

Duck and Cover: Civil Defense Education as Emotional Management

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Introduction

On August 29, 1949 the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) successfully tested its own atomic bomb. The U.S.S.R., still under Stalin, made no public announcement of the test, but within a few days, due to airborne testing by the Air Force, the United States became aware Soviets had detonated a nuclear bomb. President Harry S. Truman revealed the test to the public on September 23, 1949.¹ In response to the successful Soviet explosion and the growing tensions of the Cold War, Congress passed The Federal Civil Defense Act of 1950.² Under this Act, the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) was charged with promoting the dissemination of civil defense information and training. The Act did not allocate federal resources for civil defense projects, yet the FCDA nevertheless was charged with producing educational materials “intended to mobilize state and local agencies as well as private individuals to spend their own funds to implement programs.”³

Excepting Japan, given the WWII bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, no country’s people had a better understanding of the impact of a nuclear explosion than the U.S., where press coverage on the effect of these bombs “left no doubt that an atomic attack on American cities would be a catastrophe too horrible to contemplate.”⁴ Civil defense authorities sought to challenge and alter that narrative in an attempt to “check American anxiety about the bomb.”⁵ Historian Guy Oakes explains civil defense authorities’ rationale: “If the American people, motivated by a rational fear of nuclear attack were convinced they could survive by reason of careful planning, sound training, and firm moral discipline, then the problem of national will would be solved.”⁶ The fear of a Soviet attack was a rational one, but U.S. civil defense authorities believed that fear could be managed; in essence a form of emotional management, fear could be used as a motivating factor, not a paralyzing one. For civil defense authorities, civil defense became absolutely necessary for national security; citizens could be “trained in the procedures required to protect them in an unreflective, swift, and automatic execution of recommended civil defense techniques.”⁷ Americans would need to learn techniques of survival, and one of the best places for those techniques to be taught was schools. One

technique came to be known as “duck and cover,” the actual term most likely originating from Helen Seth-Smith, assistant headmistress of the Potomac School, an all-girls private school in McLean, Virginia.⁸ In fact, many schools were already using a form of duck and cover before the U.S. released the short film *Duck and Cover* in 1952.

Using cultural history’s analytic methods and using the film as my primary data source, in this paper I explore the effects of the Cold War-era film *Duck and Cover*, used in the U.S. to enact a form of emotional management. Much like intellectual history, cultural history’s methods allow us to study people’s values and beliefs of a particular time and place. Through the lens of cultural history, we can look at attitudes, assumptions, values, and rituals which take place within a historical and cultural context. Cultural historians seek entrée into the minds of those who lived in the past, but without forgetting how those processes inform the present. Such methods offer insight into how the present is but a transition from the past, a view that hopefully gives a clearer perspective of the present world and how it evolved, helping us better to understand the present and guide us into the future. “The effects of a particular ideological work or aspect of hegemony can only be understood in relation to attitudes and beliefs that are already lived.... Ideologies always work upon a ground, that ground is culture. To insist on this is also to insist on history....”⁹

In this paper, I analyze the film *Duck and Cover* as a cultural artifact that reflects the ideology of the Cold War era. While we often think of film as entertainment, it also represents an important cultural product. Film contains “invaluable records of events, customs, gestures, and ways of life.”¹⁰ It can also provide us with a means to examine national identity and how cultural traits have been asserted, often by building upon assumed cultural beliefs and values, seeking to strengthen them. On December 28, 2004, the Library of Congress announced its annual list of 25 motion pictures to be added to the National Film Registry, chosen for their significance “culturally, historically, and aesthetically.” The roughly 10-minute film *Duck and Cover* was selected for that year’s inclusion. The short film was seen by millions of schoolchildren, among others, during the 1950s and today remains available for viewing on the internet.¹¹ In examining the film *Duck and Cover*, I make use of the tools of film analysis to address the following questions: What influenced the production of the film and what was its intent and meaning? How are images used in the film and why were they chosen? What does the film tell us about attitudes during the Cold War, how was the film received at the time and how does it serve its intended purpose of emotional management?

Duck and Cover: What Children Saw

The film begins with Bert the Turtle calmly strolling along a path surrounded by trees to a deedle-dum-dum jingle called *Bert the Turtle (Duck*

and Cover), written by Leon Carr, Leo Corday, and Leo Langlois.¹² Bert is dressed in tie and pith helmet, similar to those worn by civil defense workers. The turtle walks in peaceful solitude, brandishing a smile, sniffing a flower as he strolls. The narrator tells us Bert is always cognizant of the potential for danger and, as he walks under a tree, a monkey hanging from a limb dangles a lit stick of dynamite that subsequently explodes. As this incident unfolds, the narrator assures us that Bert did not get hurt during the explosion because he knew just what to do. Being a turtle, Bert has ducked and covered within his shell to protect himself from the blast. When invited by the narrator to come out of his shell “to meet all these nice people,” Bert is hesitant, eyes moving from side to side, “because he is a very careful fellow,” only slowly reaching for the abandoned pith helmet dropped when he ducked inside his shell. Then film then cuts to a classroom of schoolchildren practicing the duck-and-cover technique, directed by a male authority figure who does not appear to be a teacher. The class is racially mixed, and includes one African-American boy and one girl. The male authority figure mimics the words of the narrator and children duck under their desks with hands clasped behind their necks.

