerged at a time of unprecedented crisis, they were not immune from the sexism or racism of America in 1950s. The atomic future that civil defense film outlined was fully intended to continue to exist within current social hierarchies and power dynamics. Regardless of the positive or negative effect, civil defense films had an impact on its audience and played a key role on how people viewed the atomic bomb.

The central question of this paper has focused on why civil defense films are important. At a first glance, that question can seem to be a simple answer. Civil defense films were films that taught Americans the various ways they could protect and prepare themselves for an atomic attack. However, this is a dramatically simplified idea of the function of these movies. Beyond alleviating concerns about the atomic bomb, civil defense sought to fundamentally alter the American public's conception and narratives surrounding the atomic bomb. They used the fears of atomic war to mobilize Americans and project a powerful image against the Soviet Union. These films were more than just merely propaganda pieces to sell the importance of civil defense, they played a critical role in reshaping people's narratives about the atomic bomb in one of tensest periods of American history

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