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## Selling civil defense: The politics and commerce of preparedness, 1950–1963

Angela Christine Moor  
*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

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SELLING CIVIL DEFENSE: THE POLITICS AND  
COMMERCE OF PREPAREDNESS,  
1950-1963

by

Angela Christine Moor

Bachelor of Arts  
University of Nevada, Reno  
2003

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

**Master of Arts Degree in History  
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Angela Moor

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Examination Committee Chair

Dean of the Graduate College

Examination Committee Member

Examination Committee Member

Graduate College Faculty Representative

ABSTRACT

**Selling Civil Defense: The Politics and  
Commerce of Preparedness,  
1950-1963**

by

Angela Christine Moor

Dr. Elizabeth Fraterrigo, Examination Committee Chair  
Assistant Professor of History  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

This thesis, by examining how business, government, and civic leaders promoted civil defense, shows how a policy of self-help merged the roles of citizen and consumer and how family-centered preparedness equated the survival of the nuclear family with the victory of the US in the Cold War. Civil defense officials helped reinforce messages about gender roles by stressing the value of nuclear families and the crucial role each family member played in the defense of America. Public information campaigns emphasized the importance of free enterprise and privatization by endorsing a policy of self-help for American families whereby individual families were responsible for the purchase of their own means of survival. This thesis will help us better understand the early years of the Cold War by showing how consumption became entwined with civic duty through the efforts of civil defense officials. These efforts created an image of civil defense that centered on a model citizen in the marketplace purchasing the products needed to guarantee his and his family's own survival.

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## CHAPTER 1

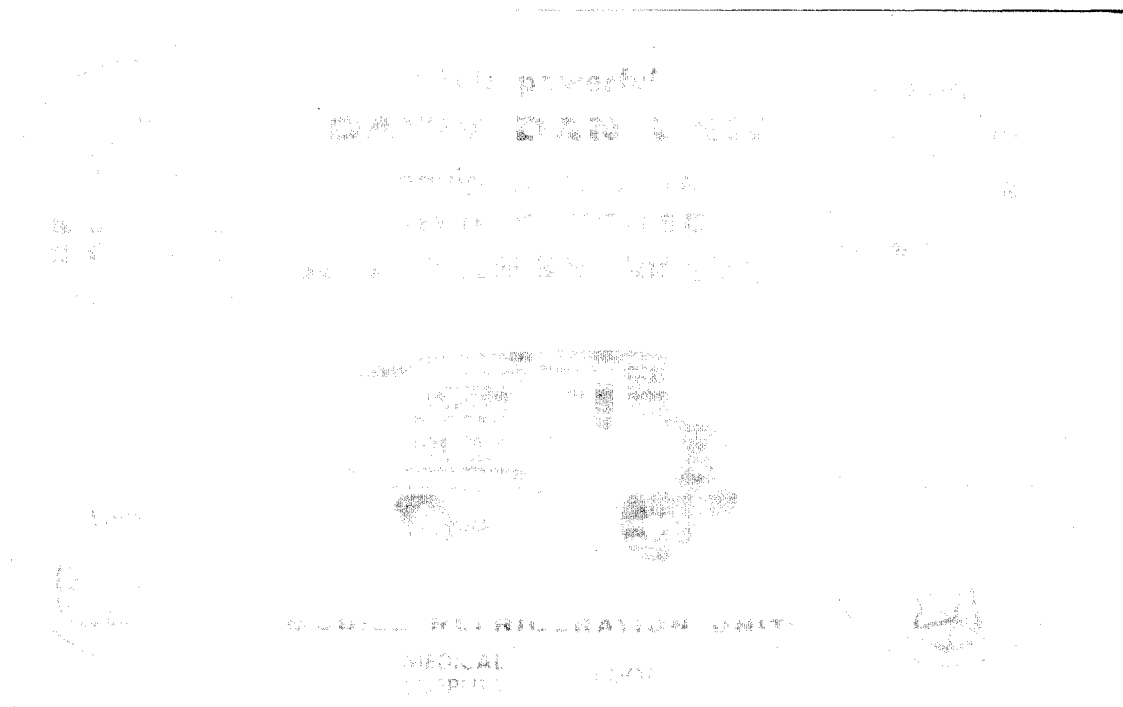
### INTRODUCTION

A leaflet distributed to owners of Dairy Dan Ice Cream trucks from the early 1950s asserted that the owners' trucks were "now an official unit of the United States Civil Defense Network," it went on to list a variety of ways the trucks could provide crucial services following an atomic attack. The trucks could provide refrigeration, illumination, and a clean water supply. It praised the owners saying, "You and your Dairy Dan unit are of inestimable value to your community."<sup>1</sup> The assertion that an ice cream truck could prove invaluable in case of an atomic attack proves useful in understanding the ways in which civil defense entered the American consciousness in the early years of the Cold War. By assuming that ice cream trucks would still be circling suburban neighborhoods following an atomic bomb blast, the leaflet downplayed the real threat of atomic war. It also demonstrates the crucial institutionalization of civil defense in the marketplace as everyday goods and services became identified as part of the survival effort. Americans faced a multitude of messages about preparedness during the early years of the Cold War, all of which largely held to the official position that survival of an atomic bomb was possible. Civil defense provides an important lens on the ways that the Cold War entered everyday domestic life and how the concept of consensus

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<sup>1</sup> Dairy Dan Leaflet, Virgil L. Couch Papers, 1951-1958 (Couch Papers); Box 20, Civil Defense Publications by Businesses and Corporations, 1950-1958 (5), Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library (DDEL).

helped shape postwar American culture and politics. The idea of consensus linked consumption with democracy, helped define appropriate roles for men and women, and pitted American affluence as a counter to Soviet communism. This thesis, by examining how business, government, and civic leaders promoted civil defense, shows how a policy of self-help merged the roles of citizen and consumer and how family-centered preparedness equated the survival of the family with the victory of the US in the Cold War. It is not concerned with the number of shelters constructed or volunteers committed to recovery, but instead with the ways in which the promotion of civil defense helped to inform the consensus of the postwar period and why Americans largely rejected such preparedness measures. Examining the selling of civil defense offers a way of seeing the dialogue that existed between the Cold War and domestic consumption during this period.



**Figure 1- Leaflet distributed to Dairy Dan Ice Cream Truck Owners**

In 1950, President Harry S. Truman established the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) with the goal of limiting casualties in the event of an atomic war with the Soviet Union. The concept of civil defense, resting on a premise that it was possible to survive an atomic, and later hydrogen, bomb blast was a tough sell for the American public, but nevertheless American policymakers, business leaders, and civic groups united to promote the cause. The idea of civil defense stretched well beyond the sphere of preparedness and offered information about home, family, and morality. The selling of civil defense, because of its connection to both mass consumption and the Cold War, allows us to identify the real relationship that existed between the Cold War and domestic politics and culture.

Recognizing that a massive program of state-sponsored shelter building was contrary to the American view on the role of government, the FCDA focused its attention on a massive public education campaign. This effort not only aimed to instruct Americans about the need for civil defense, but the campaign also promoted the free enterprise system with its dependence on corporate sponsorship. Faced with chronic budget shortages, the FCDA established a series of partnerships with private enterprise under the guise of “cooperative promotion” to educate Americans about civil defense.<sup>2</sup> Promoters of civil defense elevated their message from a policy of preparation against possible nuclear attack to a hallmark of patriotic, good citizenship for Americans. Home preparedness, one of the most important civil defense policies of the early 1950s, emphasized efficiency and preparation for the suburban home as crucial in sustaining the nation during and after an attack. This policy used the moral foundations of American

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<sup>2</sup> This phrase appears throughout official FCDA literature to refer to collaborations with various mass media outlets to spread the message of civil defense.

homes and families and recast homemaking from a domestic duty into a civic obligation. Civil defense officials helped reinforce messages about gender roles by stressing the value of nuclear families and the crucial role each family member played in the defense of America. Other campaigns emphasized the importance of free enterprise and privatization by endorsing policies of self-help for American families and lauding the participation of private companies in the nation's civil defense efforts. Together these efforts created an image of civil defense that centered on a model citizen in the marketplace purchasing the products needed to guarantee his and his family's own survival.

The FCDA worked with many groups to spread its message of survival. The non-profit Advertising Council created and distributed a number of public service campaigns on the need for preparedness. Atomic bomb tests at the Nevada Test Site provided the FCDA with important opportunities to assess the effectiveness of civil defense policy and to drum up interest in the civil defense program. Civic organizations and private companies also took part in the distribution of survival information. Each of these key groups played an important role in the promotion of civil defense during the early Cold War.

Cold War civil defense, though it took on a decidedly different form, had its origin in World War II. President Franklin Roosevelt took the first official steps for preparedness during World War II when he created the Office of Civilian Defense in 1941 to "coordinate measures of federal, state, and local government for protection of the

civilian population in war emergencies.”<sup>3</sup> In 1945, President Truman disbanded the office by executive order.<sup>4</sup> The testing of an atomic bomb by the USSR in 1949, however, regenerated interest in civil defense and, bowing to public pressure, President Truman asked the National Security Resources Board (NSRB) to take over survival planning.<sup>5</sup> In 1950, at the advice of the NSRB he established the Federal Civil Defense Administration in the office of emergency management with an executive order.<sup>6</sup> Shortly after, Congress passed legislation to make it an independent agency dedicated to civil defense.<sup>7</sup>

A three-part objective, captured in the motto “Survive, Recover, and Win,” energized the new unit.<sup>8</sup> Four functions guided early civil defense planning: “(1) measures designed to prevent an enemy attack; (2) measures designed to reduce the effects of an enemy attack; (3) services which will alleviate the damage of an enemy attack; (4) and general measures pertaining to the overall program.”<sup>9</sup> The new administration faced a number of challenges during its early days. The appointment of Millard Caldwell as the first director of the FCDA angered the NAACP and other

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<sup>3</sup> “History of Civil Defense,” President’s Secretary’s File (PSF); Box 193, Civil Defense, Harry S. Truman Library (HSTL). Activities during World War II included things like victory gardens, salvage drives, and air-raid drills.

<sup>4</sup> “History of Civil Defense,” PSF; Box 193, Civil Defense, HSTL.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Corey Brewer, *Civil Defense in the United States: Federal State and Local*. (Library of Congress Legislative Reference Service, Washington: 1951), iv.

<sup>8</sup> Spencer R. Weart, “History of American Attitudes Toward Civil Defense,” in *Civil Defense: A Choice of Disasters*, edited by John Dowling and Evans M. Harrell. (New York: American Institute of Physics, 1987), 13.

<sup>9</sup> Brewer, 4.

progressive groups because of racist statements he made as Florida governor.<sup>10</sup> Letters to the White House about Caldwell's appointment questioned his commitment to protect all Americans.<sup>11</sup> The FCDA also faced constant cuts in its budget from Congress. In 1951, Congress funded civil defense efforts at \$65 million, rather than the \$535 million requested by the FCDA citing claims that real protection of civilians would be far too costly and the best hope was "to altogether avoid war."<sup>12</sup> President Truman called Congress' allocation "tragically insufficient."<sup>13</sup> Such statements became routine at the FCDA. In 1952, the president called the ninety percent reduction in allocation a repeat of a "gross error."<sup>14</sup> Millard Caldwell likened the 1953 appropriations to Russian roulette.<sup>15</sup> Failure to obtain adequate funding from Congress prompted the FCDA to enter into a number of partnerships with industry and other groups to spread its message of preparedness.

Civil defense material between 1950 and 1963 largely appealed to Americans' sense of patriotic duty by framing preparedness as a measure of good citizenship and offered little technical information about survival. The messages offered by the FCDA through the Ad Council, civic groups, and business others all made important associations between civil defense and good citizenship as they equated characteristics

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Grossman, "Segregationist Liberalism: The NAACP and Resistance to Civil-Defense Planning in the Early Cold War, 1951-1953," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*. 13: 3 (2000).

<sup>11</sup> Numerous examples can be found in the White House Central Files (WHCF): OF (Official File) 2965, HSTL. The majority of letters were form letters used by members of NAACP branches across the United States.

<sup>12</sup> "Bomb Shelters Away," *Time*, September 3, 1951.

<sup>13</sup> Statement by the President, November 2, 1951; PSF; Box 193, Historical File, 1945-1953, HSTL.

<sup>14</sup> Statement by the President, July 15, 1952; PSF; Box 193, Historical File, 1945-1953, HSTL.

<sup>15</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, "Press Information no. 257," Spencer R. Quick Files (Quick Files); Box 6, Civil Defense Campaign - General (1), HSTL.

such as civic-mindedness, homeownership, and family togetherness with survival. These messages can help us better understand the ways that civil defense helped domesticate the doomsday destruction of the Cold War.

Throughout the 1950s, because of an inability to secure funding sufficient to establish a more active civil defense program, the FCDA focused on the relatively inexpensive process of distributing information to Americans about the possibility of survival through home preparedness. In 1953 and 1955, the FCDA participated in test operations at the Nevada Test Site. Following the tests, the FCDA released books and movies for the public urging them to undertake civil defense measures in their homes. In 1954 and 1955, a new understanding of the harmful nature of fallout and changing technology including long-range missiles and exponentially more powerful bombs altered civil defense policy. Instead of assuming that the primary threat to the population would come from heat and blast wave, it became evident that the increased destructive power of the H-bomb would necessitate evacuation from targeted areas. By the mid-1950s, civil defense virtually disappeared from national conversation as the Cold War stabilized and the American public focused their attention on the expanding economy.

Civil defense re-entered national debate in the early 1960s as Americans, faced with the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis, recognized the renewed possibility of nuclear war. Home fallout shelters were marketed as the best bet for survival and dealers sprang up around the country to sell backyard shelters to suburban families. Articles in mass media publications addressed the moral cost of fallout shelters and questioned what type of world would greet survivors on their emergence. The fervor



surrounding the fallout shelter was short-lived, however, and by 1963 the market for fallout shelters collapsed.

Limited scholarly attention has been paid to the development of American civil defense.<sup>16</sup> A number of books on the Cold War examine it only in passing as part of domestic Cold War programs and the influence of the atomic bomb on 1950s American culture.<sup>17</sup> Other authors examine the ways civil defense interacted with changing notions of gender and family in postwar America through a system of “domestic containment.”<sup>18</sup> Other works focus on the institutional development and policies of the FCDA and its successors.<sup>19</sup> These books, along with a handful of articles, represent the extent of

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<sup>16</sup> Scholars who focus on postwar America largely ignore civil defense, but their works provide important context for understanding postwar American culture. One of the most useful books on postwar America is Lizabeth Cohen’s *A Consumer’s Republic: the Politics of Mass Consumption In Postwar America*. Her analysis of postwar America and the connections between citizenship and consumption offers a useful framework for relating civil defense to American politics. She argues that mass consumption effectively set the dimensions of postwar society.

<sup>17</sup> These include: Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb’s Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York: Pantheon, 1985); Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); and Allan M. Winkler, *Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety about the Atom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> The idea of domestic containment emerged from Elaine Tyler May’s *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), but a number of subsequent authors have used her construction in examining the effects of the Cold War on American culture. Both Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Dee Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon: Why Civil Defense Never Worked* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) have examined the relationship between gender and civil defense campaigns. Garrison’s work offers an important counter-narrative to the existing scholarship. She advances a theory that civil defense played an important role in the strategy of deterrence between the United States and the Soviet Union and skillfully relates domestic civil defense policies to international politics.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew D. Grossman, *Neither Dead nor Red Civilian Defense and American Political Development During the Early Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2001). Grossman provides important insight into the influence of the FCDA, but his work is hindered by his denunciation of other works on civil defense that focus on material culture. Kenneth D. Rose, *One Nation Underground: A History of the Fallout Shelter* (New York: New York University Press, 2004) places the fallout shelter at the center of his analysis as he traces the development of the American civil defense program. Guy Oakes, *The Imaginary War: American Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) focuses on the disconnect between the official message of the FCDA, which held that survival was possible, and the awareness of government officials that nearly all efforts at survival would prove futile in case of an attack.

scholarly literature on civil defense.<sup>20</sup> They offer a valuable summary of the development and eventual demise of the national civil defense program. Some of them offer limited insight into the ways different groups, especially women, participated in organized civil defense efforts. Understanding the institutional development of the American civil defense program provides needed background, but the real importance of civil defense in the early years of the Cold War lies in the ways it intersected with broader American culture.

The evolution of civil defense between 1950 and 1963 is the focus of this thesis because this period encompasses the rise and fall of home-based preparedness. The second chapter, "Survive, Recover, Win: Public Education Campaigns of the FCDA" uses documents, reports, and correspondence from the FCDA to trace the various methods the FCDA used to indoctrinate the public on the policy of civil defense. Although ostensibly about survival, the campaigns spread overt messages about what it meant to be a good American. Chapter three, "A Tough Sell: The Advertising Council and Civil Defense" examines the tensions between the FCDA and the Ad Council through correspondence between the Advertising Council, the FCDA, and the White House. This chapter also identifies the imagery and themes through which the advertisements connected preparedness and good citizenship. The design, promotion, and success of the largely forgotten Alert America exhibit are examined in the fourth chapter, "The Show You'll Never Forget: The Alert America Convoy." Drawing on archival materials from the Kenneth D. Wells collection at Brigham Young University,

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<sup>20</sup> JoAnne Brown, "A Is for Atom, B Is for Bomb: Civil Defense in American Education, 1948-1963," *Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (1988): 68-90; Sarah A. Lichtman, "Do-It-Yourself Security: Safety, Gender, and the Home Fallout Shelter in Cold War America," *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 1 (2006): 39-55; Guy Oakes and Andrew Grossman, "Managing Nuclear Terror: The Genesis of American Civil Defense Strategy," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 5, no. 3 (1992), 361-403.

the chapter traces the exhibit from its planning stages through its tour. Chapter four, “Dummy Doomtown in the Desert: Civil Defense and the Nevada Test Site,” details the relationship of the FCDA to the atomic bomb tests and the way the tests were used to further downplay the dangers of aboveground atomic weapons tests. Newspaper and magazine articles, official reports, television programs, and correspondence all provide important insight into the ways officials framed the tests for public consumption. Advertisements are the main source for the sixth chapter, “Purchasing Survival: Preparedness Products” and show how the roles of citizen and consumer overlapped in the postwar period. The final chapter, “Civil Defense Goes Underground: The Fallout Shelter,” focuses on the boom and bust of the fallout shelter market through advertisements and articles from newspapers and magazines.

This thesis will help us better understand the early years of the Cold War by showing how consumption became entwined with civic duty through the efforts of civil defense officials. The promotion of self-help as the main policy of preparedness effectively conflated the roles of citizen and consumer. This exemplifies the important evolution in the definition of American citizenship that occurred in this period, as a new emphasis on consumption as a patriotic duty came to define what it meant to be a good American. By analyzing the ways civil defense was promoted by the government, business, and civic groups during the 1950s, this thesis exposes the relationship between Cold War politics and domestic culture, public and private lives, and demonstrates how the language of civil defense was used to mold public opinion on atomic weapons and in turn endorse the ongoing militarization of American culture.

## CHAPTER 2

### SURVIVE, RECOVER, WIN: PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS OF THE FEDERAL CIVIL DEFENSE ADMINISTRATION

In 1950, the National Security Resources Board released the Cold War's first book on civil defense, *The United States Civil Defense Program*.<sup>21</sup> The book called for the creation of an independent federal agency for civil defense, argued that panic was the greatest problem facing civil defense planners, and placed the family at the center of preparedness.<sup>22</sup> In a departure from World War II-era civil defense planning that focused on community efforts, an insistence on the family as the core of civil defense efforts guided survival planning throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. The book presented readers with a graphic representation of family-centered civil defense planning, labeled the National Civil Defense Pattern. The image, made up of concentric rings, went from the federal government, to the state, nearby cities, community, neighborhood, and ended with the family and individual in the middle.<sup>23</sup> According to the chart, the family was the "base of organized self-protection" and the individual was "calm and well-trained." The characterization of civil defense as primarily an individual effort partly reflected

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<sup>21</sup> Executive Office of the President, National Security Resources Board, *United States Civil Defense* (Washington: GPO, 1950). The book is also known as the "Blue Book" because of the color of its cover. The NSRB took civil defense on as a responsibility in March of 1949. Harry B. Yoshpe, *Our Missing Shield: The US Civil Defense Program in Historical Perspective* (Prepared for Federal Emergency Management Agency: April 1981), 520.

<sup>22</sup> Guy Oakes, *The Imaginary War: American Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 38.

<sup>23</sup> Executive Office of the President, National Security Resources Board, *United States Civil Defense* (Washington: GPO, 1950), 2.

planners' recognition that money for defense was largely directed toward active measures, such as weapons building and the development of early warning systems. While the focus on the family may have been a pragmatic solution for NSRB planners because of their limited funds, it also reflected the concurrent shift in American culture toward the nuclear family.

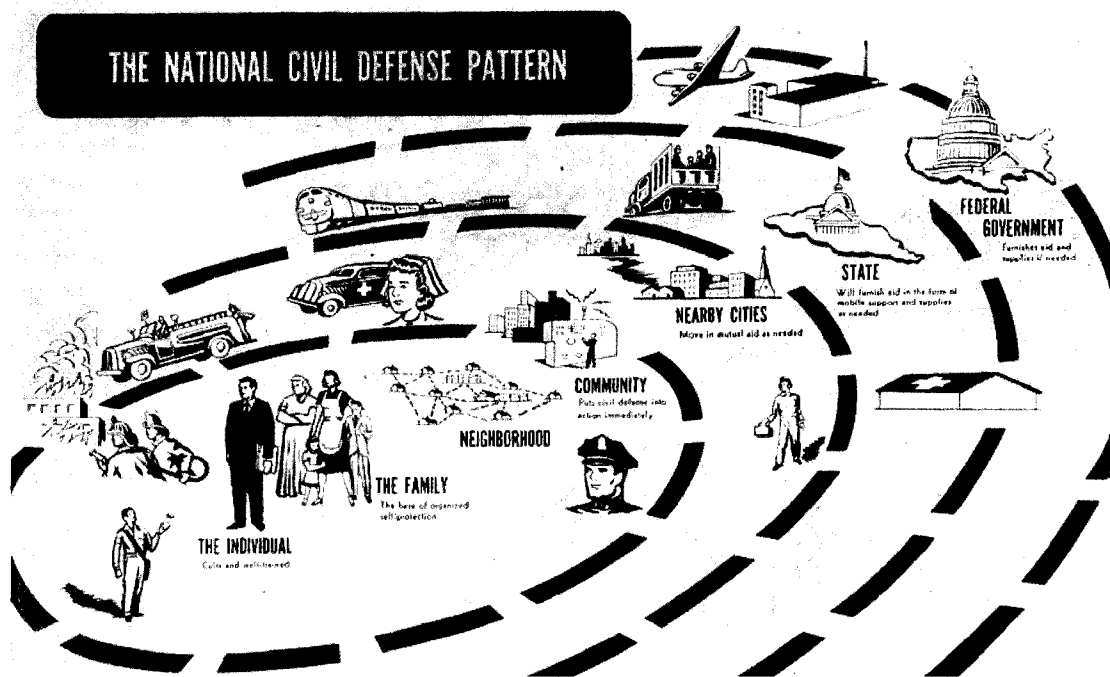


Figure 2-- The National Civil Defense pattern from the NSRB's *United States Civil Defense Program*

*United States Civil Defense Program* and other materials produced by the FCDA identified a clear intended audience. Preparedness efforts focused on suburban nuclear families while ignoring Americans in urban areas. By emphasizing a program of self-help in which individual families purchased items meant to aid in their survival at local stores, the FCDA connected consumption and patriotism. Despite ongoing internal conflict at the FCDA between the message that survival was possible and a recognition

that most efforts at preparedness would prove futile, the administration produced a consistent stream of materials for public consumption that held that American families could survive an atomic attack by practicing self-help measures. Examining the public information campaigns of the FCDA reveals one way that civil defense contributed to the hegemony of the Cold War consensus.

A desire to create a consensus developed in the late 1940s and business, policymakers, and the mass media united to indoctrinate Americans about the “benefits of the American way of life.”<sup>24</sup> They framed the American system of free enterprise in opposition to the Soviet totalitarianism and linked democracy with affluence. The concept of consensus also attempted to ascribe narrow gender roles for men and women, define acceptable public discourse, and located autonomy for Americans in their role as consumers in the free market. These groups saw this consensus as the foundation for ever-growing American affluence and power and as the key to an “egalitarian and harmonious society.”<sup>25</sup> The public information campaigns were used to educate Americans about their role in this consensus-driven society. The cynical response of Americans to many of the FCDA’s efforts suggests that the consensus of the postwar period was more imagined than lived.

Even after the creation of the FCDA at the federal level in 1950, civil defense planning remained primarily a local issue. Official federal policy held that responsibility for preparedness belonged to individual states. The federal role was one of “planning, coordination, and guidance,” while the states were the responsible for the operation of

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<sup>24</sup> Daniel Horowitz, *The Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture, 1939-1979* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 7.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

civil defense.<sup>26</sup> Since the federal role was limited to such hands-off duties, it allowed the FCDA to focus most of their efforts on public education campaigns and to promote civil defense mainly as a project of self-help to Americans. These public education campaigns took the form of booklets, pamphlets, television and radio spots, posters, and exhibits. Distributed by the FCDA to local civil defense offices and the public, these materials presented a consistent message aimed at suburban families that survival was possible and that their participation in civil defense would lead to a stronger America.

Two objectives guided the FCDA's public education campaign. The first objective, "To develop a general acceptance of civil defense as a necessary, permanent element of our total national defense, without hysteria and independent of the ups and downs of international relations" attempted to orient civil defense as a permanent part of American society.<sup>27</sup> A focus on citizens' responsibility was the core of the second objective as it aimed to "to produce a sober, routine readiness in all American families, based on indoctrination and public exercises, to the point where prompt and effective survival action becomes automatic."<sup>28</sup> These objectives led to two distinct goals for civil defense planners. First, policymakers aimed for preparedness planning independent of international politics. The second objective, indoctrination, became the main focus as the FCDA attempted to convert the domestic homefront into a Cold War battlefield. Lack of funds and little interest in the program by politicians limited the ability of the FCDA to reach either objective.

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<sup>26</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *1952 Annual Report*, (Washington: GPO, 1953), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *1955 Annual Report*, (Washington: GPO, 1956), 72.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

In order to instruct Americans about their role in civil defense the FCDA entered into a number of partnerships. Officials on the national level worked with newspapers, magazines, television, and radio to spread the message that survival was possible. The FCDA lauded these relationships and claimed that “making the facts of survival understood, believed, and remembered by millions of Americans” would have been impossible without the participation of mass media.<sup>29</sup> The partnerships the FCDA formed with the mass media largely determined the scope and content of preparedness information.

The FCDA issued booklets, pamphlets, and other publications to educate the public about their role in civil defense. Materials for the general public emphasized the policy of self-help in ensuring survival of families. The majority of publications focused on families at home and paid little attention to the very real possibility that family members might be apart at the time of attack. While these materials focused on the survival of the atomic bomb blast with little attention to post-blast society, materials produced for professional groups focused on the real devastation of a post-attack city. The divergence in the messages of these two types of publications is important because the level of destruction presented for public consumption is significantly lower than that presented to those responsible for recovery efforts. Examining the publications of the FCDA reveal important insight into the ideology of the administration and the ways they married the notion of family survival with victory for the United States in World War III.

Shortly after the establishment of the FCDA, the administration began producing materials for American families on the importance of practicing good civil defense within

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<sup>29</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *1952 Annual Report*, (Washington: GPO, 1953), 41.



their homes. These publications reiterated the policy of self-help and encouraged families to take steps needed to ensure their survival and help create a strong America. Nearly all FCDA publications also carried the message that preparedness could deter a Soviet attack because the population would recover quickly and defeat the communists. Civil defense publications often featured families on the cover and detailed steps for each member in preparing for a possible attack.<sup>30</sup> In these pamphlets, the dangers of atomic attack were downplayed, and American families were guaranteed survival by completing basic preparedness measures. One example of such pamphlets, *Six Steps to Survival*, featured a family on the cover and asked, "If an Enemy Attacked Today Would You Know What to Do?"<sup>31</sup> Inside, the FCDA listed six steps for survival: prepare family for emergencies, learn civil defense signals, know CONELRAD stations, follow the evacuation guide, construct a home shelter, and read about fallout. On the back cover, the same family stood secure in their knowledge that they were prepared to survive an atomic attack. Other materials drove home the message that survival planning for families was not only important to protect them in case of an atomic attack, but in making America stronger. One example, *What You Can Do Now*, contained the civil defense pledge and explicitly made the case on the front cover with an image of the family reading the pamphlet accompanied by the text, "for a stronger America."<sup>32</sup> FCDA publications for the public focused on the family as the core of civil defense. Pamphlets such as these "stressed the metaphoric bond between self and nation" and equated the

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<sup>30</sup> Examples include Federal Civil Defense Administration, *Before Disaster Strikes: What to Do Know About Emergency Sanitation at Home*, (Washington: GPO, 1953); *Home Protection Exercises*, (Washington: GPO, 1956); *Rural Family Defense*, (Washington: GPO, 1956), and *Corner Room Shelter for Family Protection in an Atomic Attack*, (Washington: GPO, 1953).

<sup>31</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *Six Steps to Survival*, (Washington: GPO, 1956).

<sup>32</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *What You Can Do Now*, (Washington: GPO, 1956).

survival of the family with the victory of the United States in the Cold War.<sup>33</sup> The equation of middle-class families with a Cold War victory in these publications, with their focus on suburban families, consisting of parents and a son and daughter, illustrate one way that the messages of the FCDA helped inform the consensus of the period.

The FCDA created materials with messages catered to the intended audience. In addition to the campaigns aimed at American families, the FCDA produced publications meant for groups such as clergy, doctors, dentists, welfare professionals, and the police. Most of these materials carried a bleak message about the realities of atomic attack and the need for trained professionals to tend to the masses following an attack.<sup>34</sup> These publications stand in stark contrast to the optimistic message that survival was possible offered in materials meant for the general population.

Comparing these two types of materials illustrates an important contradiction in FCDA policy. A pamphlet meant for those responsible for post-attack society, *The Welfare Task in Civil Defense*, had a particularly grim cover.<sup>35</sup> Against the backdrop of a mushroom cloud, a long line of people streamed out a destroyed town on the front cover. At the front of a line, a man carried a child while another child walked in front of him carrying a baby. The people's clothing hung in shreds around them. This drawing of the

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<sup>33</sup> Robert A. Jacobs, "'There are No Civilians; We Are All at War': Nuclear War Shelter and Survival Narratives During the Early Cold War," *Journal of American Culture* 30:4, 401.

<sup>34</sup> Examples include: Federal Civil Defense Administration, *Before Disaster Strikes: What the Farmer Should Know About Biological Warfare* (Washington: GPO, 1955); FCDA, *10 Steps to Industrial Survival* (Washington: GPO, 1956); Federal Civil Defense Administration, *Basic Course in Emergency Mass Feeding* (Washington: GPO, 1957); the Federal Civil Defense Administration also produced booklets for various professionals including doctors, dentists, veterinarians, fire fighters, and engineers.

<sup>35</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *The Welfare Task in Civil Defense*. (Washington: GPO, 1953). Federal Civil Defense Administration, "For Your Information: Public Affairs #60: The Welfare Task in Civil Defense," May 22, 1953; James M. Lambie Records (Lambie Records); Box 3, Civil Defense - General 1953 (2), DDEL. A press release described "The Welfare Task" as "a pictorial-text representation of the four components of CD-emergency services—mass care, registration and information, temporary rehabilitation aid, and evacuation."

destruction of an atomic bomb is in direct conflict with other messages offered by the FCDA for public consumption. A pamphlet meant for the general public published in 1955, *Facts About Fallout*, showed a much rosier picture of post-attack America.<sup>36</sup> On the cover of that pamphlet, a man stood in front of a mushroom cloud holding his briefcase with a bewildered look, but the cover does not convey nearly the same level of destruction or suffering as *The Welfare Task in Civil Defense*. The two covers both show an America that has just been the target of an atomic bomb with the mushroom cloud still lingering in the background, but the stark contrast in the level of destruction points to the differing messages for the general public and those meant to respond to an attack. The very different scenes of post-attack American shown on these two covers demonstrate the tension inherent in the FCDA's public information mission. Two important concepts guided civil defense planners: the official line that claimed Americans could survive an attack while privately they recognized the futility of civil defense efforts.<sup>37</sup> This tension manifest itself in the dramatically different covers; civil defense informational materials meant for public consumption offered a carefully cultivated optimistic message that cleaved to the notion that survival was possible, while those meant for individuals meant to aid in the recovery effort recognized the very real danger of atomic attack.

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<sup>36</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *Facts About Fallout*, (Washington: GPO, 1955). Interestingly, this was published in 1955, after the government released information about the very real dangers of fallout, but neither the cover nor the text inside acknowledges the harmful effects of fallout.

<sup>37</sup> Oakes, 7-8.

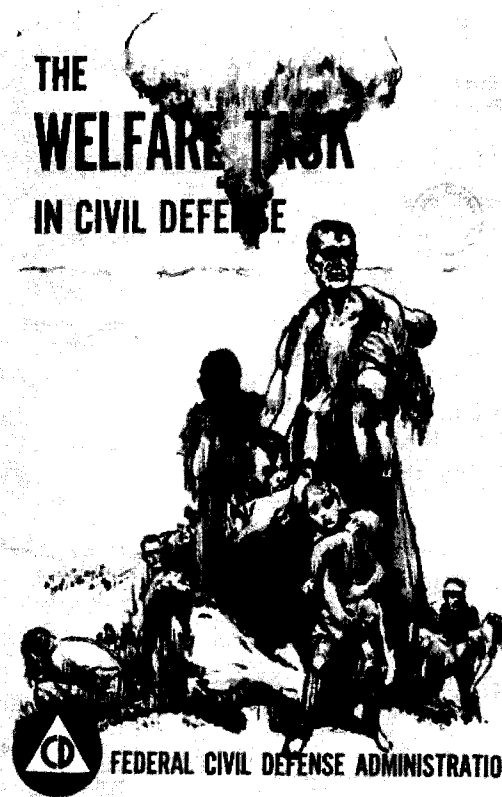


Figure 3- *The Welfare Task in Civil Defense*, 1953



Figure 4- *Facts about Fallout*, 1955

In addition to the publication and distribution of informational materials, civil defense officials created a number of campaigns in partnership with various companies and manufacturers to educate the public. In such cooperative campaigns, the civil defense message appeared in space donated by businesses, publishers, or in buildings. The non-profit Advertising Council created a series of public-service campaigns to raise awareness of civil defense measures. That campaign is examined in the next chapter. Not only did the FCDA rely on the might of the Ad Council to sell the message of preparedness, but the administration also encouraged private companies to take part in the effort. Officials asked stores that sold products related to civil defense to display posters about volunteer recruitment. The FCDA requested that companies manufacturing

preparedness products to include information about the official civil defense program in advertising materials. Such encouragement created conflict within the FCDA, however, as technical planners expressed concern about the accuracy of claims and messages made in private ads.<sup>38</sup> The Administration also partnered with manufacturers to spread its message in more unusual ways. One example was the insertion of FCDA alert cards in new wallets and billfolds by the producer of these goods.<sup>39</sup> These campaigns demonstrate the ingenuity of the FCDA in finding new ways to reach the public. This cooperation may not have been the first choice of officials, but their anemic budget made such creative promotion a necessity. Campaigns such as these bombarded Americans with the message of survival through preparedness in the marketplace.

Civil defense officials also used more graphical forms to spread the message of survival. The Alert America exhibit in 1952 was by far the largest exhibition, but the FCDA also created smaller exhibits that used a variety of tools to educate Americans about the need for civil defense including posters and maps showing potential destruction under black lights for display at conventions, trade shows, fairs, and other events.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, the FCDA developed posters to aid in education and recruitment. Similar in style to World War II posters, the FCDA commissioned two series of civil defense posters in 1952. Officials meant for them to be displayed in a variety of locations including store windows, civil defense offices, theater lobbies, factory corridors, and

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<sup>38</sup> Letter by Ed Lyman, August 8, 1951; Quick Files; Box 2, Civil Defense Program, HSTL.

<sup>39</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *1953 Annual Report*, (Washington: GPO, 1954), 74. This campaign differs from later efforts by private companies and businesses to impart civil defense information to customers. The wallet card campaign was in partnership with the FCDA in contrast to the later campaigns that were undertaken independently by companies.

<sup>40</sup> "FCDA Produces Variety of Exhibits for Public," *Civil Defense Alert*, August 1952, 2. Federal Civil Defense Administration, *1952 Annual Report*, (Washington: GPO, 1953), 52. Federal Civil Defense Administration, *1953 Annual Report*, (Washington: GPO, 1954), 74.

television backdrops. When displayed as a unit the posters formed a forty-foot narrative about the need for civil defense.<sup>41</sup> The first series, "Alert America," consisted of twelve posters that told the "basic civil defense story."<sup>42</sup> Poster messages included: "Enemy Target no.1- Civilians," "To Win- the enemy must smash our production," "Make no mistake-civilians can be bombed," "150 Million Alert Americans are a mighty force for peace," and "Your vigilance is the price of your freedom." The second series consisted of ten posters focused on the recruitment of volunteers. Each one highlighted a different activity and encouraged Americans to join the important civil defense effort. Jobs listed included post-attack welfare and health service and police and fire rescue. The FCDA reported that they distributed 40,000 sets of the posters.<sup>43</sup> Posters offered a valuable resource for civil defense officials because they were relatively inexpensive to produce and quickly communicated their message. Just as World War II posters called on every American to take part in the war effort through activities like buying war bonds and planting victory gardens, the "Alert America" series of posters called on citizens to become the front-line troops of the Cold War. One poster, "150 Million Alert Americans are a mighty force for peace," told Americans that their participation in civil defense could serve as a deterrent to Soviet attack and prevent World War III. FCDA officials, many of whom came from the World War II Office of War Information, skillfully crafted posters to compel Americans to volunteer for civil defense. These posters clearly invoked the Cold War and contrasted the opportunity of American capitalism with the

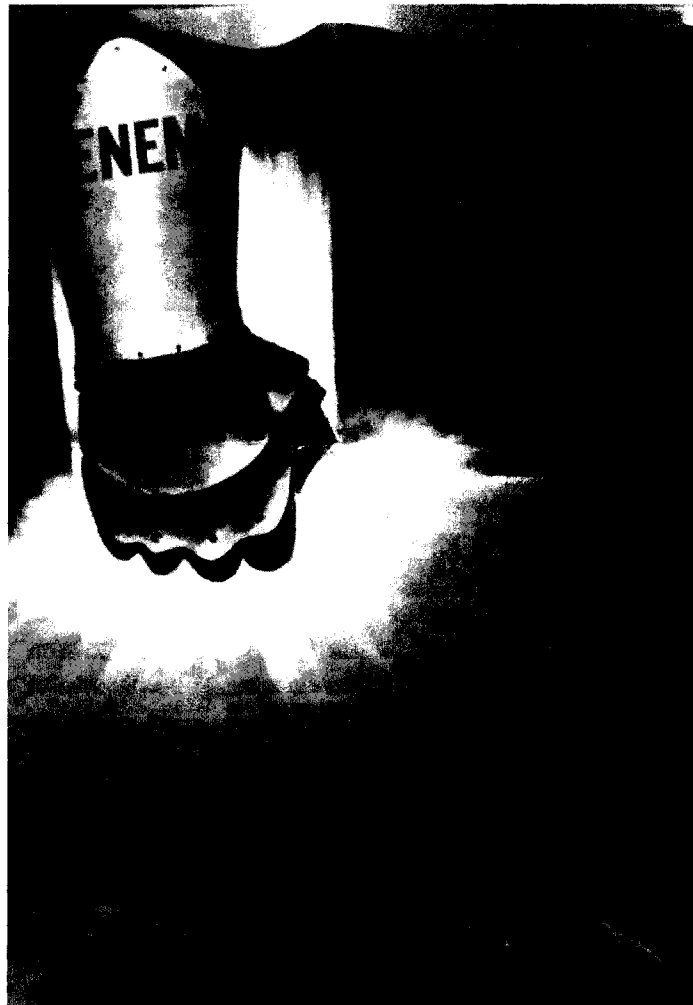
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<sup>41</sup> "FCDA Produces Variety of Exhibits for Public," *Civil Defense Alert*, August 1952, 2.

<sup>42</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, "The Federal Civil Defense Administration presents Signs of Our Times," (Washington: GPO, 1952); Lambie Records; Box 3, Civil Defense - General 1953 (2), DDEL.

<sup>43</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *1952 Annual Report*, (Washington: GPO, 1953), 53.

oppression of Soviet communism. One of the most striking posters, "Enemy Target no. 1- Civilians," showed an iron fist crushing an American town complete with factories and homes. The poster explicitly showed viewers that the home front was no longer safe from enemy attack and that American families must take an active role to ensure a strong America. The other posters in the series carried similar themes. Driving home the message that total war was an imminent possibility, these posters illustrate the real unease of the early Cold War.



**Figure 5- 1952 Poster from the Federal Civil Defense Administration  
Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum**

The FCDA saw popular press magazines as another avenue to reach the public. Officials wrote editorials and other content for the magazines. Bylines for the articles varied; they were sometimes attributed to the FCDA, but also appeared as content generated by the magazine, or as a public service article. One example appeared in 1953 when Val Peterson, then head of the FCDA, wrote an article for *Collier's* magazine, "Panic: The Ultimate Weapon?" Widely read, the FCDA republished it and sent it out from their offices.<sup>44</sup> Other magazines including *Life*, *Newsweek*, *Redbook*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Time*, heeded the call of the FCDA and published positive articles about US civil defense. The FCDA sent out a kit, "The Ever Present Danger," to magazine editors asking them to support the campaign. In a letter accompanying the kit, Acting Administrator Wadsworth of the FCDA claimed, "Civil Defense stands as a co-equal partner with the military defense. If both are sufficiently strong—they can help stave off World War III."<sup>45</sup> The kit included items he hoped editors would "find it possible to use" in "many future issues" including "quotable quotes" on civil defense from military and political leaders, suggested editorials, fillers, slogans, and a fact sheet on the program.<sup>46</sup> The position of the FCDA expressed in the kit, that civil defense stood as a co-equal partner to military defense, failed to take hold in mainstream media, but editors did regularly publish features extolling readers to volunteer for civil defense and prepare their homes and families. The distribution of "The Ever Present Danger" and the

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<sup>44</sup> Val Peterson, "Panic, the Ultimate Weapon?" *Collier's*, August 21, 1953, 99; "'Panic' Article Available as Booklet," *For Your Information*, newsletter of the FCDA, December 28, 1953.

<sup>45</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, "The Ever Present Danger: A Magazine Program for the Self-Protection of the American People through Civil Defense," Lambie Records; Box 3, Civil Defense - General 1953 (2), DDEL.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.



willingness of magazine publishers to devote space to the message that with preparation an atomic bomb could be survived helped to inject civil defense as part of postwar American discourse in a way that pamphlets from the local or national civil defense office could not.

The FCDA recognized the power of television in reaching Americans as television ownership increased dramatically in the 1950s. The FCDA distributed footage from atomic bomb tests at the Nevada Test Site to further the message of self-help as the key to survival.<sup>47</sup> The Advertising Council sponsored live coverage of the 1953 test program “to alert citizens to the need for civilian defense activities, the donation of blood for civilian emergency stockpiles and stimulation of the Ground Observer Corps.”<sup>48</sup> The FCDA applauded the live coverage because it “brought home to millions of Americans not only the tremendous destructive force of an atomic blast, but also offered visual proof that a family can survive by taking simple precautions.”<sup>49</sup> In addition to the live footage, the FCDA collaborated with film production companies to distribute films summarizing the test program.<sup>50</sup> The FCDA cooperated with “private industry, foundations, and trade associations in the production of sponsored public service films on civil defense.”<sup>51</sup> These sponsored films followed the “cooperative promotion” model of the FCDA and furthered the association between official civil defense efforts and the marketplace. The FCDA provided educational films about civil defense to television stations. One such

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<sup>47</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *1953 Annual Report*, (Washington: GPO, 1954), 70 and 74.

<sup>48</sup> Advertising Council, *Annual Report, 1952-53*, (New York: Advertising Council, 1953), 6.

<sup>49</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *1953 Annual Report*, (Washington: GPO, 1954), 74.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

program, "Survival," by the FCDA played to an estimated 12 million viewers in 1951.<sup>52</sup> Television stations also ran one-minute promotional spots for civil defense that featured celebrities such as Lucille Ball, George Burns, and Jack Benny.<sup>53</sup> Civil defense planners used television in order to infiltrate American homes with the message of survival. This emphasis on television dovetailed with "the installation [of television] into domestic space in the years following World War II."<sup>54</sup> Television producers and civil defense policymakers largely imagined the same audience for their productions: the suburban, white middle class. Reflecting planner's assumption that the suburban middle class was their primary audience for public education, they linked preparedness with two other important trends of the era, consumption and togetherness, through television.

While the FCDA devoted significant attention to magazine and television, they also developed content for use on the radio. Radio material primarily consisted of brief spots educating Americans about the need for civil defense. The ABC radio network aired weekly spots on civil defense awareness.<sup>55</sup> Radio stations carried advertisements promoting the program voiced by stars such as Bing Crosby, Amos and Andy, and Art Linkletter.<sup>56</sup> The FCDA, through the Ad Council, provided stations a "Radio Fact Sheet" with talking points on the civil defense program and directions to "indicate that an air

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<sup>52</sup> An ad promoting the program was sent to stations across the country asking them to book the program "Civil Defense Offers Survival," Quick Files; Box 6, Civil Defense Campaign - General (1), HSTL. See also Paul Boyer's discussion of the program Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 325.

<sup>53</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *1955 Annual Report*, (Washington: GPO, 1956), 78.

<sup>54</sup> Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1.

<sup>55</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *1953 Annual Report*, (Washington: GPO, 1956), 71.

<sup>56</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *1955 Annual Report*, (Washington: GPO, 1956), 76.

attack can be survived” and a caution to avoid “scare copy.”<sup>57</sup> In the mid-1950s, the FCDA’s interest in radio shifted into the implementation of the CONELRAD emergency broadcast system.

FCDA-issued publications as well as the cooperative campaigns in magazines, radio, and television all carried the same underlying message that an atomic attack could be survived through family-based preparation. The survival of American families was identified as victory for the United States in the Cold War. The slogan of the FCDA, “Survive, Recover, and Win,” implied that the administration was concerned with both survival and recovery, but the majority of public information campaigns focused solely on survival as the key to victory. The FCDA, by framing civil defense as an individual effort, helped connect the Cold War to everyday American domestic experiences like shopping, house cleaning, and food preparation. The optimistic message of the FCDA lived on beyond the pages of their booklets as the emphasis on self-help and the family informed discussions about survival until 1963.

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<sup>57</sup> Radio Fact Sheet, no. 54, Advertising Council; Lambie Records; Box 3, Civil Defense – General 1953 (1), Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library (DDEL).

## CHAPTER 3

### A TOUGH SELL: THE ADVERTISING COUNCIL AND CIVIL DEFENSE

Just months after its establishment as an independent agency, the Federal Civil Defense Administration contracted with the Advertising Council to promote their cause. The partnership was fraught with tension and the campaign never reached the prominence of some of the Ad Council's other public service efforts. Examining the relationship between the FCDA, the Ad Council, and the executive branch reveals several tensions that determined the nature of civil defense promotion in the 1950s. A close reading of the advertisements created by the Ad Council exposed many of the beliefs planners held about civil defense, including who the perceived constituents for preparedness were and what survival and victory would look like for the United States.

The history of the Advertising Council and civil defense has two important strains: the relationship between the FCDA and the Ad Council and the evolution of the campaigns developed by the Ad Council. The working relationship between the Ad Council and the FCDA was tense from the beginning of their partnership. The involvement of the White House public affairs division further strained the relationship. The tension originated from a fundamental disagreement about how the civil defense campaign should best be sold to the American public. The Advertising Council argued for a campaign that called for concrete action based on their expert knowledge of

advertising theory. The FCDA wanted a campaign that increased awareness of civil defense and enhanced the reputation of civil defense workers and volunteers. Both the FCDA and the Ad Council saw these two approaches as fundamentally incompatible. Executives at the Ad Council took offense at the FCDA's insistence that they knew better how to sell preparedness. The second strain, the content of the Advertising Council campaigns for civil defense, illustrates a number of important themes that were used in selling survival. Close reading of the advertisements show how the Ad Council and the FCDA conceptualized civil defense as the ads consistently relied on anti-communist sentiment and images of home and family to stimulate interest in preparedness. While the partnership between the Ad Council and the FCDA lasted only five years, it influenced later efforts by private groups to promote civil defense. The difficulties in their relationship also reveal important debates that took place outside of the public eye about the meaning of civil defense in postwar America.

Formed originally in 1941, the Advertising Council worked with the Office of War Information during World War II to create advertisements for rationing, war bonds, victory gardens, and other domestic programs meant to support the war effort. After the American victory in World War II, the Council remained a force in American culture and politics and created campaigns focused on American victory in the Cold War.<sup>58</sup> Leaders of the Council summed up their feelings on their role in post-World War II America by

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<sup>58</sup> Secondary literature on the Advertising Council is surprisingly lacking. The main scholarship on the Ad Council is: Robert Griffith, "The Selling of America: The Advertising Council and American Politics, 1942-1960," *Business History Review*, 57, No. 3 (1983), 388-412; Robert Jackall and Janice M. Hirota, *The Image Makers: Advertising, Public Relations, and the Ethos of Advocacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Daniel Lykins, *From Total War to Total Diplomacy: The Advertising Council and the Construction of the Cold War Consensus* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003); and Robert H. Zieger, "The Paradox of Plenty: The Advertising Council and the Post-Sputnik Crisis," *Advertising and Society Review* 4:1 (2003).

saying, “The war never stopped. Only the enemy has changed.”<sup>59</sup> Their *1950-51 Annual Report* traced the history of the Ad Council’s as dealing with the problems of “war, peace, and semi-war.”<sup>60</sup> This quote shows the important arc of the Ad Council over these years as they moved from their origin during World War II, to a focus on reconversion during the peace between 1945 and 1950, and finally their view that once again they were engaged in a semi-war with their involvement in domestic campaigns related to the Cold War. Over the course of the 1950s, the Advertising Council developed many new public service campaigns. The Ad Council’s main energies in the first years of the 1950s focused on the related campaigns of promoting free enterprise and educating Americans about the Cold War.<sup>61</sup>

“Deeply aware of the serious injury a surprise enemy attack could do to our national strength and ability,” FCDA officials asked the Advertising Council to take on the cause of civil defense in 1951.<sup>62</sup> The Council agreed and assigned the campaign to the advertising firm of Batten, Barton, Durstine, and Osborn (BBD&O), with Edward Gerbic of Johnson and Johnson as the volunteer coordinator.<sup>63</sup> The staff of the Advertising Council functioned as a go-between for the FCDA, the White House Public Affairs Office, and the advertising executives who actually designed the campaign materials. Advertising Council staff constantly had to mediate between the different

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<sup>59</sup> “Matters of Choice,” 10. From [www.adcouncil.org](http://www.adcouncil.org), last accessed 7-May-07.

<sup>60</sup> Advertising Council, *Annual Report, 1950-51*, (New York: Advertising Council, 1951), 3.

<sup>61</sup> “Matters of Choice,” 41. Some of the main campaigns in the early 1950s were care packages to European countries ravaged in World War II, blood drives, get out the vote, blood drives, and brotherhood. See also, “Ad Council Where it Came In,” *Business Week*, October 11, 1952, 136-8.

<sup>62</sup> Advertising Council, *Annual Report, 1951-52*, (New York: Advertising Council, 1952), 24.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. Batten, Barton, Durstine, and Osborn (BBD&O) founded in early part of the twentieth century became one of the most important advertising agencies, pioneering campaigns for such large companies as Ford and Pepsi.

interests of the White House Public Affairs Office and the FCDA, and nearly always took the side of the executive branch. For example, they reduced size of the campaigns despite regular pleading by the FCDA for larger campaigns in order to appease the desires of the White House. The constant compromise led to campaigns for civil defense that were dramatically smaller in scope and content than imagined by the FCDA.

The relationship between the FCDA and the Advertising Council got off to a rocky start. A memorandum about a meeting on April 24, 1951 referred to the attitude of the FCDA's public affair director, Jack DeChant, as "antagonistic."<sup>64</sup> This tension contributed to delays in communication and misunderstandings throughout the next five years of their partnership. Though the relationship was not helped by personality conflicts between FCDA officials and Ad Council staff, the real source of the tension was more the fundamental difference in opinions on the best way to market civil defense. The Advertising Council's position reflected the larger American skepticism toward civil defense. Further, the failure of both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations to embrace fully the cause of civil defense left the FCDA to scramble for funding throughout the 1950s. Ad Council executives recognized that without support of the White House, the FCDA could not possibly attain the level of prestige FCDA officials wanted. These difficulties led to a strained relationship between the two groups. Correspondence between the Ad Council, the FCDA, and the White House address much of this tension and reveal the ways it limited the possibilities for a continued relationship between the two groups.

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<sup>64</sup> Allan Wilson to Charles Jackson, August 14, 1951; Quick Files; Box 6, Civil Defense Campaign- Correspondence, 1951-53, HSTL.

While neither President Truman nor Eisenhower took an interest in fully funding civil defense, both administrations' public affairs divisions took an interest in the public materials distributed by the FCDA. Their interest repeatedly interfered with the aims of the FCDA. Charles Jackson of the White House Public Affairs Office killed the FCDA's dream for a large campaign based on his belief that advertising was most effective when it demanded concrete action from the reader such as buying a particular product. He went on to tell the FCDA that they could not recommend a campaign "which has as its sole objective 'alert America'." We have to suggest something for the reader to do."<sup>65</sup> The opposing positions of the FCDA and the White House Public Affairs Office point to two very different understanding of what the nature of civil defense ought to be during the early 1950s. Just as the FCDA constantly struggled to stay afloat with its paltry budget, the lack of support from the White House Public Affairs Office shows just how little faith the Executive branch placed in civil defense during the first half of the decade.

In addition to the differing opinions about the appropriate scope of the civil defense campaign, the Ad Council and FCDA debated the most effective forms of advertisements. Composed of members from some of the biggest advertising agencies in America, the Ad Council had a clear idea of what made advertisements compelling. The FCDA also had determined what types of advertisements they deemed most effective at selling civil defense and desired a large campaign focused on increasing awareness about preparedness efforts. FCDA officials viewed the reluctance of the Advertising Council to embark on a large prestige campaign for civil defense as a personal rebuff, when it more accurately reflected a difference in ideology about effective advertising.

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<sup>65</sup> Memorandum Charles Jackson to James M. Lambie, April 15, 1953; Lambie Records; Box 3, CD Civil Defense - Campaign - Correspondence 1953 (1), DDEL.



Once the Ad Council, the FCDA, and the White House Public Affairs Office came to a compromise about the best form and scale for the civil defense campaign, a new conflict emerged about the actual content of the advertisements. The Advertising Council rejected the optimism of the FCDA's public information campaign and saw civil defense as a grim reality of the Atomic Age. FCDA officials conversely believed that the cause of civil defense ought to be one of long-term importance, independent of the international climate. J.M. Chambers of the FCDA public affairs office wrote to Allan Wilson of the Ad Council about the way civil defense ought to be promoted. He said, "If, instead of keeping people in a perpetual state of alert, we try to sell civil defense on a calm, long-range, common sense basis, we must convince people that what the nation should strive for is not merely to build a military machine but to achieve total national security."<sup>66</sup> The Ad Council did not believe that their efforts could aid in building long-term support for the cause. Ed Gerbic, the coordinator of the campaign, argued that there was little that could be done through the Ad Council to help the FCDA or enhance the reputation of civil defense workers.<sup>67</sup> The White House agreed with the Advertising Council's stance that they could do little to aid the cause and encouraged the FCDA to seek partnerships with those who sold civil defense products to help in that endeavor.<sup>68</sup> The Ad Council and the FCDA could not compromise their difference on the content of the campaign and it led to a limited effort by the Ad Council on behalf of civil defense.

Understanding the conflict between the FCDA, the Truman and Eisenhower

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<sup>66</sup> J.M. Chambers to Allan Wilson, February 27, 1953; Lambie Records; Box 3, Civil Defense - General 1953 (1), DDEL.

<sup>67</sup> Memorandum for Charles Jackson on March 2, 1953 meeting between FCDA/AC, March 4, 1953; Lambie Records; Box 3, Civil Defense - General 1953 (1), DDEL.

<sup>68</sup> Memorandum Charles Jackson to James M. Lambie, April 15, 1953; Lambie Records; Box 3, Civil Defense - Campaign - Correspondence 1953 (1), DDEL.

administrations, and the Ad Council provides important background to the campaigns that were mounted on behalf of civil defense. These campaigns, despite the behind-the-scenes fighting, consciously made a case for preparedness that relied on an implicit, and in some cases explicit, connection between civil defense and good citizenship.

Despite the squabbling between the Ad Council and the FCDA, BBD&O moved quickly on creating a campaign for civil defense once the two agencies reached a compromise. This first campaign centered on volunteer recruitment. FCDA officials thought of it as the beginning saying, "It will have to be followed—or rather, dovetail into—a long-range campaign to sell civil defense as a permanent part of community planning, of which advertising admittedly could not be expected to carry the full load."<sup>69</sup> While the FCDA saw the recruitment campaign as only a start, the Ad Council and the White House Public Affairs Office viewed it as a sufficient effort to educate people about the need for civil defense. Civil defense officials asked the Ad Council and White House for support for a larger, more prestigious campaign over the next three years, but were denied each time. The desire of civil defense planners to create a much larger campaign partly represented their mandate to educate the public, but also points to a very different conception of civil defense than that of the White House and Congress. The FCDA conceived of civil defense as an ongoing effort, independent of larger political issues. This view failed to take hold outside the FCDA as the Advertising Council's limited interest in the cause suggests.

The Volunteer Recruitment campaign went live shortly after its creation by BBD&O. Radio spots for civil defense aired between April-July of 1951 on programs

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<sup>69</sup> Memorandum of meeting between FCDA public affairs and Advertising Council: "Preliminary run-through of BBD&O materials," May 29, 1951; Quick Files; Box 2, Civil Defense Program, HSTL.

such as Boxing Bouts, Rogue's Gallery, and the Gene Autry show with such sponsors as General Mills, Gillette Safety Razor, and Proctor and Gamble among other companies.<sup>70</sup> The development of these public service ads established a link between preparedness education and the marketplace that remained throughout the decade. Even once the Advertising Council severed ties with the FCDA, companies continued to provide space to educate the public about survival. Radio allocations for the campaign ended abruptly, however, when Ad Council executives, frustrated with the slow movement of the FCDA on approving the newspaper mat portion of the recruitment campaign debated the effectiveness of the radio spots.<sup>71</sup> The end of the Ad Council radio program, due largely to the frustration of the Ad Council with the FCDA, reveals the way that the inter-agency tension hindered the civil defense campaign.

The momentum of the campaign was further crippled when the Ad Council denied requests for car cards for the civil defense campaign. Car cards, printed posters usually eleven by twenty-eight inches, were placed on busses, trains, and other modes of public transportation.<sup>72</sup> Both public service and commercial advertisers used car cards to reach the public. Ed Gerbic, the volunteer coordinator for the campaign, wrote to Charles Jackson of the White House Public Affairs Office that the civil defense campaign had been discouraging and further quashed the FCDA's hopes for a larger campaign saying, "We feel certain that a national prestige campaign or a campaign designed to sell Civil Defense as an established way of life would have little or no chance for support by the industries and organizations that would have to finance the ads, in view of the present

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Advertising Council, "Report of Civil Defense Campaign for 1951," Jan. 15, 1952; Lambie Records; Box 52, Advertising Council - Government Campaigns, DDEL.

<sup>72</sup> Edward J. Rowse, *Fundamentals of Advertising* (Cincinnati: Southwestern, 1950), 265.

national climate.”<sup>73</sup> The Ad Council explicitly rejected the notion of the FCDA that civil defense ought to be an ongoing part of life for the United States and instead focused their efforts on campaigns they felt were more relevant to the current political climate. The campaigns of the Ad Council changed swiftly to reflect changing times and rarely did campaigns continue beyond a few-year span.<sup>74</sup>

Following the distribution of the Volunteer Recruitment kit, The FCDA requested that the Advertising Council create a more prominent campaign for civil defense awareness. So-called “prestige campaigns” were used mainly to boost the reputation of a cause or an organization.<sup>75</sup> A prestige campaign would enhance the reputation of civil defense volunteers and workers and would take place on a much larger scale than the recruitment campaign. In November of 1951, the Advertising Council rejected the idea saying that a prestige campaign’s “Pollyanna-like character that did not befit the seriousness, not to say the grimness, of FCDA’s responsibilities.”<sup>76</sup> Rebuffs such as these went against the FCDA’s own message civil defense ought to be a national priority no matter the international climate and certainly against the measured optimism of their own materials. At the end of 1951, the Advertising Council recommended that the civil defense campaign be held in abeyance and focused their efforts on other campaigns such as Better Schools, American Economic System, Student Nurse Recruitment, and Prevent

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<sup>73</sup> Edward Gerbic to Charles W. Jackson, August 3, 1951; Quick Files; Box 2, Civil Defense Program, HSTL.

<sup>74</sup> Well-known campaigns such as Prevent Forest Fires and the American Red Cross are exceptions to this rule. Most Ad Council campaigns lasted for only three years.

<sup>75</sup> The main prestige campaigns the Ad Council took on were for the various branches of the armed forces. Quick Files; Box 1, Armed Forces - Prestige Campaign - Infantry, 1951; Armed Forces - Prestige Campaign - WAC 1951, HSTL.

<sup>76</sup> Memorandum of meeting of Advertising Council and BBD&O, Nov. 6, 1951; Quick Files; Box 2, Civil Defense Program, HSTL.

Forest Fires.<sup>77</sup> The Civil Defense campaign continued on hold throughout 1952 as the Ad Council questioned the need for the campaign, "it is in sort of a limbo until a real need for the Council's aid reveals itself."<sup>78</sup>

During the break in the civil defense campaign, FCDA officials continued to squabble with the Ad Council about how the concept of civil defense could best be sold to the American public. Henry Wehde from the Ad Council countered the FCDA's claims by saying that that they understood the importance of civil defense "but in light of what is good and effective advertising it was felt that the Council could produce, from the standpoint of results and sponsorship, the most success on those programs which urge concrete and simple actions rather than on those which have as their sole objective the changing of public conceptions."<sup>79</sup> Wehde went on to say, "Thus it is our considered opinion that although advertisements could most certainly be prepared to stress to the consumer and business executive the importance and significance of Civil Defense. Such an 'understanding' campaign would not attract widespread sponsorship and not produce appreciable results."<sup>80</sup> He concluded his letter by saying that the campaign for civil defense ought only to be reactivated by the Council when the legislative and executive branches "will lead the way into arousing public interest and confidence in Civil Defense and when the FCDA can suggest simple and concise actions that advertising can urge

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<sup>77</sup> Advertising Council, "Report of Civil Defense Campaign for 1951," Jan. 15, 1952; Lambie Records; Box 52, Advertising Council - Government Campaigns, DDEL; Advertising Council, "Mobilization-Public Interest Campaigns," October 1951; Files of Charles W. Jackson (Jackson Files); Box 16, Advertising Council Publications and General, HSTL.

<sup>78</sup> Allan Wilson to Charles Jackson, Feb. 6, 1952; Quick Files; Box 6, Civil Defense Campaign-Correspondence, 1951-53, HSTL.

<sup>79</sup> Henry Wehde to Spencer Quick, July 31, 1952; Quick Files; Box 6, Civil Defense Campaign-Industrial, HSTL. Most revealing are the comments handwritten on the letter, several points are underlined with NUTS written next to them.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

upon the individual.”<sup>81</sup> Wehde’s lengthy letter summarized the position of the Advertising Council. While the FCDA took offense at the Ad Council’s position, the concerns of the Council executives more accurately reflected the apathy of the American public at the time to the concept of civil defense.

After realizing the limits of the Ad Council’s interest in their cause, the FCDA embraced the Volunteer Recruitment kit. The main portion of the kit consisted of a newspaper mat campaign. A letter that accompanied the kit claimed, “recruiting is a job for advertising and publicity.”<sup>82</sup> The bulk of the kit consisted of ads to be used in newspapers and periodicals. The campaign stalled out, however, because, according to Henry Wehde of the Ad Council, “1952 was an election year and hence the policy of the federal government in regard to Civil Defense was somewhat fluid, it was the decision of the Council’s task force with the full realization of the importance of this program, to defer action until the situation stabilized.”<sup>83</sup>

The contention surrounding the design of the Volunteer Recruitment Kit set the terms for the civil defense campaign. While such tension certainly colored the form of the campaign, the real importance of the campaign is in the messages the advertisements set forth. The main goal of the campaign was recruitment of volunteers, but the ads had other aims as well. The ads all contained blatant anti-communist, pro-democracy imagery. They also depicted a remarkably homogenous America, consisting solely of white, middle-class, suburban Americans. The ads included in the packet provide

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Advertising Council, *Civil Defense Volunteer Recruiting Kit*, Federal Civil Defense Administration,” Record Series 13/02/207, File #576, Advertising Council Archives, University of Illinois Archives.

<sup>83</sup> Advertising Council, *Annual Report, 1952-53*, (New York: Advertising Council, 1953), 18.

significant insight into the way civil defense officials imagined its constituency in the early years of the Cold War. The underlying theme of each of the ads is an implicit, and in some cases, explicit, connection between civil defense and good citizenship. For example, a number of ads included authority figures from the military with statements about the importance of preparation. Other ads used images of servicemen to promote the importance of home front preparedness. The main theme in the volunteer packet is that civil defense ought to be carried out by individuals and their families, at home, and that survival was possible with moderate preparation in case of an atomic attack. Most importantly, the fate of America rested squarely on the shoulders of individual Americans in all of the ads.

One of the ads included in the kit embodies a number of these themes. The ad used images of three white, middle-class couples. The first image featured a sullen couple, accompanied by the text, "Pessimists say, "What's the use?" The second image is of a smiling couple, the optimists, who say, "What's the Rush?" The third, and largest, image on the page is of a man reading the newspaper, with his smiling wife beside him. Underneath their picture the ad read, "Good citizens say, "How can we help?" The ad played out many of themes of civil defense during the early years of the Cold War. Preparedness was identified as an effort to be taken by yourself at home with your family. A portion of the text read, "The difference between preparedness and unpreparedness could mean survival... for you, your family, your city... yes, even survival for America."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Advertising Council, *Civil Defense Volunteer Recruiting Kit*, Federal Civil Defense Administration," Record Series 13/02/207, File #576, Advertising Council Archives, University of Illinois Archives.

This advertisement neatly shows the ways in which the FCDA imagined its constituency and the ways the message of civil defense focused on the home as a crucial site of defense. All three couples appear to be middle-class and squarely fit into the homogeneous world of civil defense. The youngest couple, the optimists, appears as though they have yet to learn important lessons. Both the pessimists and good citizens are middle-aged, but the good citizens are affluent and fashionable. The husband is reading the newspaper, suggesting he stays well informed. The imagery of the ad, with the three couples in their own living rooms graphically reinforced the message that the home front is the first line of defense in the Cold War. The good citizens pictured in front of their fireplace embody the best of America; they are educated, successful, and realistic.

Pessimists say, "WHAT'S THE USE?"

Optimists say, "WHAT'S THE RUSH?"

Good citizens say, "HOW CAN WE HELP?"

**VOLUNTEER FOR CIVIL DEFENSE TODAY!**

SPONSORED AS A PUBLIC SERVICE BY  
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Figure 6- Civil Defense Volunteer Recruitment Kit, 1951



Several ads in the Recruitment Kit used images of women and family to showcase the pressing need for civil defense awareness to defend America. Ads meant to appeal specifically to women, however, offer a more complicated picture of the relationship of women to the broader civil defense program than identified by scholarship.<sup>85</sup> One ad featured a large image of a married woman in a business suit wearing a civil defense armband. The woman appears confident and serious. The text says, "There's an important job for every woman in civil defense." Underneath the larger text are a series of questions including, "Can you drive a car? Run an office? Cook?" The ad then goes on to encourage women to donate time to local civil defense efforts. Beneath the large image of the woman, six smaller images recreate possible scenarios for civil defense volunteers. The jobs represented are warden, nurse, welfare service, drivers, office staff, and communications service.

This ad presents a more complicated relationship between women and civil defense in the early years of the Cold War than allowed for in existing scholarship. The ad differs from traditional accounts because while it appeals to women's maternal instincts, it allows women flexibility in their roles as wives and mothers to become invaluable members of the recovery effort. It also recalls many of the important jobs women took as paid labor during World War II. These images, rather than simply marrying maternalism and the militarization of American society, created additional opportunities for women in civil defense outside of childcare or nursing. Women, according to this ad, are useful to civil defense because they are rational human beings,

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<sup>85</sup> The advertisement offers an important complication to the argument of domestic containment set forth by Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988). May sees postwar culture using the Cold War and civil defense to define narrow roles for women as mothers.

not because of any innate feminine capability. While other ads certainly used images of family to stress the need for adequate defense, they largely included both men and women, suggesting that instead of a campaign to enlist mothers, civil defense was more broadly a campaign to enlist families.

## There's an important job for every woman in Civil Defense

Can you drive a car? Run an office? Cook? Operate a telephone switchboard? Type? Take temperatures?

If you can do any of these things, or a thousand others, there's a job for you that may help save lives. A volunteer job in our town's Civil Defense. Many jobs take only a few hours a week. Plan to give as many hours a week as you can.

Civil Defense can cut A-bomb fatalities in half! This is the statement of scientists who have studied the effects of the bomb at Hiroshima, and Nagasaki.

You can help save lives by volunteering for a job in Civil Defense. Come to your local Civil Defense office today. You'll be taking a proud part in a great team.



**WORKING.** Housewives make good workers. They know their own homes. They're good leaders. Good leaders. Working Civil Defense is a big part of a woman's job today.



**HEALTH SERVICE.** Women are natural nurses. They're good at taking temperatures, hospital work, laboratory helpers and nurses will be needed if atomic war comes.



**WELFARE SERVICE.** A woman knows best how to feed the hungry, to shelter and comfort the homeless. Women will be sorely needed if the atomic bomb falls.



**TRANSPORTATION SERVICE.** You won't leave your car at home. Women drivers should first aid courses. Emergency service. C. V. drivers are the valuable women in automobiles and emergency services.



**MAIL SERVICE.** Civil Defense needs women to help parents, with letters, and help the whole nation work even of Civil Defense (see something).



**COMMUNICATION SERVICE.** This is the heart of Civil Defense. Do you have training in radio, television, radio, or telephone work? Sign up right now!

VOLUNTEER FOR



CIVIL DEFENSE TODAY



SPONSORED AS A PUBLIC SERVICE BY  
SPONSOR'S NAME



Figure 7- Civil Defense Volunteer Recruitment Kit, 1951

The relationship between the FCDA and the Ad Council remained icy following the release of the Volunteer Recruitment Kit. In 1952, the Ad Council approved another civil defense campaign consisting solely of promotional materials for the Alert America

convoy.<sup>86</sup> The Alert America convoy traveled the nation in 1952 in an attempt to meet the twin objectives of the FCDA's public education efforts by both educating Americans about the need for civil defense and recruiting volunteers and is discussed in more detail in the next chapter. The Advertising Council devoted their resources to other campaigns such as "American Economic System," "Armed Forces Blood Program," "Prevent Forest Fires," "US Defense Bonds," and "American Heritage."<sup>87</sup> All of these campaigns spread important messages about America and used the language of the Cold War to call for domestic action. Most of these campaigns have long since been forgotten, but the way that they flooded the airwaves, billboards, and print media show how a particular image of America was carefully constructed and codified during the postwar period. While the civil defense campaign failed to garner the level of interest of some of other Ad Council campaigns, it too spread important messages about the meaning of America and the Cold War.

In 1953, the tensions between the Advertising Council and the FCDA lessened when the incoming Eisenhower administration replaced Jack DeChant as the FCDA Public Affair director.<sup>88</sup> The aims of the civil defense campaign also changed as it moved away from volunteer recruitment and focused on first aid readiness for American homes and industry.<sup>89</sup> This change is important as it moved the emphasis from direct action, through volunteering, to a more passive form of preparedness focused in one's

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<sup>86</sup> Advertising Council, "Report of Civil Defense Campaign for 1951," Jan. 15, 1952; Lambie Records; Box 52, Advertising Council - Government Campaigns, DDEL.

<sup>87</sup> Advertising Council, "Mobilization-Public Interest Campaigns," May 1952; Jackson Files; Box 15, Advertising Council- Monthly Summaries of Activities [3 of 3- November 1949-May 1952], HSTL.

<sup>88</sup> Status Report- July 1952-January 1953, Government Public Service Campaigns, Federal Civil Defense Administration, Lambie Records; Box 3, Civil Defense - Campaign - Correspondence 1953 (2), DDEL.

<sup>89</sup> Advertising Council, *Annual Report, 1953-54*, (New York: Advertising Council, 1954), 18.

own home. It also reflected in a broader downturn in the national discussion of civil defense. BBD&O developed two newspaper kits to support the new campaign, *A Campaign to Save Lives if Disaster Strikes: Here's A Kit That Will Help You Protect The People of Your Community* and *A Campaign to Save Lives if Disaster Strikes: Here's a Kit that Will Help Business and Industry Prepare for Disaster*.<sup>90</sup> The two new campaigns did little to impart to Americans the crucial need for civil defense because of the threat of atomic war, and instead framed civil defense as a more general policy of preparedness for whatever disaster may come.

The new campaigns for civil defense were far different from the prestigious campaign originally called for by the FCDA. The reactivation of the civil defense campaign focused on basic first aid and the maintenance of a well-stocked medicine cabinet with checklists of products needed to insure survival. Much to the disappointment of the FCDA, the Ad Council conceived the campaign as one on a local level with local sponsors, lacking the prestige of other Ad Council campaigns.<sup>91</sup> The First Aid kit began with letter to advertisers from Val Peterson that included a quote from President Eisenhower that emphasized self-help as the first step of survival saying, "The first of these home exercises is perhaps the simplest and most necessary – having adequate first aid supplies on hand and knowing how to use them through a free Red

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<sup>90</sup> Advertising Council, *A Campaign to Save Lives if Disaster Strikes: Here's a Kit that will help you protect the people of your community* and *A Campaign to Save Lives if Disaster Strikes: Here's a Kit that will help Business and Industry Prepare for Disaster*, Record Series 13/02/207, File #671, Advertising Council Archives, University of Illinois Archives.

<sup>91</sup> Advertising Council, "Call Report," May 1, 1953; Lambie Records; Box 3, Civil Defense – General 1953 (2), DDEL.

Cross first aid course.”<sup>92</sup> Another letter in the kit from Ed Gerbic called on advertisers to support the campaign saying, “Public apathy and indecision about civil defense is a serious gap in America’s defense. They not only tempt an enemy to attack, but would also increase the possibility that such an attack on our population and industrial might would be devastating and decisive. A weak civil defense could lose us the peace... it would lose us a war.”<sup>93</sup> One of the most striking ads centered on a drawing of a pencil. Beneath the pencil the text read, “This pencil may save your life.” On the bottom, it included a checklist of products including bandages, antiseptic, and water purification tablets.<sup>94</sup> In addition to the newspaper kit, the Advertising Council made the booklet, *Emergency Action to Save Lives* available over drugstore counters.<sup>95</sup> The book carried a note on its back cover granting permission to any “responsible organization, institution, individual, or concern which wishes to republish it for free distribution, legitimate promotional purposes, or for sale.”<sup>96</sup> The first-aid campaign relied heavily on sponsorships of companies that produced the items called for on the checklist. This campaign, for the first time, explicitly made a connection between manufacturers and civil defense education. This connection caused anxiety within the FCDA, as they debated whether or not to list medications by their brand names or their generic scientific names, fearing the brand name would be seen as an endorsement of the product. The FCDA decided to use the generic names much to the displeasure of storeowners who

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<sup>92</sup> Advertising Council, “A Campaign To Save Lives If Disaster Strikes: Here’s A Kit That Will Help You Protect The People Of Your Community” (Washington: GPO, 1953); Lambie Records; Box 12, Civil Defense - General 1958, DDEL.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Advertising Council, *Annual Report, 1953-54*, (New York: Advertising Council, 1954), 18.

<sup>96</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *Emergency Action to Save Lives*, (Washington: GPO, 1951).

claimed difficulty in assisting customers in finding the products. While earlier public service advertisements for civil defense appeared on donated space mainly in newspapers or radio programs, they were not linked to a particular company or manufacturer that had a monetary interest in preparedness. With the first aid campaign, the Ad Council and the FCDA made deals with companies that had a financial interest in the purchase of these products. This relationship set the stage for later informational campaigns sponsored by business and corporations that occurred outside the purview of the FCDA, but sought to educate the public, partially to gain goodwill but also to inspire the purchase of their product.

The move by the FCDA to an industrial campaign offered an important revision of earlier campaigns that emphasized self-protection in the home. The campaign for business and industry focused on the protection of America's vital industries and their employees. The kit contained advertisements aimed at executives and stressed the need for disaster planning.<sup>97</sup> Nearly all the advertisements featured businessmen, ignorant to the threat of atomic attack. It connected America's ongoing prosperity with industry. It urged preparation by companies so that they could reopen soon after attack and their contribution to America's war effort.

By the mid-1950s, a new understanding of fallout altered civil defense policy and the FCDA realized the challenges inherent in promoting the new preparedness plans. Policymakers recognized evacuation of targeted cities as the best form of civil defense, but quickly realized that such a radical plan would have to be sold to the American

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<sup>97</sup> Advertising Council, *A Campaign to Save Lives if Disaster Strikes: Here's A Kit That Will Help You Protect The People Of Your Community*, (Washington: GPO, 1953); Lambie Records; Box 3, Civil Defense - General 1953 (3), DDEL.

public.<sup>98</sup> Even the FCDA conceded that it would be a tough sell because patterns of fallout and evacuation routes would make standardized directions impossible.<sup>99</sup> The Ad Council concurred and, for the first time, the two agencies agreed on the direction of a new campaign with materials focused on a “broad scale, national program, the purpose of which would be to win public understanding of the threats we face and the defense against them- and public participation in tests of evacuation and other tactics which offer our best chance of survival if attack comes.”<sup>100</sup> While the Ad Council and the FCDA agreed on the goal of the campaign, the actual campaign produced by the Ad Council tempered the idea somewhat and focused solely on the implementation of the CONELRAD alert system. CONELRAD was developed in the early 1950s as a comprehensive alert system and outlet for official civil defense instructions. The FCDA saw a need to educate Americans to memorize the CONELRAD frequencies and to seek it out in case of an emergency. While the sudden harmony between the Ad Council and the FCDA initially seems surprising, the change in philosophy for civil defense planning fell more in line with the skills of the Ad Council. With a shift toward evacuation and a recognition that education campaigns would have to be localized, the FCDA was forced to concede that the best campaign would have to aim for simple action. Instead of any kind of large-scale prestige or awareness campaign, the new campaign focused simply on awareness of the CONELRAD alert system.

CONELRAD reused many of the same tropes present in the first large campaign civil defense campaign, the Volunteer Recruitment kit. The packet contained a letter

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<sup>98</sup> Edward B. Lyman to Henry Wehde, October 20, 1954; Lambie Records; Box 12, Civil Defense-Correspondence 1954, DDEL.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

from Val Peterson, the head of the FCDA that held that “a strong America stands as a barrier to aggression. A weak America would invite national suicide.”<sup>101</sup> The campaign had as its aim “to impress on every citizen that if attack threatens he can find out where to go and what to do by tuning in on the emergency frequencies of 640 and 1240 kilocycles.”<sup>102</sup> The kit contained a number of advertisements that linked the CONELRAD broadcast with survival for American families. The most powerful ads featured families coming under surprise attack and an admonishment to remember to turn to the radio in times of emergency.

One of the most visually striking advertisements created for the campaign featured a family sitting around a kitchen table eating breakfast. The family consisted of a father in a business suit, a boy, a girl, and a mother serving breakfast. As the family enjoyed their breakfast, the ad implied that they are vulnerable to an attack. In the lower right hand corner of the image, three planes drop bombs. Beneath the image, the copy read, “If an enemy attacked right now would you know what to do?” The ad contained information about the CONELRAD alert system that would broadcast information in case of attack. In a complete reversal of earlier goals, the ad does not call for any kind of volunteerism in civil defense activities. It simply encouraged readers to write for the civil defense booklet, *Six Steps to Survival*.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Advertising Council, *CONELRAD*, Record Series 13/02/207, File #744, Advertising Council Archives, University of Illinois Archives.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. Interestingly, requests were not made to any administrator or office in particular; rather they were to be addressed simply to “Survival.”





## If an enemy attacked right now would you know what to do?

There's just one thing to remember—and it could save your life and the lives of your family. It is this: GO TO YOUR RADIO and tune in 640 or 1240. These are the two official Civil Defense stations. All others will go off the air. 640 or 1240 will tell you whether enemy planes are heading your way—and give you full instructions about what to do to protect yourself and your family. Mark those two stations—640 and 1240—on your radio dial now.

### In case of an enemy raid, remember these rules:

1. Keep tuned to Civil Defense stations **640** or **1240** on your radio
2. Don't use the telephone. Leave circuits free for Armed Forces, doctors, police and Civil Defense workers who can use phone to help you.

### Disaster may strike when you least expect it. Be prepared.

Write today for free Civil Defense booklet "Six Steps to Survival." Send name and address to "Survival," P. O. D. A., Battle Creek, Michigan.

Presented as a public service by



SPONSOR'S NAME



Civil Defense 640-1240      Copyright  
Newspaper of 1941, 1942 News, Inc. C.D.A.

Figure 8- Advertising Council, CONELRAD, 1955.

This advertisement and others in the kit used images of family to appeal to the emotions of Americans. This ad contained a disconnect between the image and the text. The imagery offered a frightening proposition: that Soviet attack could come at any time, anywhere. The text however offered a surprisingly calm command to remember to tune into the radio. It says, "There's just one thing to remember—and it could save your life and the lives of your family. It is this: GO TO YOUR RADIO and tune in 640 or 1240."<sup>104</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Advertising Council, *Civil Defense Volunteer Recruiting Kit*, Federal Civil Defense Administration," Record Series 13/02/207, File #576, Advertising Council Archives, University of Illinois Archives.

The content of the CONELRAD kit illustrates the trajectory in the relationship between the FCDA and the Ad Council. The move from the Volunteer Recruitment Kit, to First Aid, and eventually to the CONELRAD campaign all represented the FCDA's concessions to the Ad Council's favored type of ads. The FCDA finally recognized the value of ads that urged simple actions. It also marked the last campaign undertaken explicitly for the cause of civil defense by the Ad Council. In 1960, civil defense officials, then housed in the Office of Civil Defense and Management, asked the Advertising Council to create a campaign about the need for fallout shelters. The Council rejected the campaign because it would be an impossible sell, that it "would be an immensely difficult job even in the case of a shooting war. Lacking such an obvious danger, it would be necessary for the highest officials of government to warn solemnly and repeatedly that this must be done."<sup>105</sup> While fallout shelters briefly became an important element of the civil defense program under the Kennedy Administration, the Advertising Council failed to show any interest in the promotion of the new shelter policy.

Tensions between the FCDA and the Ad Council soured their relationship throughout the 1950s. The two groups consistently had different ideas about the best method to promote survival. Even after the Eisenhower administration took office and the personal tensions abated somewhat, Ad Council executives did not hesitate to let their feelings be known about the FCDA's policies. One such incident took place in 1956, when Ad Council executives expressed outrage over the FCDA's new booklet and radio

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<sup>105</sup> Theodore Replier to James M. Lambie, Aug. 15, 1960; Lambie Records; Box 56, Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization 1960, DDEL.

spot for "Four Wheels to Survival."<sup>106</sup> The spot and booklet claimed that the personal automobile could provide shelter in case of an attack and could also be used for evacuation and then as a living space.<sup>107</sup> The Advertising Council's outrage over the pamphlet demonstrates how far apart the FCDA and the Ad Council diverged on the policy of civil defense. Not only did the Ad Council believe that they knew how to sell civil defense most effectively, but they also opposed FCDA policy. This incident illustrates the rejection of the optimism of the FCDA by the Ad Council, a rejection that made their relationship nearly impossible. Although personality conflicts led to some of the tension between the Ad Council and the FCDA, the Ad Council's reluctance to take on the campaigns requested by the FCDA reflected more their knowledge and insight into the American public as advertisers than any vendetta against the FCDA. The Ad Council's position accurately reflected the dominant culture of the time and the apathy of not only the American public, but also the executive branch toward civil defense. Without overwhelming support of public officials, it seems nearly impossible that civil defense could ever reach the level of prestige that its leaders imagined and hoped for the policy.

As short-lived and tense as the relationship between the FCDA and the Ad Council was, it allowed for an institutionalization of civil defense in the marketplace. It set up and encouraged many of the relationships that would continue throughout the 1950s between private companies and local civil defense agencies. The public service campaigns created by the Advertising Council used nuclear, white, suburban families to

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<sup>106</sup> Notes between James Lambie and Harold Rosenberg, October 18, 1956; Lambie Records; Box 27, Civil Defense Administration, Federal - Correspondence 1956, DDEL.

<sup>107</sup> McEnaney, 55.

represent America, effectively eliminating class and ethnic differences. The narrow image of America as conceptualized by the Advertising Council helps show one way that the consensus of the early Cold War was deliberately structured and carefully maintained. These public service campaigns illustrate how the federal government, through the power of advertising, helped frame the national debate about preparedness.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE SHOW YOU'LL NEVER FORGET:

#### THE ALERT AMERICA CONVOY

In 1952, three ten-truck convoys carried the Alert America exhibit to cities across United States with the mission of inspiring interest in civil defense. US Senator Margaret Chase Smith authored an editorial in January of that year urging readers to visit the convoy when it visited their towns. Smith decried the fact that the American people and congress had to be sold “a bill of goods on civilian defense” and compared the exhibit to an advertising campaign writing, the “Alert America convoys are basically nothing more than educational advertising and an attempt to do a selling job to the American people.”<sup>108</sup> Smith’s editorial neatly summed up the imagined role for the convoy, that it would travel the country visiting targeted cities and encourage people to volunteer for the civil defense agency in their hometowns and increase the prominence of the Federal Civil Defense Administration in the eyes of Congress. While the mission of the Alert America campaign was straightforward, the design and content of the exhibit strove to brand civil defense as a fundamental component of the American way of life.

The Alert America Convoy followed in the tracks of the Freedom Train, an exhibit that traveled across the United States after World War II. A number of groups came together to create and sponsor the train, including civic groups, advertisers, mass

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<sup>108</sup> Margaret Chase Smith, “Alert America,” *Oakland Tribune*, January 24, 1952, D48.

media, and the federal government. The Freedom Train encouraged Americans to rededicate themselves to their country and carried in it various historical documents including the Bill of Rights, Constitution, Declaration of Independence, Emancipation Proclamation, and artifacts from World War II including the Iwo Jima flag and surrender documents from Japan and Germany. The train served as the forerunner for the Alert America exhibit and as a “model for those who sought to elevate American patriotism and Cold War consciousness.”<sup>109</sup>

Edward Burdick, the designer behind the 1939 New York’s World Fair and the Freedom Train, designed the Alert America exhibit.<sup>110</sup> The Federal Civil Defense Administration sponsored the exhibit, while donations largely financed its construction and operation. Kenneth Wells of the non-profit Freedoms Foundation oversaw the free exhibit. Crisscrossing the nation, the exhibit distributed information on how to prepare for an atomic attack and peaceable uses of atomic energy. Wells hoped that the Alert America campaign would emphasize that civil defense was an important part of “the free American way of life based as it is on a fundamental belief in God, on constitutional government designed to serve the people, and our indivisible bundle of political and economic rights.”<sup>111</sup> The Alert America exhibit offered an image of civil defense aligned with Cold War patriotism while asserting that atomic weapons could be managed and beat by modest preparation.

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<sup>109</sup> Richard M. Fried, *The Russians are coming! The Russians are Coming! Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold-War America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 28. Fried’s discussion of the planning of the Freedom Train exhibit and the debates that surrounded the selection of artifacts for display shows just how contested meanings of what it meant to be an American in the years immediately following World War II were.

<sup>110</sup> *New York Times*, January 19, 1952, 5.

<sup>111</sup> Kenneth D. Wells, “The Alert America Convoys: Campaign Book.” Kenneth D. Wells Collection; 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Western and Mormon Americana; L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, MSS 1503, Box 3, Folder 2, Book 3. p.3.

The FCDA adopted "Alert America" as the slogan for their public information campaign in 1951 with the goal of informing "the American people of their grave danger and the need for Civil Defense for protection."<sup>112</sup> Two goals guided the public education campaign: first, to inform Americans about the fundamentals of self-protection and second, to enlist Americans as volunteers for civil defense.<sup>113</sup> The FCDA conceived of two major components of the public education campaign, both relying on the cooperation of private industry for their implementation: the Advertising Council's development of public information campaigns and the Alert America convoy.<sup>114</sup> The Alert America convoy aimed to "give a living, visible, dramatic action to the urgent but intangible concept of civil defense."<sup>115</sup> According to official materials, the Alert America exhibit aimed to convince Americans of the reality of the Soviet threat and that "civil defense is every citizen's duty."<sup>116</sup> It also had the ambitious goal of enlisting fifteen million volunteers for civil defense.<sup>117</sup> The Alert America exhibit functioned as one part of massive public information campaign by the FCDA that included advertising campaigns, movies, television and radio spots, and various publications. More so than the other components, Alert America explicitly linked civil defense with the Cold War conception of American patriotism.

In 1951, the FCDA asked the Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge to take on the task of developing a traveling exhibit to stimulate interest in civil defense. The Freedoms

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<sup>112</sup> Alert America campaign, Progress Report. WHCF: OF, File 1591C, Alert America, HSTL.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> "The What and How of the Alert America Campaign," LTPSC, BYU, MSS 1503, Box 3, Fld 1.

<sup>116</sup> "The Civil Defense Alert America Convoy: The Show that may save your life," WHCF: OF, File 2965, Federal Civil Defense Administration, 1952-53, HSTL.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

Foundations, founded in 1949 by General Eisenhower, Kenneth Wells, and other prominent politicians and business leaders, aimed to enhance and protect the “American way of life.”<sup>118</sup> The Freedoms Foundation advocated for conservative economic policies and embarked on campaigns to educate Americans about the Constitution and free enterprise system.<sup>119</sup> The Freedoms Foundation created a separate entity, the Valley Forge Foundation, to design and build the massive exhibit. Kenneth Wells, then president of the Freedoms Foundation, took the head role in the Valley Forge Foundation.<sup>120</sup>

The patriotic conservatism of the Freedoms Foundation colored the design and content of the exhibit. Kenneth Wells, in his position as head of the Valley Forge Foundation, sought to imbue the exhibit with piety and patriotism.<sup>121</sup> His statements about the convoy positioned civil defense as a crucial component of the American way of life by conflating anti-communism and preparedness. Wells identified a clear enemy to the American way of life that constantly guided his thoughts about the Alert America convoy, he wrote that The Enemy (his emphasis) seeks to destroy all “we hold dearest in life, our freedoms, our ideals, our moral standards, our spiritual values.”<sup>122</sup> The FCDA’s partnership with the Freedoms Foundation unequivocally linked civil defense with larger

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<sup>118</sup> Richard M. Fried, *The Russians are coming! The Russians are Coming! Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold-War America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 21.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Fried, 46.

<sup>121</sup> The Truman Administration remained frigid to Wells’ despite his involvement with the Alert America campaign. He sent a copy of a souvenir book from the Alert America exhibit to the White House for the president’s signature it was returned unsigned because Wells was an “eager beaver” and “General’s Boy.” HST, Cross-reference Sheet, December 6, 1952; WHCF: OF, File 1591C, Alert America.

<sup>122</sup> Kenneth D. Wells, “The Alert America Convoys: Campaign Book.” LTPSC, BYU, MSS 1503, Box 3, Folder 2, Book 3. p. 7.



conservative political trends of the early 1950s such as anti-communism, practicing of religion, and a belief in the benefits of free enterprise.

While the Alert America exhibit primarily focused on the need for civil defense, it also featured a section on the peaceful uses of atomic energy. This juxtaposition at first seems a contradiction, but points to the dual role of the atom in the early years of the Cold War. While the atomic bomb launched an age of uncertainty and possible total destruction, it also heralded in the “Atomic Age,” a period of rapid technological advances and seemingly endless possibilities. Alert America was by far the largest example of the way in which the propaganda about the peaceful possibilities of atomic energy collided with warnings about the destructive power of atomic weaponry, but not the first of such exhibits. In 1950 and 1951, fairs and exhibitions across the United States included atomic energy displays. Oak Ridge Institute of Nuclear Studies offered up exhibits on atomic energy to state fairs. The exhibits demonstrated the splitting of uranium atoms, a cartoon on atomic energy, samples of radioactive plants, and an “exhibit of radioactive frogs in a Lucite-enclosed pool” with a Geiger counter of the pool so spectators could identify the radioactive frogs.<sup>123</sup> The Oak Ridge exhibit was displayed at the Long Beach Exposition in California surrounded by circus acts, a home show, and the other expected components of a fair. The Oak Ridge exhibit, in addition to detailing the wonders of atomic energy, offered a “thrilling demonstration” on “how a family escapes under atomic attack.”<sup>124</sup> Another example of this type of exhibit was

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<sup>123</sup> “Institute Will Show Nuclear Phenomena at State Fairs,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 1, 1950, 8.

<sup>124</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 1951, 13. The advertisement for the show is quite visually striking. The background is taken up by a mushroom cloud with a box in front of it with two clowns touts the “star-studded circus and exposition.”

Westinghouse's "The Theatre of the Atom" built for the Chicago Fair in 1950. It included "a three-dimensional atom model, a miniature atom-smasher, an electrostatic 'atomic' motor, a 'mousetrap' bomb, and other exhibits to explain atomic energy."<sup>125</sup> New York City hosted an atomic energy show in 1951, billed as the "most complete demonstration of atomic energy ever assembled."<sup>126</sup> The exhibit focused on the peacetime uses of atomic energy but also offered "instructions on individual defense against atom bombs."<sup>127</sup> Exhibits celebrating the wonders of the atom were designed to satisfy people's curiosity about atomic energy.<sup>128</sup> These exhibits focused on the wonders of the Atomic Age and the possibility of atomic energy to transform completely the American way of life. The novelty surrounding the atom during the first part of the decade contributed to difficulties in communicating the real dangers posed by atomic war and led to tension between the celebratory tone of exhibits on atomic energy and the much more serious exhibits on the need for civil defense.

Just as the FCDA recognized that civil defense as policy needed to be sold, the Valley Forge foundation saw a need for promotion before the convoy arrived to "arouse the greatest possible interest in it."<sup>129</sup> Wells urged people to "capitalize on the "Alert

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<sup>125</sup> "Plans Model Atom Show," *New York Times*, June 4, 1950, F8; "Fair to Show How Atomic Forces Work," *Chicago Tribune*, April 18, 1950, 1.

<sup>126</sup> "Atom Energy Shows Opens Here Today," *New York Times*, May 14, 1951, 16.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> At the Chicago Fair, visitors to the Westinghouse exhibit were given cards to fill out for a drawing for a set of *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The winning card was the one that was radioactive when placed under a Geiger counter. "Radioactive Card to Reveal Winner at Fair," *Chicago Tribune*, July 4, 1950, A4.

<sup>129</sup> Kenneth D. Wells, "The Alert America Campaign For Your Community." LTPSC, BYU MSS 1503, Box 3, Folder 1, p.5 The draft of this statement said that the exhibit, like the circus was coming to town. Apparently, the comparison to a circus was found to be in poor choice and was not included in the final statement.

America” Convoy visit to get your hometown prepared for the real thing.”<sup>130</sup> He wrote several objectives for advertising including participation and awareness of civil defense, but also to persuade Americans that “a strong Civil Defense is necessary to protect our Freedoms and build an enduring Peace.”<sup>131</sup> The content of the advertisements and the records of the Valley Forge Foundation show the very real ways that the exhibit was meant to link civil defense with freedom, religion, and anti-communism. The Advertising Council assisted in the effort, but focused primarily on getting people to the exhibit and ignored larger statements about the meaning of civil defense. They created a packet of ads to be used before and during the exhibit’s visit to a town. The ads marketed the exhibit as a “Show you’ll never forget” and advertisements appeared primarily on movie pages in local papers.<sup>132</sup> Nearly all of the marketing alluded to the awesome power of the show. A number of articles and ads stressed the importance of the exhibit and that at least one member of each household should visit it.<sup>133</sup> The promotion of the Alert America exhibit, both by the Valley Forge Foundation and by the Advertising Council, focused on the importance of the show in preparing Americans for an atomic attack.

Advertisements for the Alert America convoy worked to attract visitors to the exhibit. At the request of the FCDA, the Advertising Council created a national campaign for the convoy. These advertisements addressed both the atomic energy and civil defense components of the exhibit. These ads illustrate the tension between

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<sup>130</sup> Kenneth D. Wells, “The What and How of the ‘Alert America’ Campaign.” LTPSC, BYU MSS 1503, Box 3, Folder 1, p. 5.

<sup>131</sup> Kenneth D. Wells, “The Alert America Convoys: Campaign Book.” LTPSC, BYU MSS 1503, Box 3, Folder 2, Book 3, p. 70.

<sup>132</sup> One such example is in *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 1952, B7.

<sup>133</sup> “Big Attendance Urged at Civil Defense Show,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 23, 1952, A3.

celebrating the possibilities of atomic energy and the serious need for civil defense. In one, the largest graphic on the page was a mushroom cloud. Next to the cloud, four smaller images detailed the features of the exhibit. It said the exhibit would show both the “remarkable uses of atomic energy” and a “vivid dramatization of an actual A-bomb attack.”<sup>134</sup> The ad claimed that the Alert America exhibit would show “the ‘inside story’ of modern war weapons—and how organized Civil Defense can beat this menace.”<sup>135</sup> An important theme in the Ad Council’s campaign was the use of Paul Revere on horseback as the symbol of Alert America. These ads recalled Paul Revere’s ride to warn colonists of the British invasion. The imagery of Paul Revere connected Cold War civil defense with the American Revolution, aligning the Alert America’s message of survival through preparedness with Paul Revere’s early warning and eventual victory by the colonists in the Revolutionary War. Promotional materials for Alert America all carried several secondary messages; that a visit to the exhibit was a duty of every household, that civil defense could protect Americans from atomic attack, and a balancing of the threat of possible atomic war with the possibilities of atomic energy. Notably absent from the materials produced by the Advertising Council were mentions of the “the Enemy” and an emphasis on moral and religious fortitude that infiltrated the promotional material of the Valley Forge foundation. This absence points to differences in ideology between the Valley Forge Foundation, the Ad Council, and the FCDA.

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<sup>134</sup> Advertising Council, *Alert America Convoy*, 1952, Record Series 13/02/207, File #597, Advertising Council Archives, University of Illinois Archives.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

The Show You'll Never Forget Is Here In

(SET NAME OF COMMUNITY)

(SET TIME) . . . . . (SET PLACE)

See the

# Alert America Convoy

What is atomic energy all about? What can it do? ... what are its peacetime uses? ... what can Civil Defense do to protect you and your family in the event of enemy attack?

Everyone is asking three questions today. Now, the ALERT AMERICA show gives you a dramatic answer. It shows you ... in a way you'll never forget ... the "inside story" of modern war weapons—and how organized Civil Defense can beat this menace.

This is the show that may save your life. Don't miss it!

YOU'LL SEE...



remarkable uses for atomic energy in times of peace... for application in the factory, on the farm, and in the field of medicine!

YOU'LL SEE...



a vivid action drama of enemy soldiers, and gas warfare. A dramatic exhibit showing how the "war of tomorrow" may be fought!

YOU'LL SEE...



...and hear... and feel... a vivid dramatization of an actual A-Bomb attack. Shows what can happen to a community that is unprepared!

YOU'LL SEE...



how organized Civil Defense in your community is working to protect lives, property, and production. Shows what you can do, now, to protect yourself!

## ADMISSION FREE!

Figure 9- Alert America poster, Advertising Council

The Valley Forge Foundation created its own promotional materials for the convoy. Wells asserted that the convoy offered "real merchandising and promotional opportunities" to stores since "practically every department of a store and every type of

store has some type of merchandise that fulfills some requirement of Civil Defense.”<sup>136</sup>

Department stores set up shop windows that featured preparedness products and also included information on the visit of the convoy. Materials sent ahead of the visit by the Valley Forge Foundation listed a number of possible promotions for host communities such as including civil defense inserts in company mailings, donated space on restaurant menus, changing street names for the week, and other imaginative endorsements of the Alert America convoy.<sup>137</sup> These creative marketing efforts helped establish a crucial link between preparedness education and the promotion of goods and services that is examined in the next chapter. Stores and businesses took part in the promotional activities because it allowed them to generate positive feelings in their customers who then saw the businesses as providing a valuable public service. This symbiotic relationship became even more pronounced throughout the 1950s, as businesses published educational material for patrons and employees. The Valley Forge Foundation also suggested more traditional promotional activities for the exhibit and sent ahead sample speeches, radio spots, and editorials to cities hosting the exhibit.<sup>138</sup> Materials created by the Valley Forge Foundation emphasized the role of civil defense in protecting the American way of life. The types of promotions as well as the organizers’ statements connected the civil defense effort with consumption, religion, and morality.

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<sup>136</sup> Kenneth D. Wells, “The Alert America Convoys: Campaign Book.” LTPSC, BYU MSS 1503, Box 3, Folder 2, Book 3, p. 76.

<sup>137</sup> Kenneth D. Wells, “The Alert America Convoys: Campaign Book.” LTPSC, BYU MSS 1503, Box 3, Folder 2, Book 3, p. 90.

<sup>138</sup> Kenneth D. Wells, “Alert America.” LTPSC, BYU MSS 1503, Box 3, Folder 3.

Designed to “drive home the reality and nature of the threat that faces us,” the Alert America exhibit attempted to motivate visitors to volunteer for civil defense.<sup>139</sup> The convoy was divided into two segments with the first half showing the possible enemy attacks on the United States and the second half detailing what individuals could do “to meet this threat.”<sup>140</sup> The layout of the exhibit emphasized that civil defense was a responsibility of every American in the Atomic Age. The early parts of the exhibit focused on the real threats that faced the United States and used sound, fire, and hissing gas to show visitors the face of the enemy as foreboding communist menace. The next section contained footage of an atomic blast and a mock attack on an American city. The exhibit climaxed with the possible destruction of an atomic bomb. The exhibit ended with a focus on hope, with an “inspiring exhibit on the heritage of freedom that is America’s and which we guard though Civil Defense.”<sup>141</sup> This last area summarized the need for civil defense and exhorted visitors to, “Love your freedoms, live your freedoms, guard your freedoms.” The last room contained pictures of iconic American symbols including the Liberty Bell. A child praying was the last visual for exiting visitors.<sup>142</sup> In no uncertain terms, Alert America connected civil defense with what it maintained made a good American: religious and patriotic.

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<sup>139</sup> Kenneth D. Wells, “The Alert America Convoys: Campaign Book.” LTPSC, BYU MSS 1503, Box 3, Folder 2, Book 3, p.11.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> *What You Will See in the Civil Defense, Alert America Exhibit*, Quick Files; Box 6, Civil Defense Campaign- General (1), HSTL.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.



Part of an inspiring exhibit on the heritage of freedom that is America's and which we guard through Civil Defense. Banks of live flowers loaned by local florists and a background of typical American music help make this one of the most moving parts of the show. Just beyond is a room where visitors sign up for recruiting, first aid training and other activities allied with CD, and secure take-home literature.

**Figure 10- *What You Will See in the Civil Defense, Alert America Exhibit***

The design of the Alert America exhibit consciously attempted to convert visitors into volunteers by employing graphic illustrations of the destruction of the atomic bomb paired with symbolic images of America's past. As visitors left the exhibit, they were encouraged to sign a personal pledge to volunteer for civil defense in their community, but few visitors signed pledge cards. Over one million people visited the convoy in 80



different cities, but only six percent signed pledge cards.<sup>143</sup> Despite the small number of volunteer commitments, organizers considered the exhibit a success, calling the public education results gratifying.<sup>144</sup> Based on the number of visitors compared to the number of volunteers, the Convoy seemed to fail in its mission to convince Americans of their critical role in civil defense efforts. While it may not have inspired most visitors to volunteer, Alert America did effectively connect civil defense with notions of what it meant to be a good American.

By creating an interactive exhibit that graphically illustrated the potential devastation of an atomic attack while simultaneously promoting peaceful uses of atomic energy, Alert America captures many of the tensions inherent in the official civil defense rhetoric of the 1950s. The promotion of the show also demonstrated the ways Advertising Council communicated assumptions both about civil defense and, more importantly, American families and their homes. Alert America, with its overt emphasis on patriotism, illustrates one of the ways civil defense was constructed as an important civic duty. It shows how officials attempted to reconcile the destructive power of the atomic bomb with the incredible possibilities of the atom.

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<sup>143</sup> Kenneth D. Wells, "Valley Forge Foundation Report on Alert America Convoys," February 10, 1953; LTPSC, BYU MSS 1503, Box 3, Folder 1, p.17. (The official report listed 1,096,102 visitors in 80 cities, with 67,171 signing pledge cards; it did not include a percentage).

<sup>144</sup> Kenneth D. Wells, "Valley Forge Foundation Report on Alert America Convoys." February 10, 1953; LTPSC, BYU MSS 1503, Box 3, Folder 1, p.14.

## CHAPTER 5

### DUMMY DOOMTOWN IN THE DESERT:

#### CIVIL DEFENSE TESTS AT THE NEVADA TEST SITE

Throughout the 1950s, civil defense officials participated in nuclear weapons tests at the Nevada Test Site (NTS). During two testing programs, Operation Doorstep in 1953 and Operation Cue in 1955, the FCDA tested the effect of bombs on mock cities filled with the latest consumer goods, including cars, clothing, and frozen foods. The public received information about the tests in official reports and films from the FCDA and through widespread print and television coverage. The FCDA used the test programs to convince Americans of the importance of civil defense and assure them that through modest preparation they could survive an atomic attack. This message was imperative to the aims of the FCDA; civil defense could only be successful if Americans believed that an atomic weapon could be survived.

The testing of civil defense measures at the NTS tried to reconcile the use of unrealistically small bombs that came nowhere near the destructive power of the USSR's weapons with the certain total destruction that would come from the use of a bomb of that magnitude would lead to conclusions that survival was impossible. The FCDA and the AEC decided to use smaller atomic bombs rather than testing the full destructive power of the hydrogen bomb. This decision limited the applicability of data collected. Private industry also took part in the test programs through the donation of goods to be tested in

the blasts. Examining the various forces that went into the civil defense tests as well accounts of the tests in official reports and the popular press reveals the ways that these civil defense exercises continued to frame preparedness as an issue for individual American families.

The federal government established the Nevada Test Site in 1950, as increased hostilities in Korea heightened Cold War tensions, made the need for a continental testing site apparent.<sup>145</sup> The federal government chose a site in southern Nevada, part of the United States Air Force's Las Vegas Bombing and Gunnery Range.<sup>146</sup> Officials identified several benefits of the site, including a small population of people nearby and an abundance of federally owned land and resources within close proximity.<sup>147</sup> On December 18, 1950, President Truman approved the development of the Nevada Proving Ground, later renamed the Nevada Test Site.<sup>148</sup> Nevada residents were notified about the site through a press release issued by the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) in January 1951.<sup>149</sup> Las Vegas newspapers focused on the positive economic aspects of the construction of the testing site, the added tourist draw, and rejected the possibility of health problems as the result of tests only 65 miles away.<sup>150</sup> On January 27, 1951, the AEC detonated the first atomic bomb at the Nevada Proving Ground.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> *Origins of the Nevada Test Site* (Department of Energy, 2000), 43.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> A. Costandina Titus, *Bombs in the Backyard: Atomic Testing and American Politics* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986), 56.

<sup>149</sup> *Origins of the Nevada Test Site* (Department of Energy, 2000), 57.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 55, 58.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

Collaboration between the FCDA and the Atomic Energy Commission began in 1951 during the Buster-Jangle test series.<sup>152</sup> The FCDA tested twenty-eight home shelters and used the information collected to prepare guides for homeowners about the most effective in case of an attack.<sup>153</sup> The 1951 test operation failed to garner much attention nationally, because officials did not promote it widely and did not release footage from the actual test. Buster-Jangle set the precedent for future joint operations between the FCDA and the AEC.

Two years later, FCDA officials again visited the NTS to participate in an atomic bomb test operation, Upshot-Knothole. This time, the FCDA created a series of media opportunities to promote the civil defense program. The FCDA referred to their activities as Operation Doorstep. In it, FCDA officials recreated two typical American homes and tested the effect of an atomic bomb on the houses, shelters, automobiles, clothing, and food.<sup>154</sup> The FCDA flooded the media with images of the test operation. This test marked the first time civil defense observers were allowed to witness the detonation of an atomic bomb.<sup>155</sup> Millard Caldwell, head of the Federal Civil Defense Administration, allowed the observation because he felt “it will stimulate the zeal and raise the effectiveness of civil defense volunteers and paid personnel.”<sup>156</sup> The FCDA partnered with other federal agencies during the test, including the AEC, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Agriculture. Private companies lent support by

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<sup>152</sup> Robert L. Corsbie, *Operation Plumb-Bob: Shelters and Associated Tests: A Preliminary Report of a Continuing Program* (Washington: GPO, 1957), 2.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *1953 Annual Report*, (Washington: GPO, 1954), 59.

<sup>155</sup> HST, Cross Reference Sheet, March 13, 1952; WHCF: Confidential File; Box 63, FCDA, HSTL.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

providing the materials to be tested including clothing, food, furniture, and automobiles.<sup>157</sup>

In Operation Doorstep, civil defense officials examined the effects of an atomic blast on typical American homes. The FCDA constructed a miniature town affectionately referred to as “Doom Town,” complete with houses and automobiles. The population consisted of mannequins donated by the L.A. Darling Company and outfitted by the local J.C. Penney store.<sup>158</sup> Official reports focused on two houses of “typical American construction” inhabited by mannequins in everyday poses such as sitting at a table and sitting in the living room.<sup>159</sup> The Advertising Council sponsored the broadcast of the test on national television to increase attention of three of their campaigns: civil defense, blood drives, and the Ground Observer Corps.<sup>160</sup> Following the blast, accounts referred to the destruction of the “Doom Town” and the mannequins as stand-ins for a typical American town and average citizens.

Operation Doorstep continued the FCDA’s use of cooperative promotion efforts. Various companies lent support to the test program and in return received praise from the FCDA and mentions in press accounts and reports following the test. This program of cooperative promotion defined much of the FCDA’s efforts during the Cold War. The FCDA especially appreciated the support of the automobile industry and praised them in their 1953 *Annual Report* saying, “the most important technical test involving participation by private industry dealt with the effect of atomic explosions on automotive

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<sup>157</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *1953 Annual Report*, (Washington: GPO, 1954), 59.

<sup>158</sup> <http://www.nv.doe.gov/news&pubs/publications/historyreports/news&views/perspective.htm> Last accessed March 14, 2006; Federal Civil Defense Administration, *1953 Annual Report*, (Washington: GPO, 1954), 59.

<sup>159</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *1953 Annual Report*, (Washington: GPO, 1954), 60.

<sup>160</sup> Advertising Council, *Annual Report, 1952-53*, (New York: Advertising Council, 1953), 6.

vehicles and their occupants.”<sup>161</sup> Such participation did not go without benefit to the donating dealerships. Automobile dealerships in southern California exhibited “atom-bombed” cars following the blast.<sup>162</sup> Mannequins used in the two houses went on display in store windows for display and exhibition for the public.<sup>163</sup> Other companies used the tests as an opportunity to secure unofficial endorsements and talk about the ability of their product to withstand an atomic attack and then assert that the product could certainly withstand everyday wear and tear.<sup>164</sup> Such relationships were quite important to the FCDA. The Administration, due in part to their small budget, relied on others to disseminate information about civil defense. Neither did the Administration have the funds to secure the items needed to stock “Doom Town.” These relationships further helped the FCDA spread the message of preparedness in the marketplace, and helped cement the bond between citizenship and consumption.

Press coverage following Operation Doorstep points to conflicting feelings about the test program. Some articles certainly reflected the FCDA’s exuberant attitude toward the program, but others revealed ongoing debates about the utility of civil defense and pointed out lags in the national program. Some authors questioned the prudence of airing the test on national TV, claiming that because many of the mannequins emerged relatively unharmed, interest in civil defense would be “paralyzed.”<sup>165</sup> A number of accounts of the test focused on the image of the mushroom cloud and the usefulness of

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<sup>161</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *1953 Annual Report*, (Washington: GPO, 1954), 59.

<sup>162</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 23, 1953, 11.

<sup>163</sup> “Atomic ‘Victims’ Going on View” *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 1953, 6. “The Wax Models Will be Taken on Tour,” *Las Vegas Sun*, April 3, 1953.

<sup>164</sup> Beautyrest mattress after test in 1955, *Hotel Monthly Magazine*, Simmons Company Records, Collection #731, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

<sup>165</sup> “Television in Review: Yucca Flats Reflects Danger of Overstressing Atom Destruction at Cost to Civil Defense,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1953.

the test in stimulating interest in civil defense. One example, "A-Bomb's Grim Reminders of Lagging Civil Defense," was published in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. The author claimed that images from the test were in fact the best motivators for civil defense, writing, "Better than reams of words these pictures pointed up the personal significance of the perils of Atomic Age."<sup>166</sup> While many articles offered fairly straightforward summaries of the test program, an article in *Parade Magazine* summed up many of the conflicting feelings about the test program. In the article, a 21 year-old Las Vegas housewife recounted her feelings at the detonation. She wrote, "If you had seen what I saw, you'd realize how important civil defense is. All my life, I'll remember that atomic cloud drifting in the wind after the blast. It looked like a stairway to Hell."<sup>167</sup> She pointed toward civil defense as an important duty, but failed to acknowledge the possibility of survival and instead ended on the note that the mushroom cloud looked like a stairway to Hell. Taken together these articles illustrate the complicated range of reactions to Operation Doorstep.

In their 1953 Annual Report, the FCDA listed the benefits of the test program. They asserted that the real value of Operation Doorstep did not lay in the collection of data on the effect of the bomb on homes and furnishings, but that press coverage of the blast "did more to stimulate interest and promote knowledge of self-protection and civil defense than any other event during the past year."<sup>168</sup> This statement explicitly reveals the real intent of the FCDA in Operation Doorstep and asserts that the test program was little more than a massive publicity stunt. The FCDA released an official film and book

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<sup>166</sup> "A-Bomb's Grim Reminder of Lagging Civil Defense," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 22, 1953.

<sup>167</sup> "I Saw a Stairway to Hell," *Parade*, April 26, 1953, 6-7.

<sup>168</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *1953 Annual Report*, (Washington: GPO, 1954), 60.

commemorating the exercise. The official film, produced by a private company, emphasized that “simple, inexpensive shelters in the basement or backyard might mean the difference between life and death of this country should it be attacked.”<sup>169</sup> The film, marketed toward civic organizations, schools, and civil defense organizations, retailed for \$27, including shipping, from the company that produced it.<sup>170</sup>

The official book, *Operation Doorstep*, was published by the FCDA and made available for free to the public. The book summarized the objective of the test program as “to show the people of America what might be expected if an atomic burst took place over the doorsteps of our major cities.”<sup>171</sup> The book continued the goal of showing Americans’ how a typical town would fare after a blast by including a number of images of the mannequins in before and after shots of the houses. The text admonished readers to outwit the mannequins and prepare and survive an atomic blast. The FCDA compared the mannequins to typical suburban American families throughout *Operation Doorstep*. Despite the optimistic tone of the book that promised readers survival through preparation, questions remained about the applicability of evidence from the test. *Time* magazine summarized these doubts in a scathing review of the book and called the actual test results “less reassuring” than the book reported.<sup>172</sup> The *Time* review foreshadowed the general reaction to later testing programs.

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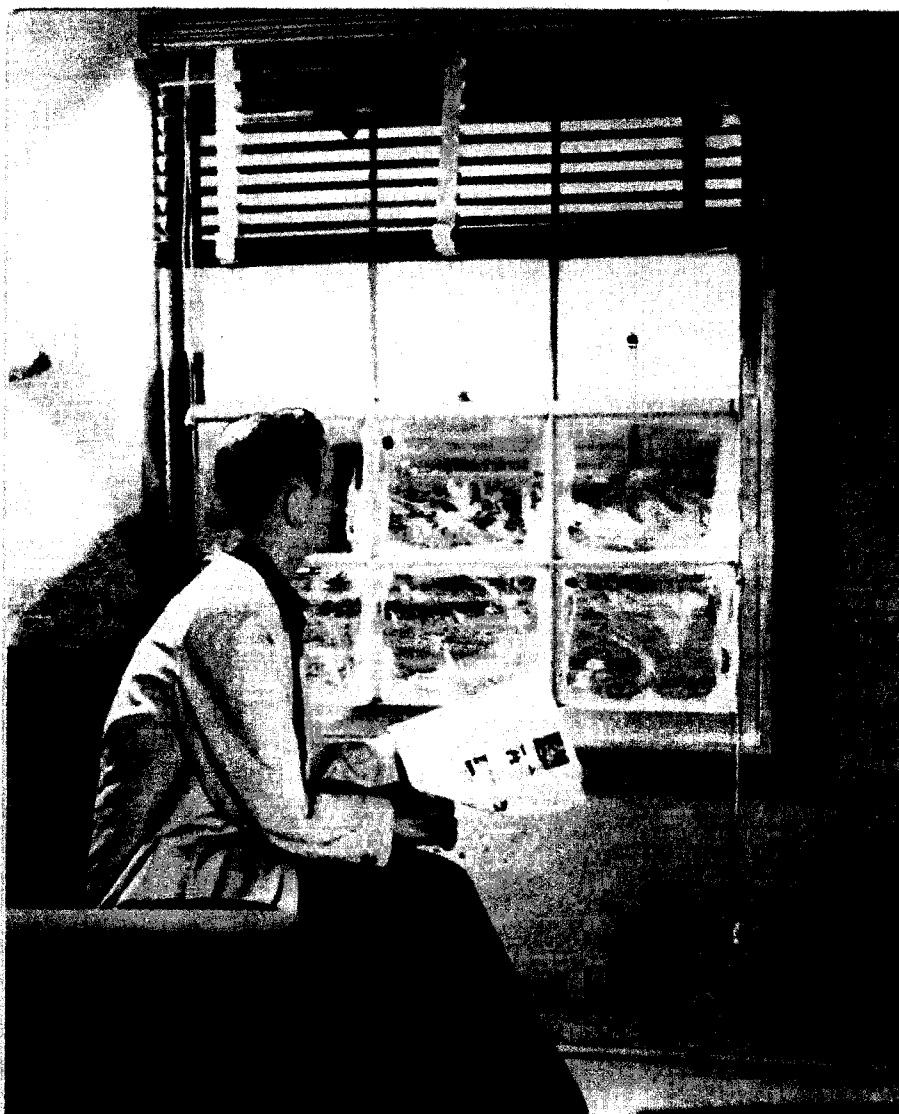
<sup>169</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, “Press Information no. 340,” June 28, 1953; Lambie Records; Box 3, Civil Defense - General 1953 (2).

<sup>170</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, “Press Information no. 340,” June 28, 1953; Lambie Records; Box 3, Civil Defense - General 1953 (2). This model, with private enterprise producing and distributing films related to civil defense, with the cooperation of the FCDA, continued throughout the 1950s. FCDA, “For Your Information,” July 22, 1954.

<sup>171</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *Operation Doorstep* (Washington: GPO, 1953), 2.

<sup>172</sup> “Operation Doorway,” *Time*, July 6, 1953.





**X-19**

***This mannequin can only stay in the position in which he was placed, staring through the window at coming disaster. A real occupant of this house could prepare—and survive.***

**Figure 11- Image of a mannequin from *Operation Doorstep***

Footage from Operation Doorstep found use in later public service films. One example of this type aired on television during National Fire Prevention Week. The film, *The House in the Middle*, compared the fates of three-miniature houses that were part of the Operation Doorstep testing program. The film asserted that the middle house fared the best “because it is free of litter and trash, properly painted, and made of good materials. The other two are completely destroyed by fire as a result of their rundown, badly weathered condition and trash accumulations around one of them.”<sup>173</sup> The film, while sponsored by the FCDA, paid little attention to civil defense and used the backdrop of the atomic bomb to convince viewers of the need for fire prevention. According to the film, houses with trash and weathered paint were not only eyesores, but “may be doomed in the Atomic Age.” The houses with rotten wood, dried grass, and messes inside quickly burned, while the only damage the house in the middle sustained was some charring of its exterior paint. The film connected cleanliness with good American ideals and stated that cleanliness could guarantee survival. The explicit connections the film made between good housekeeping and survival points to the ways that civil defense rhetoric moved far beyond actual theories about survival to become a hallmark of what it meant to be a good American; that good citizenship was something that could be purchased and displayed outwardly, in this case through a clean and nicely painted home.<sup>174</sup>

Administrators at the FCDA viewed Operation Doorstep as a success because it dramatically increased the amount of attention paid to national civil defense efforts. However, despite the best hopes of Administrator Caldwell, it did not lead to an increase

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<sup>173</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, “For Your Information, Public Affairs # 81,” Sept. 28, 1953.

<sup>174</sup> *The House in the Middle*, National Paint, Varnish and Lacquer Association, 1954. Film footage is part of the Prelinger Archive and is available at [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org).

in the number of volunteers for civil defense and the FCDA's budget continued to shrink. Based on the success of the test in generating attention for civil defense, the FCDA set the plans in motion for an even larger test at the Nevada Test Site in 1955.

The FCDA hoped the 1955 test would serve to reinvigorate lagging interest in civil defense. FCDA officials converged on the Nevada Test Site during the Apple 2 test and labeled their program Operation Cue. It "was brought into the homes of America by every medium of communication," just like Operation Doorstep was two years earlier.<sup>175</sup> Just as before, it served as an opportunity for self-promotion on the part of the companies involved in the testing program.

While planners conceived of Operation Cue as a bulked-up version of Operation Doorstep, the reaction to the second test was much more negative. During the two years between the tests, the national attitude toward atomic weapons grew increasingly hostile and the press accounts contained much more cynicism than those on Operation Doorstep had. The press reported with skepticism about the usefulness of the information gathered since the FCDA used a bomb of significantly less power than those currently held by the Soviet Union. A series of weather-related delays further soured the media's feelings toward the FCDA as the press and civil defense visitors became frustrated at the postponements. Visitors to the test operation faced problems finding hotel rooms in the city during the delays.<sup>176</sup> The FCDA did their best to play good host to the visitors and planned day trips to Hoover Dam and Death Valley during the delays.<sup>177</sup> The test

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<sup>175</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *1955 Annual Report*, (Washington: GPO, 1956), 71.

<sup>176</sup> Press Release, The Sands, April 28, 1955; Lambie Records; Box 19, CUE, Operation (the atomic test program - Federal Civil Defense Adm.) 1955, DDEL.

<sup>177</sup> Revised Schedule, Operation Cue, Atomic Test Operations Open Shot Program, April 22-27, 1955; Lambie Records; Box 19, CUE, Operation (the atomic test program - Federal Civil Defense Adm.) 1955, DDEL.

eventually took place on May 3, 1955, several weeks after originally scheduled.<sup>178</sup>

Nearly all newspaper accounts reported negatively on Operation Doorstep. The *Salt Lake Tribune's* account of Operation Doorstep encapsulated the tone of most reports on the test. The headline read, "Atom Show Fizzles Despite Top Billing" and it went on to compare the test to a circus and claimed it "turned into the biggest flop in show business history." The author continued, "Billed as a 'spectacular' that would galvanize the nation's prodigious civil defense effort, the atomic tests serious purpose has been lost in a bally-hoo hoopla, with press agents stepping on each other's toes, observers agreed."<sup>179</sup>

Operation Cue failed to generate the positive press for civil defense that Operation Doorstep had just two years earlier. The FCDA failed to take into account changes in the public's feelings toward continental testing and increased apathy toward civil defense. The larger scale of Operation Cue made observers even more aware that the program was little more than a media stunt and the press largely rejected the spectacle.

Three major components made up the Operation Cue program. The observer program, the first component, focused on the observation of the detonation by civil defense officials.<sup>180</sup> Volunteer civil defense workers participated in the field exercise program, the second component in which they practiced responding to an emergency. Civil effects tests made up the final component of the Cue program. In these tests, FCDA officials gathered information on the effect of the bomb on housing, food, shelters,

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<sup>178</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *Cue for Survival*, (Washington: GPO, 1955), 1.

<sup>179</sup> "Atom Show Fizzles Despite Top Billing," *Salt Lake Tribune*, May 2, 1955.

<sup>180</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *Cue for Survival*, (Washington: GPO, 1955), 1.

vehicles, and other products of everyday life. Over two hundred companies participated in the civil effects tests by donating products.<sup>181</sup>

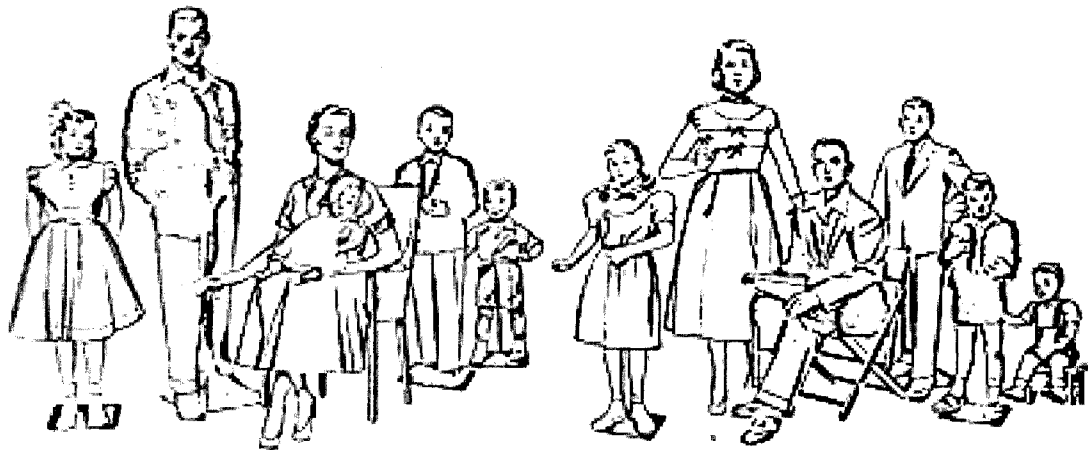
For Operation Cue, the FCDA constructed an entire city to serve as the laboratory for the civil effects tests. Articles referred to the set-up alternately as “Survival City” and “Doom Town,” pointing to two very different fates for the residents of this representative American city. An important component of the test program measured the bomb’s effect on clothing. Officially known as the “Thermal Ignition and Response of Projects,” it consisted of a line of mannequins across the desert floor dressed in donated clothing.<sup>182</sup>

The imagery of the test is captivating: a line of mannequins dressed in the latest moderately priced fashion faced the 30-kiloton bomb. An image of mannequins following the detonation shows a not nearly as idyllic scene. Mannequins stood in various states of dismemberment with torn clothing. The usage of mannequins in both Operation Doorstep and Operation Cue went beyond a desire to make the test houses seem realistic. Civil defense officials intentionally dressed the mannequins and placed them in typical positions to evoke images of American families in suburban homes. FCDA officials hoped such images would spur Americans to act. The mannequins functioned as stand-ins for the Americans the FCDA imagined as their core constituency.

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid. Articles leading up to the test focused on the testing of donated products. See for example, “Effect of Atomic Radiation on Furniture to be Tested,” *Albuquerque Journal*, Feb. 11, 1955.

<sup>182</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *Operation Cue: The Atomic Test Program of the Federal Civil Defense Program*, (Washington: GPO, 1955), 35.



L. A. Portland Co., civil defense mannequin family.

**Figure 12- Operation Cue: The Atomic Test Program of the Federal Civil Defense Program, 35.**



**Figure 13- Line of manikins at 7,000 feet, part of thermal radiation test (after blast), May 5, 1955.**  
 Record Group 304: Records of the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization,  
 1947 – 1962, National Archives

The FCDA released a booklet for the public about the test, *Operation Cue*.<sup>183</sup> It lauded the participation of industry in the test. Just as in 1953, the National Automobile Dealers Association provided automobiles for the test program, the L.A. Darling Co. provided mannequins, and J.C. Penney outfitted them with clothing.<sup>184</sup> The FCDA reiterated the importance of private industry to the civil defense program. The official book also summarized the state of American civil defense in the book and called for a reinvigoration of interest in preparedness. The book claimed that the time had come “for a renewed effort, for a restudy of local civil defense needs in terms of new information, and for a greater effort to show the people of American how they can best prepare for such individual and family protection.”<sup>185</sup> The public book on Operation Cue contained more detailed information than the Operation Doorstep book did; yet it failed to receive much attention from any mainstream media outlets. The lack of interest in Cue was owed at least partially to the unreasonably small bomb used in the test. By the time the book was printed, the Soviet’s first strike capabilities were exponentially more powerful than the test bomb. The information contained in the book was out of date before the bomb was even detonated.

The FCDA released the Operation Cue film the same year. Officials attempted to defuse the opposition to Operation Cue by adding a caveat to the film that recognized the disparity between the 30-kiloton bomb used in Operation Cue and much more powerful

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<sup>183</sup> The FCDA and the AEC issued different types of books and reports for the testing program. *Operation Cue* was meant for public consumption, while Observer Handbooks were given to participants, and a second book, *Cue for Survival* (Washington: GPO, 1955) focused on more technical details of the test.

<sup>184</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *Operation Cue: The Atomic Test Program of the Federal Civil Defense Program*, (Washington: GPO, 1955), 24.

<sup>185</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *Operation Cue: Observer Handbook* (Washington: GPO, 1955), 3.

H-bomb the Soviets were known to possess. The film acknowledged that the H-bomb would exert 667 times more force as the 30-kiloton atomic bomb and begrudgingly conceded that most of the structures tested would have been completely obliterated had an H-bomb been used. With that sticky issue resolved, the film moved on to recount the Operation Cue program. A reporter, June Collin, narrated the film as it followed her through the Nevada Test Site. She is shown examining the buildings and products to be tested. She showed a particular interest in the mannequins, describing them as “Mr. and Mrs. America,” and expressed curiosity about the effect of the blast on the various textiles and synthetic fabrics used in their clothing. She observed the detonation and returned to visit the ruins of the bombed town the following day. Collin ended the film by offering viewers her conclusions about Operation Cue, “I took a last look at the debris and devastation. This time it was only test, a well-planned test, not a real attack. It was test of the things we use in everyday life.” The film played upon the same tropes that other civil defense materials used; that preparedness efforts were to be taken up by individual families and that survival was possible through self-help. Calling the mannequins “Mr. and Mrs. America” implied that they stood in for everyday Americans in the blast. The types of homes tested and even the placement of the mannequins conveyed a very clear notion of who “Mr. and Mrs. America” was, leaving out Americans outside of suburban settings and nuclear families. The Operation Cue film reinforced that idea that survival through civil defense was meant for ‘good’ Americans.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> *Operation Cue*, Federal Civil Defense Administration, 1955. Film footage is part of the Prelinger Archive and is available at [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org).



Operation Cue failed to garner the attention that Operation Doorstep had just two years earlier. The delays caused part of the press' animosity, but the irrelevant data was the real source of the derision in their reports. Unlike Operation Doorstep that was used as a promotional point for companies that donated to the test, donors did not include information about their participation in advertisements following the test. The FCDA moved away from massive efforts such as the atomic testing program, and instead focused their efforts on first aid and the CONELRAD alert system.

Civil defense policies evolved as well, as the FCDA recognized evacuation as the best form of civil defense. The evacuation strategy made the information gathered in the testing program at the Nevada Test Site obsolete. The FCDA focused its public information campaigns on yearly mass evacuation drills called "Operation Alert."

Civil defense testing continued at the Nevada Test Site with Operation Plumbbob in 1957. FCDA official tested shelters and other structures.<sup>187</sup> FCDA officials did little to promote the exercise, it received very little attention in the press, and the FCDA did not issue a commemorative book or movie for it as they had with Cue or Doorstep. Smaller civil defense activities took place at the Nevada Test Site throughout the 1950s and 60s, but were treated with scientific detachment by the press.

Operations Doorstep and Cue offered opportunities for companies and organizations to contribute to the civil defense effort by donating products to the programs. Retailers also used atomic themes to promote a product or generate business. Stores often ran sales linked to atomic testing.<sup>188</sup> The atomic bomb became

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<sup>187</sup> Corsbie, 3.

<sup>188</sup> A. Costandina Titus, *Bombs in the Backyard: Atomic Testing and American Politics* (Reno: University of Nevada, Press, 2001), 93.

sensationalized as a clever way to gain the attention of fickle shoppers. These contributions enhanced goodwill for business and industry and offered an opportunity for the dissemination of civil defense information outside official channels. This synergistic relationship served both groups well during the 1953 exercise, but the increased opposition to atomic testing by 1955 limited the potential to earn goodwill by donating items to the program.

The FCDA's testing program at the Nevada Test Site raises important questions about whom the intended recipient for civil defense information was in the early Cold War. Both series featured mannequin families that mirrored the ideal with a father, mother, son, and daughter. The houses they populated resembled those found in suburbia, well outside the critical targets identified by the FCDA and the programs ignored densely populated urban cores. Films produced after the tests like "The House in the Middle," implied that those whose houses were destroyed brought the destruction upon themselves because they were poor housekeepers or lived in slum-like conditions. The optimistic and celebratory messages following the detonations helped downplay the threats of atomic war, a calm that lasted through much of the 1950s, when events of the Cold War forced Americans to revisit civil defense.

## CHAPTER 6

### PURCHASING SURVIVAL: PREPAREDNESS PRODUCTS

Entrepreneurial companies throughout the 1950s and 1960s took up the cause of civil defense and sold products meant to aid in home preparedness. At the same time as these products entered the marketplace, businesses and other groups took up the cause of survival as a means of generating goodwill for their firms. Together these two trends were another means through which Americans were sold civil defense in the postwar period. These efforts occurred outside the official purview of the FCDA, yet they contained many of the same themes that underlay the Advertising Council's public service ads: they touted survivability, the importance of self-help, and the family as the core unit on the Cold War battlefield.

The exact reason companies took up the cause of civil defense in the 1950s varied; some companies saw an opportunity to rebrand existing products for the Atomic Age, others invented new products to protect consumers from the dangers of atomic bombs, and finally other businesses took advantage of the moment and distributed civil defense information as a public service. Interest in civil defense by private companies took many forms. Some companies produced straight informational material. Others included simple civil defense messages in their regular advertisements to drum up volunteers or promote events. Some companies used gimmicks to attract customers and displayed items used in the civil defense items in shop windows; these sensationalist

stunts were usually accompanied by a minimal amount of education. Still other companies linked their everyday products with the civil defense cause by showing how they could be used in multiple ways to aid in survival. Despite the range in form and content, a clear set of messages about preparedness emerged from these materials. These ads fell outside the control of the Advertising Council or the FCDA, yet they largely reflected the same themes that those campaigns set forth. They subscribed to the same narrative: survival was likely and possible with modest financial investment and commitment to education about the perils of the Atomic Age. These advertisements offered reassuring messages about the civil defense program. The FCDA encouraged private companies to shoulder the burden for public education about preparedness. A closer look at the ways in which private companies took up the cause of civil defense reveals just how quickly the idea of citizen and consumer merged in the postwar period.

Throughout the 1950s, private companies produced and distributed materials meant to educate Americans about civil defense in an effort to provide an important public service. These materials took a variety of forms, including straight informational materials like pamphlets, comic books and other items aimed at children, and adding information about preparedness to existing advertisements. The range in content and form represented the various audiences they were intended to reach. Despite differing designs, informational materials distributed by businesses largely followed the FCDA's script on survival. They also used imagery similar to that used in the Advertising Council's campaigns by showing survival for middle class American families. Closely looking at these types of materials illustrates on ways that the message of preparedness

was presented to consumers in a variety of forms and helps us locate the points at which concepts of citizen and consumer overlapped in this period.

One of the most prominent efforts at public education undertaken by private firms in the era was the creation of comic books and cartoons detailing the importance of preparedness. These comics stumped for awareness about civil defense and aimed their message at children. These efforts largely followed scripts similar to those used in FCDA materials for children such as the *Bert the Turtle* cartoon. While the message was altered for the youth audience, the comics followed the same narrative that adult materials did, that civil defense was primarily an effort to be undertaken by suburban families in their homes. One of the earliest comics, "If An A-Bomb Falls," emphasized the need for civil defense and the dangers of the Cold War. It read in part, "The ambitions of Communist dictators make the danger of an atomic attack on our cities a grave possibility."<sup>189</sup> Reiterating the stance of the FCDA, "If An A-Bomb Falls" told readers that it was every citizen's responsibility to be prepared. Another example, "The H-Bomb and You," from 1955 told the story of a group of students and their teacher discussing civil defense preparedness. The comic held to the same gendered hierarchy that dominated official civil defense material. The teacher listed appropriate jobs for the female students such as working in welfare centers, mass feeding lines, and nursing. She also told the girls that their mothers' "job of home defense is especially important." The male students are encouraged to help the civil defense effort by being messengers, assisting in rescue work, aiding the block warden, and "keeping mother and dad

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<sup>189</sup> "If An A-Bomb Falls," Quick Files; Box 6, Civil Defense Campaign- General (1), HSTL.

interested in civil defense.”<sup>190</sup> “The H-Bomb and You” reflected an interest in children as key to generating interest in civil defense. By telling the male students that they were responsible for keeping their parents interested in civil defense, the comic shows how material written for children was meant to indoctrinate both the youth and their parents.<sup>191</sup> Comic strips in national newspapers also ran civil defense storylines. For example, in 1956 Al Capp “agreed to introduce an appropriate civil defense story line into one of his comic strips for a period of 14-16 weeks” and lent one of the characters from his “Lil Abner” comic to serve as “Mr. Civil Defense.” The civil defense storylines that appeared in comic strips contained the messages as official materials. Comic books promoting civil defense were produced at the same time as other comics were beginning to explore the dangers of radiation and other science-fiction themes. When one compares the great number of science fiction comics published to the relatively few on civil defense, it becomes clear that Americans encountered a variety of narratives about life in the Atomic Age.

Many companies produced cards, booklets, posters, and other materials meant to educate their customers about civil defense. These items offered a variety of information to recipients, including what to do in case of an atomic attack, the meaning of air-raid siren wails, and basic first aid measures. These materials attempted to prepare Americans for the seemingly inevitable attack to be launched by the Soviets. The Harrisburg Railway Company distributed one of the most striking examples of this type of materials

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<sup>190</sup> “The H-Bomb and You,” Virgil L. Couch Papers, 1951-1958 (Couch Papers); Box 21, Miscellaneous Articles, Books, and Manuscripts Relating to Civil Defense, 1950-1958 (5), DDEL. The comic was produced in full color by Commercial Comic, Inc. and distributed in cooperation with the *Washington Post*.

<sup>191</sup> JoAnne Brown, “A Is for Atom, B Is for Bomb: Civil Defense in American Public Education, 1948-1963,” *Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (1988), 70.

in the form of a two-sided circular dial titled, “You Can Survive an Atom Bomb.” The dial contained “vital information, a combination of basic facts as established by nuclear physicists” on what to do in case of an atomic bomb blast.<sup>192</sup> The text on the dial admonished recipients to be prepared. On the back of the dial, text encouraged recipients to pray that God “strengthen our hearts” and “end forever all wars.” The two-sided dial embodies an important contradiction in civil defense education throughout the period. On the front, an atomic attack is presented as survivable if one only knows what to do. The backside, however, reveals a much bleaker reality in which prayer for peace is the only real chance for survival. This contradiction gets at the heart of civil defense planning throughout the Cold War. Despite the emphasis on survival from a variety of sources, widespread recognition existed that total destruction would be the likely result of an all-out war with the Soviets.



Figure 14- Dial from Harrisburg Railway Company, “You Can Survive An Atom Bomb”

<sup>192</sup> “You Can Survive an Atom Bomb,” Couch Papers; Box 20, Civil Defense Publications by Businesses and Corporations, 1950-1958 (6), DDEL.

Another important effort companies undertook to educate consumers about civil defense took the form of reproducing and distributing educational materials with the name of the sponsoring company included prominently somewhere on the copy. These materials took little effort by the companies, but gave them a chance to enhance their reputation with consumers for doing a public service. One example of this type promotion occurred in 1952 when International Latex Corporation reprinted and distributed a letter from Philip Wylie on the need for civil defense “as a public service to emphasize the need for preparation to cope with atomic warfare.”<sup>193</sup> Throughout its existence, the FCDA relied on such cooperation to educate the public about civil defense. These campaigns served the both the companies and the FCDA well. By framing their efforts as doing a public service, the company improved its reputation. At the same time, the FCDA relied on such efforts to spread effectively the civil defense messages in ways its paltry budget did not allow it to do directly. These two aims converged in the informational materials distributed by private companies. The expectation by the FCDA for private companies to take on the important task of indoctrinating Americans on preparedness and the fact that private companies willingly took it on helps expose the growing relationship between politics and the marketplace that emerged in the years following World War II.

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<sup>193</sup> *Civil Defense Alert*, August 1952, 3. Philip Wylie served in the FCDA’s Public Affairs Division and witnessed the atomic tests as part of the official delegation. His 1954 book *Tomorrow!* detailed the destruction of an atomic bomb attack on two fictional cities. In the city where residents practiced good civil defense, most people survived, while the residents of the second town who ignored civil defense instructions perished. It was turned into a radio broadcast narrated by Orson Welles the following year. In the early 1960s, Wylie opposed the civil defense policy of home fallout shelters saying, “And certainly nobody in my family is thinking of building a shelter, and if it would become a (mad) law that we had to, we would have to try to have the law revoked before engaging in such preposterous and useless effort.” “Truth About Fallout Shelters,” *Redbook*, January 1962, 43. He revisited civil defense in his 1963 book, *Triumph*. After a nuclear war, fourteen Americans survive in a shelter. Those who survived in the shelter faced grave social ills such as alcoholism, prejudice, and infidelity. M. Nelson Hayes, “Wylie’s Survivor’s of the Bomb,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1963, B14.



Companies engaged in another important educational effort aimed specifically at their customers and employees. The materials produced included posters, envelopes for the storage of civil defense information, and pamphlets and books. These materials, like other privately financed efforts, cleaved to the official FCDA doctrine that preparedness was a family affair. An envelope distributed by a telephone company illustrates that point. The text on the front of the envelope directed recipients to “file in it civil defense information you receive in [the] future, after family discussion and deciding what YOU will do to protect your family.”<sup>194</sup> Companies did not ignore opportunities to combine education and profit. Banks across the nation distributed plans and other information on the construction of home shelters. Not surprisingly, the banks were more than willing to help their customers finance the construction costs.<sup>195</sup> Companies tried to maintain a careful balance between education and profit in campaigns such as these. Many companies also distributed informational material for their employees and their families. These materials ranged from regular newsletters, to pamphlets, and whole books on the importance of home preparedness and also carried the message that survival was possible for employees and their families.<sup>196</sup> A January 1957 bulletin to the employees of Pacific Gas and Electric is an example of this type of publication. On the cover, a little girl stood

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<sup>194</sup> Envelope—Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Co. of West Virginia, Couch Papers; Box 31, Publications from Businesses and Corporations, 1958-1961 (1), DDEL. Another envelope at the archive was a sample and instead of a company’s name had the filler of “Blank Manufacturing Company,” Couch Papers; Box 13, Envelope for Family and Home Survival, DDEL.

<sup>195</sup> “Suggestion for Your Fallout Shelter,” Couch Papers; Box 36, Publications by Businesses and Corporations Relating to Civil Defense, 1961-1963 (1), DDEL.

<sup>196</sup> “Civil Defense Information for your family—prepared for the Employees of Johnson Wax,” Couch Papers; Box 36, Civil Defense Publications and Materials from Businesses and Corporations, 1958-1961, (4), DDEL.

holding a doll in the shadows of bombed city.<sup>197</sup> Despite the depressing cover, the text inside reiterated FCDA claims that all that was needed for survival was a small amount of preparation. The production and distribution of such materials shows how Americans received messages about civil defense from a variety of sources. The consistency in messages, no matter the source, shows how widespread the faith in survival became in the 1950s. A closer reading of these materials, however reveal contradictions in their messages, through disconnects between the images and texts, and raises doubt about how much the recipients bought the claims that survival was possible.

The civil defense tests at the Nevada Test Site offered companies an opportunity to connect themselves to the civil defense program. Companies used their participation in the testing program to promote themselves and their products, and, to a lesser extent, preparedness. These ads were less concerned with educating the public than the others described here and strayed the farthest from official civil defense doctrine. One example of this type ran in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1953. In the ad, a group of southern California car dealers promised shoppers the opportunity to see “Atom Bombed Cars.” In an attempt to avoid the appearance of shameless promotion, the dealers also promised information on the “best precautions if you are in your car during an atomic explosion.”<sup>198</sup> This advertisement presents one way in which companies used their participation in the testing program to their advantage. The car dealers were not concerned with disseminating public information, but instead used the people’s interest in the atomic bomb to attract shoppers to examine the “atom bombed cars.” J.C. Penney

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<sup>197</sup> “Emergency Procedures for P.G. and E. Personnel,” January 1957; Couch Papers; Box 21, Miscellaneous Articles, Books, and Manuscripts Relating to Civil Defense, 1950-1958 (1), DDEL.

<sup>198</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 23, 1953, 11. Articles also ran on their appearance. See for example, “Atom-Bombed Cars Go On Display Today.” *Los Angeles Times*, May 22, 1953, 22.

engaged in promotional programs with the mannequins used in the test program and displayed them in shop windows and print advertisements for the store.<sup>199</sup> The displays recreated the conditions of the mannequins found following the blast.<sup>200</sup> These efforts only marginally incorporated information on survival and instead focused on satisfying the curiosity of consumers. J.C. Penney also took advantage of their donation of clothing to the test program at the Nevada Test Site and ran ads with the mannequins and lists of the clothing that best withstood the atomic bomb tests. Advertisements such as these used graphic images from the civil defense testing program and attempted to appeal to people's curiosity. While they were most interested in stimulating interest in a product or company, ads of this nature also maintained a certain amount of educational intent by including a minimum amount of civil defense information.

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<sup>199</sup> One ad in particular was a two-page pictorial of mannequins before and after the blast. The copy of the ad said, "These mannikins (sic) could have been live people, in fact, they could have been you. Volunteer now for Civil Defense." The ad not only described the way the clothing withstood the blast, but also gruesomely recounted the fate of the various mannequins describing in explicit detail the ways in which the mannequins lost or broke limbs and other injuries. *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, April 3, 1953, 3-4.

<sup>200</sup> "Doom Town Residents." *Los Angeles Examiner*, April 1, 1953, 1-3.

**NOW you can see them!**

**Atom Bombed Cars**

JUST RELEASED BY THE ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION... these cars can be viewed by the public for the first time. See the effect of a powerful atomic explosion equal to 15,000 tons of TNT... See the effect of thousands of degrees of atomic heat.

Now you can learn best precautions if you are in your car during an atomic explosion.

These cars made history—See these famous cars today!

**ABSOLUTELY NO DANGER!** The Federal Civil Defense Administration reports every car was subjected to radiological safety procedures and declared safe before cars were released for public inspection at famed Figueroa Auto Mile.

**Come to Figueroa Street..**  
BETWEEN OLIVE and JEFFERSON

SEE THE ACTUAL TEST CARS IN THESE NEW CAR DEALERS' SHOWROOMS... OPEN EVENINGS

<p>ART KELLEY FORD 1000 W. 1200 South Figueroa NORTH CALIFORNIA CO. 1000 W. 1200 South Figueroa PILSON MOTORS 1000 W. 1200 South Figueroa ED JAMES BUICK CO. 1000 W. 1200 South Figueroa J. V. BARNHART MOTOR CO. 1000 W. 1200 South Figueroa KALSH BROTHERS 1000 W. 1200 South Figueroa</p>	<p>LAMARCO &amp; HOFFMAN, INC. 1000 W. 1200 South Figueroa GEORGE WALDMAN 1000 W. 1200 South Figueroa BUTMAN MOTORS 1000 W. 1200 South Figueroa SAVING'S-MASSARIAN 1000 W. 1200 South Figueroa MARSHALL &amp; CLAMPETT 1000 W. 1200 South Figueroa</p>
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Figure 15- *Los Angeles Times*, May 23, 1953, 11.

Some companies sought to take advantage of the interest in the civil defense by linking their products with preparedness. These advertisements pointed to secondary uses for everyday products in the preparation for atomic war. One example of this type of ad ran for a reflective paint called Scotchlite, manufactured by 3M. The ad, entitled, "To sell a drink or save a city," showed two billboards that both used Scotchlite: one for

Coca-Cola and a highway sign about civil defense.<sup>201</sup> By positioning Scotchlite as able to sell Coca-Cola or help a community in case of an atomic attack, the ads illustrates how civil defense entered the marketplace. Other ads offered information about local civil defense efforts as well as asserting their products usefulness in home preparedness. One ad of this style for Levelor Venetian blinds stated that the blinds could shield residents from bomb fragments and debris in case of an atomic attack. It included a list of civil defense warden districts for the local area and available volunteer positions.<sup>202</sup> The Levelor ad balanced public information and promotion of the blinds by positing that the blinds could be useful in protecting one's home in case of atomic attack and by stressing the need for volunteers. This ad and others like it connected the cause of civil defense with the growing consumer market in the United States following World War II.

Non-consumer products also dominated the civil defense market in the early years of the Cold War. Companies that produced goods used in citywide civil defense efforts, such as air raid sirens and radio communication systems, also ran advertisements touting their products' contribution to the area's safety.<sup>203</sup> Other industries, less directly tied to civil defense efforts, publicized their utility in preparing for possible attack. Telephone companies in particular took advantage of this added promotion. Phone companies, such as Illinois Bell and Pacific Telephone ran regular ads that included information about expanding phone service and their important role in civil defense. Illinois Bell even included information about 'tele-tags' for children in their ads, citing the importance of

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<sup>201</sup> "Say it in Scotchlite," Quick Files; Box 6, Civil Defense Campaign- General (2), HSTL.

<sup>202</sup> Levelor ad, Quick Files; Box 1, Civil Defense- Miscellaneous, HSTL.

<sup>203</sup> An example of this ad appeared in the *Civil Defender*, August 1957, 15. In the ad, a panicked broadcaster appears with the siren in background and the text "get 'em to the radio!" Other ads of this nature appeared regularly in the *Los Angeles Times* for Motorola sirens.

identification tags and the added ease of adding your home number.<sup>204</sup> Other ads included information on what to do in case of an emergency, which, ironically, included not using home telephones. One particularly engaging advertisement from Ohio Bell, a puzzle for children, entitled “The CD Story” said that the coordination of civil defense activities depended on effective communications that were built on good telephone facilities.<sup>205</sup> Much as the advertisements created for the Advertising Council merged private interests with the larger public good, telephone companies took advantage of civil defense as a means of building support for their industry.

Mass media outlets also took advantage of the interest in civil defense drive sales. Magazines especially used civil defense related articles as headlines and promoted these issues in other outlets. When *Collier's* produced an issue in 1951 dedicated to the “War We Do Not Want” including an article about the devastating costs of a fictional A-bomb strike on New York, they took out ads in a number of major newspapers.<sup>206</sup> Throughout the 1950s, magazines promoted ‘special issues’ that promised to give readers needed advice on what to do in case of attack. These articles and issues often included content written by the FCDA and reinforced the message that survival was possible. By the early 1960s, the support that editors had for the FCDA dissipated and the mood in most

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<sup>204</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, March 16, 1954, 16.

<sup>205</sup> “The Civil Defense Story,” Couch Papers; Box 21, Miscellaneous Articles, Books, and Manuscripts Relating to Civil Defense, 1950-1958 (1), DDEL.

<sup>206</sup> *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Chicago Tribune* each ran the same ad for the magazine: *Chicago Tribune*, October 19, 1951; *New York Times*, October 19, 1951; *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 1951. The pattern was repeated for a number of *Collier's* issues related to civil defense. Other magazines like *Redbook*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and *US News and World Report* also followed the same pattern.

mainstream magazines shifted away from articles supporting the civil defense program to ones berating the government and questioning the prudence of shelter building.<sup>207</sup>

While some companies simply provided civil defense information in their ads, other companies took advantage of international tensions and sold products meant to aid in survival of an atomic attack. The market for these items ebbed and flowed during the 1950s and 1960s, rising to match increased political tensions, and falling during periods of relative calm in international politics. The interest in such products did not suddenly appear during the Cold War, but such products had virtually disappeared from the marketplace and national conversation following World War II.<sup>208</sup> In 1950, fear following the Soviet testing of an atomic bomb blew open the survival market. The Soviet Union's detonation of their own atomic bomb in September of 1949 and the invasion of South Korea by North Korea in 1950 prompted Americans to consider the possibility of an attack on their home soil. The federal government responded to such concerns by establishing the FCDA and the marketplace saw the emergence of products meant to protect Americans from the A-bomb. Retailers of survival products published summaries of their offerings in magazines, newspapers, and trade journals. Through these advertisements, private companies sold Americans a concept of civil defense largely based on the official policy of family-based defense.

With the possibility for an all-out war with the Soviet Union looming, entrepreneurial companies began marketing home bomb shelters. Largely based on the

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<sup>207</sup> By the early 1960s, even the most fervent civil defense proponents questioned the program. The *Saturday Evening Post* ran a number of articles including, "The Case Against Fallout Shelters," (March 31, 1962, 8-9) that opposed the fallout shelter program.

<sup>208</sup> *The Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* lists no articles between 1945 and September 1950 on shelters.

shelters constructed in Western Europe during World War II, these shelters promised protection from the blast of an A-bomb. During the early 1950s, a majority of civil defense articles focused on such shelters.<sup>209</sup> Companies sold plans for the construction of private, family shelters. These shelters promised to “protect you against death and danger of flying glass, debris, and collapsing buildings as a result of atom or hydrogen bombs.”<sup>210</sup> Building on the FCDA’s model of the family as the core unit in the Cold War, shelter advertisements used the family to encourage purchase and compared shelters to life insurance. An ad for the Lifesafe Atomic Bomb Shelter used an image of a mother, baby, two children, and the family dog running into an underground shelter to sell their product. Copy accompanying the image tugged at the heartstrings of parents saying, “Of course you love your children! Even though you may not be concerned with your own safety, you’re bound to be concerned with your youngsters! Don’t let them down- but provide them with the comfort and security that they expect from you.”<sup>211</sup> While these early shelters lacked the sophistication of the shelters promoted in the early 1960s during the fallout shelter boom, they did offer moderate protection from the blast and heat wave. The bomb shelters of the 1950s fared poorly in the marketplace and the market quickly dried up.<sup>212</sup> More important than the technical specifications of the bomb shelters is the way that manufacturers positioned their product in the marketplace. Companies manipulated the emphasis on family togetherness during the period to

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<sup>209</sup> “West Coast Gets Ready,” *Life*. March 12, 1951, 64. “Wonderful to Play In,” *Time*, February 5, 1951. “A Place to Hide,” *Time*, December 18, 1950.

<sup>210</sup> *New York Times*, November 1, 1953, S13.

<sup>211</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 1951, 28.

<sup>212</sup> “Would-Be Shelter Mogul Folds Up,” *New York Times*, September 11, 1951, 24.



encourage purchase of the shelters. The focus on family shelters as a refuge for suburban families carried into marketing strategies for fallout shelters in the early 1960s.

Other companies marketed products that they claimed could provide protection from the atomic bomb. Ads made outlandish claims that even the limited knowledge available at the time would have discredited. These products played upon some Americans' fundamental fear of an atomic attack. One such product, the Atomicape, promised to shield those unlucky enough to be outside a shelter when the bomb struck. The product, essentially a plastic sheet, was meant to be used as covering during an attack. The ad played on apocalyptic fears saying, "It could happen tomorrow!" Curiously, though, the ad promises other applications for the cape "should we be fortunate enough to be spared the death, destruction, and disease of an atom bomb, the Atomicape has hundreds of other convenient uses."<sup>213</sup> Ads for products like the Atomicape reinforced many of the policies underlying the civil defense program by chiding customers that they must be prepared and promising that survival could be guaranteed through preparation. Of course, the manufacturers of products like the Atomicape had a financial interest in convincing customers that survival was possible. The market for survival products never took off in the 1950s. Americans spent their money purchasing the newly available consumer goods for their homes. Despite the low consumption of these products, they point to another way that survival became entrenched in the marketplace. Further, advertisements for early shelters firmly established the suburban family as the market for shelters, an idea that dominated the market through 1963.

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<sup>213</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, February 15, 1951, B2.



### POCKET-SIZE COMPACTNESS

The ATOMICAPE will not protect you from heavy flying debris or direct flame. It will give you convenient, quick coverage to reduce the danger of flash burns or contamination from alpha particles from an air burst, ground burst or water burst.

The **ATOMCAPE** comes in three sizes. Small, up to 4 feet tall; Medium, up to 6 feet; Large, over 6 feet. The price is a lot less than you might expect—only \$3.00 for the Small and Medium sizes, and \$2.50 for the Large size. This low price includes all taxes and postage paid. Send cash, check or money order and your shipment will be rushed from our factory in Los Angeles. Don't delay—send your order today on the handy coupon below.

Black 40-der is obtained as per above in preparing for a possible attack.

**Figure 16- *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 12, 1951, B2**

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up to take advantage of the new market and developed underground storage facilities to house copies of essential records outside of targeted areas.<sup>214</sup> To aid in the moving and storage of documents, such sites partnered with companies like Bell and Howell to microfilm records prior to their storage. The FCDA applauded such efforts and even worked with Burroughs, an electronics and computer company, to produce the film “Bomb Proof” starring Walter Abel. The film chronicled the “survival of a city after an H-bomb demolishes its principal industry.” Businesses and government in the town face the destruction with cautious optimism because they microfilmed important records and the film ends with a promise to rebuild.”<sup>215</sup> Promotional material about the film identified civic groups, sales groups, trade associations, schools and colleges, 4-H clubs, women’s clubs, farm organizations, veterans’ organizations, and business and labor groups as the intended viewers of the film. The anticipated audience points to an important secondary purpose of the film. While Burroughs had a vested interest in encouraging various entities to rent underground storage space, the real purpose of the film was to convince viewers that they and their communities could survive an atomic bomb blast and that society would continue in a relatively normal state following the attack. Other ads pointed out the way that everyday industry could be converted to the civil defense recovery effort in case of an attack. These ads, while not selling anything for the average consumers, had a secondary intent to convince Americans that their communities could withstand a Soviet attack and emerge victorious.

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<sup>214</sup> Why Industries in the field of production for defense should go underground,” Couch Papers; Box 32, Publications from Businesses and Corporations, 1958-1961(6), DDEL; Iron Mountain Underground Storage Vaults, Couch Papers; Box 20, Civil Defense Publications by Businesses and Corporations, 1950-1958 (3), DDEL.

<sup>215</sup> “Burroughs Presents Bomb Proof starring Walter Abel,” Couch Papers; Box 20, Civil Defense Publications by Businesses and Corporations, 1950-1958 (8), DDEL.

Entrepreneurial companies marketed identification tags for children to school districts and worried parents as another important product meant to aid in most attack recovery. Advertisements for the tags held that they would aid in the reuniting of children with their parents following an attack. Press reports and advertisements carefully avoided any other scenarios, never acknowledging that the tags could be used to identify dead and disfigured bodies following an attack. These materials championed the tags for the sense of protection they offered children in light of possible atomic war.<sup>216</sup> Promotional materials for the tags featured grinning youths posing with their tags around their necks. Tag companies targeted schools, PTAs, church groups, and other civic groups to outfit children for the Cold War.<sup>217</sup> National School Studios, the company responsible for school portraits for children across the nation, came up with an innovative marketing strategy for tags. The company used school photos of the children and sold paper tags for students that featured the child's photo and address. Schools could purchase the tags outright for sixty cents each, but National School Studios would give them to the school for free if school administrators would allow the studio to send an envelope of pictures, with no obligation, to the children's parents for purchase. Promotional materials for the programs featured a grinning student proudly wearing her tag.<sup>218</sup> The creative financing of the tag program highlights one way that companies took advantage of the goodwill generated by promoting civil defense and also aimed to earn a profit.

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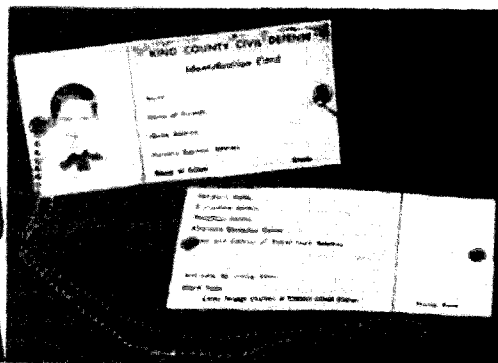
<sup>216</sup> Winkler, 115.

<sup>217</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1955, L70.

<sup>218</sup> *Civil Defender*, October 1955, 2.



**TO: CIVIL DEFENSE AUTHORITIES,  
EDUCATORS, AND  
PARENT-TEACHERS ASSOCIATIONS**



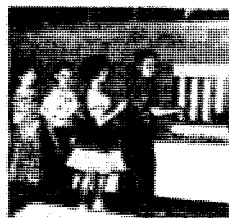
## **STUDENT IDENTIFICATION** *During an "Atomic" Alert*

**NEED:** Is Civil Defense Needed? If the answer to this question is yes, then we must entertain the thought of evacuation. Since the advent of the Hydrogen Bomb the only safety lies in not being "there."

**EVACUATION:** Should it be necessary to evacuate the children during school hours it is also necessary to identify them. Many educators feel that this identification is more necessary for the grades from sixth down through kindergarten.

**IDENTIFICATION:** Identification must be positive, practical and nontransferable. Identification must be kept in the school to be used only during the time of the actual alert or drill. Identification must be inexpensive since neither the schools nor the Civil Defense people have a lot of money to spend.

How do we of NATIONAL SCHOOL STUDIOS fit in to this picture? We offer the solution of the Identification problem in two ways. We will furnish the Identification Card, chain and pin (pictured in this ad) for the small sum of 60c per student. If you want the wallboard (pictured here also) you may have it at a price of \$1.50 per board. We will furnish the Identification Card and Boards (mentioned above) free of charge if we are permitted to submit our picture envelopes to the parents for possible purchase of these envelopes by the parents. Incidentally, this entails absolutely NO OBLIGATION on the part of the parent to purchase the envelope of pictures. We submit the envelope of pictures 100% on speculation.



1. Student wearing I.D. Card.
2. Photograph of actual I.D. Card, front and back.
3. Civil Defense Board in the classroom.

If you are interested in learning more about our plan write to:

**NATIONAL SCHOOL STUDIOS, Inc.**  
P.O. BOX 352 - - - - - MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

Figure 17- 1955 Advertisement for Tags, *Civil Defender*, October 1955, p.2.

Messages about civil defense appeared in advertisements for other products only tangentially related to the program as well. Toy companies took advantage of the national interest in civil defense and manufactured toys that recreated the tools of survival. Manufacturers attempted to involve children in civil defense through the

creation of realistic toys for young boys. A Christmas-time Sears Roebuck and Co. ad featured a “complete civil defense center in miniature.”<sup>219</sup> In the 1960s, during the height of the fallout shelter boom, Wham-O, the company responsible for the Hula-Hoop and Frisbee, manufactured a build it yourself bomb shelter for children.<sup>220</sup> Such toys appeared alongside toys reproducing the tools of uranium mining, civil defense’s less threatening cousin. Other toys for children used the image of the atom and mushroom cloud to increase appeal. These objects prove useful in understanding the ways children were educated about the atomic bomb and how private companies used atomic imagery and civil defense to sell products. Toys such as these fed into the idea that civil defense was an important practice, but that an atomic bomb attack could be survived

While the FCDA attempted to escape politics and frame itself as a public good, civil defense became an important bargaining chip in political campaigns. Campaign ads carried images of destruction and spoke of the potential destruction of an attack on a particular jurisdiction. In 1962, a “worried mother” ran ads for Richard Nixon’s gubernatorial campaign in California citing a number of reasons why Nixon was the right choice for “mothers and grandmothers concerned about the future of their children” including the candidate’s guarantee to strengthen civil defense programs.<sup>221</sup> The presence of civil defense in political campaign ads is not surprising, but the similarities between the imagery and rhetoric in campaign ads and other non-political ads points to

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<sup>219</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, November 18, 1956, 16.

<sup>220</sup> The toy retailed for \$119 and was reportedly a flop. Douglas Martin, “Richard Knerr, 82, Crazy Creator, Dies,” *New York Times*, January 18, 2008.

<sup>221</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, November 5, 1962, D4. Lisa McGirr’s *Suburban Warriors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) describes the ways the conservative right took root to power in southern California based on the grassroots movements of people such as this “worried mother.”

the merging of the government and private enterprise in the years following World War II.

The marketing of civil defense during the 1950s reflected the cycles of apathy that plagued civil defense officials throughout the decade. When tensions ran high, the number of survival products marketed and the number of other goods invoking civil defense messages increased. When tensions eased, advertisers focused more on the good life promised by the expanding economy. The marketing of civil defense, through products meant to aid in survival and in public service type ads, drew on the real relationship between politics and the marketplace. Examining the content of such promotional campaigns, reveals how civil defense helped transform consumption into a measure of good citizenship.

By the late 1950s, advertisements for civil defense products nearly disappeared from the marketplace. This downturn in interest was due to waning interest as international tensions come to a relative peace.<sup>222</sup> In addition to the decrease in attention to civil defense, a number of groups emerged in the mid-and late-1950s that vocalized concern about nuclear weapons and the value of American civil defense. The recognition that fallout posed a significant danger following the 1954 Bravo Test in the Pacific led to a spate of articles questioning the prudence of current civil defense policy and the possibilities for survival.<sup>223</sup> The mid-1950s also saw a rise in the number of protests of

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<sup>222</sup> John Gregory Stocke, "Suicide on the Installment Plan": Cold-War Era Civil Defense and Consumerism in the United States," in *The Writing on the Cloud: American Culture Confronts the Atomic Bomb*, Alison M. Scott and Christopher D. Geist, eds., (Lanham: University Press of America, 1997), 44–60.

<sup>223</sup> Perhaps most remembered from the Bravo shot was the plight of the Japanese fishermen on the Lucky Dragon. The boat was at sea about 23 miles away from the site of the detonation and the fishermen suffered from a series of medial problems and the fish were also contaminated. A. Costandina Titus, *Bombs in the Backyard: Atomic Testing and American Politics* (Reno: University of Nevada, Press, 2001), 49.

nuclear weapons testing by groups like SANE. These protest movements helped shift the national dialogue from a belief that survival was possible through modest preparation to a call for the cessation of nuclear weapons testing.<sup>224</sup> The interest in civil defense products and information reflected the larger geopolitical trends and increased when tensions heightened. In 1958, the moratorium between the United States and the Soviet Union on aboveground nuclear weapons testing essentially squelched national discourse on civil defense. Cities and the federal government maintained their civil defense infrastructure, but refocused their preparedness efforts on natural disasters.

The close of the 1950s saw a reinvigoration of debate about civil defense as the Berlin Crisis made the possibility of war with the Soviet Union again seem like a real possibility. As civil defense once again entered national discussion, it moved underground to family fallout shelters in basements and backyards. Marked by dissension and debate, civil defense in the early 1960s reflected the heated moment and the eventual official recognition that the ability to survive nuclear war was tenuous at best.

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<sup>224</sup> For a discussion of Women Strike for Peace and the SANE movement see, Dee Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon: Why Civil Defense Never Worked* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Dee Garrison, "Our Skirts Gave Them Courage: The Civil Defense Protest Movement in New York City, 1955-1961," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, edited by Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).



## CHAPTER 7

### GOING UNDERGROUND: FALLOUT SHELTERS AND THE END OF CIVIL DEFENSE

The first years of the 1960s saw a dramatic shift in national civil defense efforts. Shelters, which had been virtually ignored since the early 1950s, were resurrected as the centerpiece of national civil defense efforts. Improved understanding of the nature of fallout and increased tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union led to a reinvigoration of the survival market. Companies no longer touted products meant to provide protection from radiation; instead, they developed numerous variations on the fallout shelter and products meant to stock them. New national civil defense policy emphasized the construction of home fallout shelters meant to house families for fourteen days, the length of time needed for the greatest threat of radiation poisoning to pass, following a blast. Shelters raised questions about the spirit of community and what post-attack America would look like. The popular press ran articles about the morality of shelters and their benefits.<sup>225</sup> The rise of the fallout shelter as the best hope for survival prompted debate on the cost of survival for Americans.

The fallout shelter 'boom' received a great deal of media attention. Advertisements for plans to construct one's own shelter, to purchase pre-fabricated ones, hire a contractor, or move into a new home pre-equipped with a fallout shelter frequently

appeared in newspapers and magazines. Television, magazines, and newspapers all ran a number of reports about fallout shelters, but the messages were divided between ones staunchly supporting the move toward fallout shelters, with others calling the program absurd and immoral. Narratives appeared in the popular press questioning the prudence of shelter building. Other articles focused on the livability and decoration of shelters. Advertisements and articles also pointed out the multiple uses for the shelter during peacetime; it could be used as storage space, a den, or a rumpus room for children. The promotion and debate surrounding fallout shelters in the early 1960s highlights the connections between the international tensions of the Cold War and domestic politics and culture. The campaigns for fallout shelters also raised important questions about family and self-help, just as the earlier campaigns for civil defense did. The debate surrounding fall-out shelters, however, exposes the ways that the good-life image of the 1950s became fractured by the mid-1960s. The bust of the fallout shelter market by 1963 marked the beginning of the end of the “victory culture” that had defined American culture following World War II.<sup>226</sup>

The fallout shelter emerged as the best hope for survival by the end of the 1950s. With the recognition that the real threat was fallout, planners realized that long-term seclusion in shelters would be the only way to protect Americans from radiation. The fallout shelter represented a departure from earlier policies. Early civil defense policy recommended shelters, but those were meant to shield occupants from the immediate blast and heat wave and not for long-term occupancy. By the mid-1950s, policy shifted

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<sup>226</sup> The idea of victory culture is explored in Tom Engelhardt’s book, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998). In it, he argues that the postwar period in the United States centers on the victory of the United States in World War II. The flipside to the victory culture is a sense of despair that eventually overtakes the exuberance of victory.

to dispersal and evacuation as the primary means of preparedness and survival. As weapons grew exponentially in strength, policymakers were forced to recognize the futility of evacuation as a strategy. New civil defense plans called for the construction of fallout shelters in office buildings, stores, schools, and other public spaces. In addition to the public shelters, civil defense officials encouraged Americans to construct home fallout shelters. In 1958, a new federal agency was put in charge of civil defense. The creation of the Office of Civil Defense and Mobilization (OCDM) merged domestic civil defense and military defense in one office. The OCDM offered instructions for the construction of home fallout shelters.<sup>227</sup>

*The Family Fallout Shelter*, first produced in June 1959, detailed the official position on shelters.<sup>228</sup> It began with a statement from acting director of civil defense, Leo Hoegh, about the need for shelters.<sup>229</sup> In a departure from earlier civil defense informational material, he recognized the certain death of people near ground zero of the blast. He argued, though, that “many *more* millions- everybody else- could be threatened by radioactive fallout.” To combat the threat of fallout, the OCDM called on Americans to construct home fallout shelters. According to *The Family Fallout Shelter*, the threat of fallout could not be localized to critical target areas. The book offered detailed plans for five different models to shield families from the harmful effects of radioactivity. It ended

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<sup>227</sup> The responsibility for civil defense changed hands several times in the late 1950s-early 1960s. In 1958, the Federal Civil Defense Administration and the Office of Defense Mobilization merged, creating the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization (OCDM). In 1961, President Kennedy moved responsibility for civil defense to the Department of Defense.

<sup>228</sup> Office of Civil Defense and Management, *The Family Fallout Shelter* (Washington: GPO, 1959).

<sup>229</sup> Hoegh’s interest in fallout shelters went beyond his role as director of the OCDM. He also served as Vice-president of Wonder Building Corporation who manufactured fallout shelters. Kenneth Rose, *One Nation Underground*, 80; “Charges Ike and Cashes in on Shelters,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 6, 1962; “Boom to Bust,” *Time*, May 18, 1962.

with instructions about living in a shelter and included a list of necessary supplies. Rationing, housekeeping, and clearly delineated roles for each family member were needed to guarantee survival in the shelter. *The Family Fallout Shelter*, much like earlier civil defense materials placed the family at the center of civil defense efforts.

Advertisements for shelters also relied on the family to sell shelters. Newspaper advertisements for shelters often appeared on pages for new home developments and other household products. Construction companies and pool builders branched out into the fallout shelter business. The ads touted adherence to the OCDM's standards for fallout shelters. Perhaps recognizing the limited appeal of a fallout shelter, advertisers promoted their multiple uses. One company in Los Angeles, Horn Brothers, sold a "combination fallout shelter and family room" that would not "mar the beauty of your home."<sup>230</sup> Another company offered shelters creatively named "Safety Dens, a survival shelter with peacetime use as a den, playroom, etc."<sup>231</sup> The Safety Den could be built with 100% FHA financing beneath a garage or patio. Most ads for fallout shelters included images of nuclear families occupying in the shelters. The accompanying text spoke to the need to protect one's family in light of information released by the OCDM on the harmful effects of fallout.

Other entrepreneurial companies constructed homes and apartments with pre-installed shelters. Builders offered up shelters as one more feature of their new development. In southern California, the builders of Sunset Conejo, a large tract of houses, ran a number of ads in early 1961 encouraging people to visit the new development. The ads talked about the spacious homes, their distance from the smog of

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<sup>230</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 1960, K17.

<sup>231</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, February 19, 1961, SG8.

downtown, and the peace of mind of having a “family-size, Civil Defense approved Fallout Shelter.”<sup>232</sup> Another advertisement for the development offered an even more frightening message for potential homebuyers. A white mushroom cloud against a black background with the words, “H-Bomb? Survive” encouraged families to look at the houses of Sunset Conejo.<sup>233</sup> Nearly the entire ad is consumed by its insistence on the need for home fallout shelters. Fallout protection is touted as the most valuable feature of the development. The ad reads, “Family protection is as basic as a build-in at Sunset Conejo and the Dales as your range, oven, or disposal, it’s optional of course, but you can’t afford to go without this survival feature, only \$1,100.”<sup>234</sup> Apartment builders also promoted their buildings with “subterranean civil defense fallout shelters.”<sup>235</sup> For a brief period in the early 1960s, the need for fallout protection merged with the growing housing market. For some developers, fallout shelters represented one more way to distinguish their model home from the rest.

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<sup>232</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 1961, I10.

<sup>233</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1961, WS11.

<sup>234</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1961, WS11.

<sup>235</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1962, WS11.



Survival Kit, extolled Americans to wake up because “Your time is running out!”<sup>236</sup> Shelter kits proliferated and nearly all the advertisements focused on the inevitability of an attack. Other goods, previously sold for camping, became rebranded as ideal for the home fallout shelter. Companies sold home Geiger counters to be included in every shelter. One such device, the Nu-Klear Fallout Detector, promised to detect fallout from a nuclear bomb. Advertisements for the device guilted householders into buying it saying, “It would be better to know at a price this low, no man can afford not to give his family this protection.”<sup>237</sup> Home Geiger counters often showed families using the devices and focused on their ease of use. The proper use of the instruments promised survival. Stores sold portable radios, ventilation systems, and air filters to make the fourteen-day stay in the shelter safe. Advertisements for fallout shelters and products for them carried similar imagery to the ads for civil defense products in the 1950s as the image of home and family as the front line of defense remained constant, but they were nearly devoid of the optimistic tone that pervaded earlier advertisements. Advertisers recognized the heavy cost associated with fallout shelters. Shelters were not an easy sale. Two weeks in a cramped space, with limited food, no running water, or fresh air was not nearly as simple a solution to the threat of war as the Atomicape had been ten years earlier.<sup>238</sup> In addition to the difficult stay in the shelter, questions remained about what kind of neighborhood and community Americans would face after emerging from the

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<sup>236</sup> “Nuclear Attack Survival Kits,” Couch Papers; Box 36, Publications by Businesses and Corporations Relating to Civil Defense, 1961-1963 (3), DDEL.

<sup>237</sup> “Now You Can Be Prepared,” *New York Times*, October 19, 1963, 11.

<sup>238</sup> Despite overwhelming scientific evidence about the dangers of fallout, some entrepreneurs continued to market products similar to the Atomicape. Fallout suits were plastic full body suits meant to “protect against deadly radiation while traveling to a shelter, or to allow the person to leave such protection to get needed supplies or to carry out rescue work,” “New Products,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 1961, C11. *Time Magazine* derided the suits saying they provide “no more protection against radiation than a raincoat.” “The Sheltered Life,” *Time*, October 20, 1961.

shelter. These questions pervaded the advertisements for shelters as manufacturers made the case that they were the best hope in the face of a terrible threat. Fallout shelter companies were continually charged with taking advantage of helpless citizens during a time of crisis.<sup>239</sup> Some companies went as far as to stress that they sold their shelters at a fair price. Radiation Shelters, Inc. in California ran advertisements stating that, because it was their “patriotic duty to not accept an excess profit in a case directly concerned with possible national disaster or survival,” they would only earn 150 dollars in profit on each shelter.<sup>240</sup> While the image of the family safe in an underground bunker resembled earlier messages about survival, a closer reading reveals deep-seated unease about the costs of survival.

The benefit of fallout shelters weighed heavily on the minds of Americans in the early 1960s. Mass media articles focused on the financial and moral costs of living a sheltered-centered society.<sup>241</sup> A *Time* article from October of 1961, “The Sheltered Life,” summarized the tensions inherent in the shift toward private, home shelters.<sup>242</sup> The article focused on the “profiteering” of shelter manufacturers. Other articles questioned the use of the family in advertisements for shelters. *Redbook* ran an article that questioned the imagery of family used by fallout shelter manufacturers saying, “Life in a private fallout shelter would bear little relation to the reassuring picture that the public is

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<sup>239</sup> “Some Ground Rules for the Shelter Trade,” *Consumer Reports*, February 1962, 98. The article reports that the Federal Trade Commission issued rules for the advertisement of fallout shelters. *Consumer Reports* fails to list any of the requirements and instead listed a series of grievances committed by manufacturers toward consumers and calls for greater consumer protection laws.

<sup>240</sup> The shelters were advertised for \$1995. *Los Angeles Times*, November 5, 1961, 39.

<sup>241</sup> Arthur Waskow, “Shelter-Centered Society,” *Scientific American*, May 1962, 34.

<sup>242</sup> “The Sheltered Life,” *Time*, October 20, 1961. *Time* ran an advertisement for the issue in the *New York Times* calling civil defense “the second deterrent” and that the issue would tell readers “what shelters can and cannot do for his family.” *New York Times*, October 16, 1961, 60.



now being offered by some of the companies selling these shelters. The happy image of father, mother, and all the children sitting snugly together in their new convertible gameroom-shelter, first-aid kit ready but unused, is based on several assumptions that may be grossly inaccurate.”<sup>243</sup> Articles appeared in various magazines opposing the shelter program.<sup>244</sup> Religious periodicals also published articles calling for renewed efforts for peace and opposing the fallout shelter program.<sup>245</sup> Scientific magazines largely opposed the shelter program.<sup>246</sup> Questions about the fallout shelter program entered national dialogue in the 1960s, and civil defense policymakers worked to dispel the negative messages in mass media as well as fight public apathy toward the program. In 1961, they published a pamphlet, *Facts and Fiction About Home Fallout Shelters*, that

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<sup>243</sup> Truth About Fallout Shelters,” *Redbook*, January 1962, 73.

<sup>244</sup> “Let’s Stop the Fallout Shelter Folly!” *Good Housekeeping*, February 1962. *Farm Journal* published an article calling to question the dual-purpose nature of fallout shelters saying calling them the “family room of tomorrow” was a “sugar-coated label” and that Americans ought to reject fallout shelters on the basis that they made idea of atomic warfare acceptable. The article ended by asking, “If we’re reduced again to war—this time by bombs that obliterate all life—does it matter if we survive at all?” “Family Room of Tomorrow,” *Farm Journal*, March 1960, 132. Other examples include, “Fallout Shelters: Dig We Must?,” *Newsweek*, October 02, 1961, 24; “Speaking Out (Case Against Fallout Shelters),” *Saturday Evening Post*, March 31, 1962, 8; “Moral Dilemma of Fallout Shelters,” *Senior Scholastic*, November 29, 1961, 15-19; “Gun Thy Neighbor,” *Time*, August 18, 1961, 58; and “Shelter Skelter,” *Time*, September 1, 1961, 59.

<sup>245</sup> See for example “Ethics at the Shelter Doorway,” *America*, September 30, 1961, 824; and “Shelter Debate,” *America*, July 28, 1962, 543. Other liberal religious periodicals like *Christian Century* and *Commonweal* also ran articles opposing the fallout shelter program. See for example, “Urgently Needed an Ethics for Moles,” *Christian Century*, August 23, 1961, 1006; “Fallout Shelter is Our God,” *Christian Century*, March 7, 1962, 293; and “Lines for a Dedication of a Fallout Shelter,” *Commonweal*, October 12, 1962, 73.

<sup>246</sup> *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* published articles opposing the fallout shelter program as incapable of protecting Americans from the dangers of nuclear war. “Thoughts on Bomb Shelters,” *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, March 1962, 14; “More Important than Shelters,” *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, April 1962, 8; and “Do We Want Fallout Shelters?,” *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, February 1963, 24. The opposition of *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* to civil defense planners’ move to fallout shelters was a complete reversal of their position of the 1950s of supporting the FCDA and running a number of articles written by FCDA officials. Other scientific publications echoed the claims that underground shelters came with a heavy price for humanity. “Effective Bomb Shelters Could Destroy Man Kind,” *Science News Letter*, March 17, 1962, 168. *Science News Letter* offered the most contradictory articles on fallout shelters, less than six months earlier they ran an article, “Fallout Shelters’ ‘Lived-In’ Look” singing the praises of the home fall-out shelter and offering directions at “turning a sheltered into a study, a den, a guest room, a stereo Hi-Fi room, or a utility room.” *Science News Letter*, October 14, 1961, 258.

laid out a number of fallacies in the popular press about the home shelter, and urged Americans to build shelters.<sup>247</sup> The booklet claimed, "The major barrier to public understanding of the need for a massive self-help family fallout shelter campaign continues to be the inability of most people to separate the facts and fiction about survival, coupled with a sense of utter frustration and futility regarding their ability to do anything worthwhile."<sup>248</sup> Constant scrutiny of the benefits of the fallout shelter, charges of profiteering by manufacturers, and a general apathy toward to civil defense preparedness created a limited market for shelters.

Despite the buzz about fallout shelters, few Americans actually constructed them. Public opinion surveys conducted in 1963 following the Cuban Missile Crisis pointed to a new lull in interest on civil defense. Only twenty-five percent of respondents said that they had thought about building shelters.<sup>249</sup> Even with the lack of interest in constructing shelters, most respondents were in favor of fallout shelters.<sup>250</sup> The disconnect identified in this poll, between the lack of construction of shelters by Americans and a faith in shelters, gets back at the fundamental problem that plagued civil defense officials from the beginning. While most Americans could believe that survival might be possible through preparation, few were willing to invest their own resources in guaranteeing that survival. American consumers had lingering doubts about the possibility of survival.

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<sup>247</sup> National Defense Department, Chamber of Commerce of the United States, "Fiction and Facts about Family Fallout Shelters" (Washington: n.p., 1961).

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Gene N. Levine and John Modell, "American Public Opinion and the Fallout-Shelter Issue," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, (29: 2, 1965), 272. In 1960, the percentage of people that had given thought to constructing a home shelter was only 21%. Hazel Gaudet Erskine, "The Polls: Atomic Weapons and the Nuclear Energy," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* (27:2, 1963), 160.

<sup>250</sup> Gene N. Levine and John Modell, "American Public Opinion and the Fallout-Shelter Issue," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, (29: 2, 1965), 272.

These doubts caused much of the inaction that civil defense planners identified as apathy throughout the 1950s and 60s. Business periodicals published articles about slow fallout shelter market. *Business Week* addressed the market for shelters, saying that despite all the talk following the Berlin Crisis fallout shelters became the number one topic of conversation, yet a “plodding business.”<sup>251</sup> *Consumer Reports* analyzed the survival trade saying while it was initially conceived some ten years earlier, it peaked with the Berlin Crisis of 1961 but that the response by consumers was “scarcely overwhelming.”<sup>252</sup> The article continued that investment in shelter seemed mainly to be a habit of the wealthy.<sup>253</sup> *Time* ran its own obituary of the survival market in 1962, blaming the death on “the lull in the cold war.”<sup>254</sup> The marketing of the home fallout shelters raised questions about the role of advertising for something as serious as survival. Repeated calls in the mass media for oversight of the shelter trade and regulation of advertisers’ claims demonstrate the different sensibility inherent in the fallout shelter market than earlier civil defense products that were promoted and sold without question.

For a moment at the end of 1962, it seemed that civil defense might finally come to the forefront of American politics. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, grocery stores

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<sup>251</sup> “Shelters: Lots of Talk, a Plodding Business,” *Business Week*, October 7, 1961, 32. See also “Hazards of Selling Survival Products,” *Business Week*, February 24, 1962, 62. The article talked to manufacturers of equipment for shelters like food rations, dosimeters, and water. It said that distribution of such materials through traditional stores was met with failure, and these companies were forced to distribute their goods through mail-order outlets.

<sup>252</sup> “Enter the Survival Merchants,” *Consumer Reports*, January 1962, 47.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.* Several articles focused on their ostentatious shelters. See for example: “Bachelor’s \$250,000 Bomb Shelter,” *Cosmopolitan*, January 1954, 86; “Fallout Protection: Here are Case Histories of Family Shelters Recently Built in the West,” *Sunset*, November 1961, 107-114; “The Sheltered Life,” *Time*, October 20, 1961 talked about a shelter in Texas that included “an elevator, a pool table, and a keg of wine.”

<sup>254</sup> “From Boom to Bust,” *Time*, May 18, 1962.

reported a run on canned goods and worried citizens overwhelmed the phone lines of local civil defense offices. The fervor died down quickly and in January of 1963, a report by the Associated Press identified a rise in apathy toward civil defense by Americans in all fifty states.<sup>255</sup> Civil defense officials continued to stock community shelters, but rejected the self-help theory of civil defense that had been in place since 1950. Companies no longer mass marketed survival products or shelters. Planning on the national level to protect the American public in case of nuclear war practically stopped due to budget cuts.<sup>256</sup>

Home fallout shelters carried a heavy cost for homeowners, both monetarily in the actual cost of construction and maintenance, and morally with the questions it raised about sharing resources with neighbors and the community in case of attack. While advertisements for fallout shelters and the related accessories continued to use images of home and family, their tone lacked the optimism of those for earlier preparedness products. Survival seemed less guaranteed by the early 1960s and even if one lived, it was at the expense of friends and neighbors who lacked their own shelter. The promotion of fallout shelters marked the last gasp of the self-help, family-centered civil defense campaign. By the mid-1960s, an emphasis on public shelters replaced home-based preparedness.

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<sup>255</sup> "Civil Defense Apathy Rising, Say Officials," *Chicago Tribune*, January 20, 1963, B8.

<sup>256</sup> B. Wayne Blanchard, *American Civil Defense 1945-1984: The Evolution of Programs and Policies* (FEMA: National Emergency Center, vol. 2, no.2), 9-13.

## CHAPTER 8

### ANYONE FOR SURVIVAL?

In 1965, the *Saturday Evening Post* questioned what happened to fallout shelters. The article, “Anyone for Survival?” compared the fallout shelter trade to a national fad, such as hula-hoops, and reported the experience of a shelter dealer in Michigan who could not even give away his remaining fallout shelters.<sup>257</sup> The lukewarm response to civil defense consumer goods suggests American ambivalence toward civil defense; opinion polls offer evidence of an even more complicated public reaction.

Polls during World War II had indicated a faith in the necessity of civil defense, but by the close of the 1950s, Americans began to see futility in such efforts. Thirty percent of those polled in 1945 favored a mandatory one-year training period for young women in “civilian defense or other work that would be useful in wartime.”<sup>258</sup> In 1953, not even five percent of respondents said that they were doing “any work in the civilian defense program” and only two percent planned to construct a shelter in the next year.<sup>259</sup> Americans did not completely reject civil defense, however. In 1956, sixty-five percent of those polled approved of a “plan to require every man and woman to spend an average of one hour a week in Civil Defense work.”<sup>260</sup> The seeming disconnect between the two

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<sup>257</sup> Alfred Balk, “Anyone for Survival?” *The Saturday Evening Post*, March 27, 1965, 72-74.

<sup>258</sup> Gallup Poll #359, October 31, 1945, in Gallup Brain, online database, cited March 14, 2006.

<sup>259</sup> Gallup Poll #517, July 2, 1953, in Gallup Brain, online database, cited March 14, 2006.

<sup>260</sup> Gallup Poll # 568, August 1, 1956, in Gallup Brain, online database, cited March 14, 2006.

polls indicates the public zealously Americans quickly afforded government programs in the conservative postwar period, but the personal ambivalence many Americans harbored for civil defense. These and other Gallup Polls indicate that a wide gap existed between the narrative of civil defense in government publications and the popular media and in actual practice. In reality, Americans expressed a more complicated attitude toward civil defense than the exuberant attitude claimed by FCDA officials.

Interest in civil defense swelled with the tides of international politics. The first wave of interest in the early 1950s coincided with the testing of atomic weapons by the Soviet Union. The next fifteen years continued much in the same way. Cycles of apathy, enthusiasm, and a return to apathy guided both public interest in civil defense products and legislative funding for preparedness. Budget appropriations never increased to levels needed to prepare Americans adequately for possible attack. From 1951 to 1961, civil defense officials requested \$2.5 billion, but Congress only appropriated \$622 million for the program, only about 25% of the amount officials needed for the a fully functioning program.<sup>261</sup>

By the end of the 1950s, Americans' modest interest in civil defense became clear. Also, national magazines began to focus on the futility of preparedness. Women, once the key to civil defense, rejected such policies. In 1955, women in New York City acted out against the evacuation drills of Operation Alert using the "image of enraged motherhood."<sup>262</sup> The women, using their traditional role as mothers protested the

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<sup>261</sup> R. Brody and E. Tufte, "Constituent-Congressional Communication on Fall- out Shelters: The Congressional Polls," *Journal of Communication*, (14: 1, 1964), 35.

<sup>262</sup> Dee Garrison, "Our Skirts Gave Them Courage: The Civil Defense Protest Movement in New York City, 1955-1961," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, edited by Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 202.

government policy and rallied for an end to “atomic testing, the arms race, and civil defense efforts.”<sup>263</sup> Even as President Kennedy called for the construction of private home shelters in 1961, most Americans ignored such calls.<sup>264</sup> Civil defense formed an important part of the political discussion in the 1950s and early 60s, but the historical record indicates a much more ambivalent relationship by most Americans with the program than previously thought.

While civil defense effectively functioned to offer reassuring messages about survival, it also offered important instruction about what it took to be a good American during the post-World War II period. Official materials of the FCDA and the Ad Council, as well as advertisements and information produced by private parties all reinforced messages about America during the Cold War. The emphasis on the nuclear family and the home as the site of survival privileged suburban families as the norm during the period. Further, appeals to men and women as mothers and fathers, placed the nuclear family at the center of the civil defense effort and as the most prized unit in the militarized American society during the Cold War.

In popular memory, civil defense is recalled as the construction of fallout shelters by naïve Americans in their basements and backyards.<sup>265</sup> This kitschy characterization conceals the real tensions of civil defense in the 1950s and 1960s. The informational materials, advertisements, and products developed for civil defense lends insight into the

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<sup>263</sup> Dee Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon: Why Civil Defense Never Worked* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 209.

<sup>264</sup> Margot A. Henriksen, *Dr. Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 200.

<sup>265</sup> See for example the website [www.CONELRAD.com](http://www.CONELRAD.com). The movie *Blast From the Past*, directed by Hugh Scott (1999), focused on a family that lived in their fallout shelter in southern California for thirty years and their introduction to late 1990s Los Angeles.

tensions that drove American society in the years following World War II. They offer a real understanding of the ways in which Americans were presented with messages about atomic war and survival, home and family, and religion and civic duty. Civil defense functioned as more than a just a method of preparing Americans for atomic war, it helped create a new sensibility about nuclear weapons and the Cold War, that lasted through the early 1960s.



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## VITA

Graduate College  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Angela Christine Moor

Local Address:

3913 Lighthouse Ave.  
Las Vegas, Nevada 89110

Degree:

Bachelor of Arts, History and Political Science, 2003  
University of Nevada, Reno

Special Honors and Awards:

Recipient of Harold and Carol Boyer Award, 2007  
Winner Carol Corbett Prize, Best Paper in Nevada History, 2008  
Member Phi Alpha Theta, History Honor Society, inducted April 2007  
Member Phi Kappa Phi, Honor Society, inducted April 2008

Presentations:

"Operation Hospitality: Las Vegas and Civil Defense, 1951-1959," Nevada  
Historical Society Biennial Conference on Nevada History, May 24, 2008.

Thesis Title: Selling Civil Defense: The Politics and Commerce of Preparedness, 1950-1963

Thesis Examination Committee:

Chairperson, Dr. Elizabeth Fraterrigo, Ph.D.  
Committee Member, Dr. Elizabeth White Nelson, Ph.D.  
Committee Member, Dr. Andrew Kirk, Ph.D.  
Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. Robert Futrell, Ph.D.