In an attempt to calm children viewing the film, the narrator reminds them of the familiar fire drill and the use of traffic lights as means that keep them safe from danger. “Now we must be ready for a new danger: the atomic bomb,” warns the narrator. “There is a bright flash, brighter than the sun, brighter than anything you have ever seen. If you are not ready and do not know what to do it could hurt you in different ways.” The narrator continues by explaining an atomic bomb could knock someone down or throw them against a tree, this said as the film shows a tree and house being demolished by the blast. “The atomic blast could burn you worse than a terrible sunburn, especially when you are not covered,” cautions the narrator. The next scene shows a female teacher in front of her class with a drawing of a turtle on the blackboard. She instructs the students how to duck and cover under a table or desk. Subsequently, in a different classroom, an older student named Betty asks her teacher how she will know when an atomic bomb explodes. Through the voice of the narrator, the teacher explains that there may not be a warning or signal but civil defense workers will do their best to sound an alarm so we can find shelter. She warns, if you do not get a warning but see a flash you must “do like Bert; duck and cover and do it fast.”

The scene then shifts to a group of high school students, both boys and girls, where one boy shows the audience how to duck and cover in a hallway. The message “being ready means we must be ready to take care of ourselves when adults might not be present to help,” is constantly emphasized throughout the film. Next, after getting ready for school and following a kiss from their mother, Paul and Patty are walking to school when they see a flash; they immediately duck and cover. Tony is on his way

to a cub scout meeting on his bike when he sees the flash and immediately ducks and covers. “Atta boy!” exclaims the narrator, “he knows that the flash means to act fast. He stays down until he knows the danger is over.” Tony is helped to his feet by a civil defense worker. “We must obey the civil defense worker,” advises the narrator. The film then shows students how to duck and cover on a bus, and later shows a family on a picnic when they see the flash. “This family knows what to do,” explains the narrator, “They know that even a thin cloth helps protect them; even a newspaper can save you from a bad burn. . . . No matter where we live in the city or the country,” the narrator warns, “we must be ready all the time for the atomic bomb. Duck and cover! That’s the first thing to do.” As the film closes, the scene moves to another classroom when the narrator suggests, “If you don’t know what to do, ask your teacher when the film is over. Discuss what to do in different places if a bomb explodes.” Bert the Turtle closes the film with his only dialogue in the film: “Remember what to do friends. Now tell me right out loud—what are you supposed to do when you see the flash?” Bert then ducks and covers in his shell and the film ends on the U.S. civil defense logo, a symbol also used clearly to mark public fallout shelters.

The Making of Duck and Cover

It is clear the FCDA envisioned schools as the primary disseminator of civil defense education. Some school personnel were concerned about the identification of children post-blast, so San Francisco, Detroit, Denver, and Seattle followed Los Angeles in issuing a form of “dog tag” called identification necklaces. As one ad stated, the necklace is “so flexible it cannot kink, economical, comfortable and very strong.”¹³ In extreme cases, some educators, without the guidance of the FCDA, recommended the “tattooing of schoolchildren under their left arm with the blood type,” assuming, “this would help in the treatment of the victims of an atomic attack.”¹⁴

The National Security Research Board (NSRB), eventually consolidated into the FCDA, understood the power of cinema at the time and believed film the best means to impress upon the population the need to embrace civil defense education. By the 1950s Americans were familiar with the cartoon images of Walt Disney, and Disney’s widespread appeal was not lost on the producers of *Duck and Cover*; just consider their character Bert the Turtle.¹⁵ One NSRB report explained to potential civil defense film producers:

We are convinced that you can impress any group of people most deeply by presenting a series of pictures about persons with whom they will identify themselves. The audience will learn the bomb’s true danger and the steps to be taken to escape from it by watching these characters.¹⁶

The NSRB contracted with Castle Films, a major distributor of films produced for civil defense. The majority of profits from the production of the films went to distributors; the studio producing the film received royalties for each print sold. Castle Films' James Franey contacted Leo Langlois of Archer Film Productions in New York City. At the time Archer, the best in their field, was a production house that held commercial television accounts with such mega-corporations as Chevrolet, Proctor & Gamble, and the American Tobacco Company. After meeting with Franey, Langlois reported to Archer that "the concept was just merely civil defense for the schools and how the kids could protect themselves and things like that...what do you do when you see the big flash...[and to] eliminate any panic possibilities."¹⁷ Ray Mauer, a script writer at Archer conceptualized Bert the Turtle by creating a character that appealed both to kids and adults. Although the character Bert the Turtle was designed to appeal to all age groups, especially kids, "he is drawn almost as an old man with a box tie, a wrinkled neck, and a civil defense style helmet, while the monkey is drawn as a classically mischievous kid."¹⁸ Bert exemplifies calmness under fire—and even optimism.



Bert the Turtle being menaced by a mischievous monkey, the image used to show children in schools the necessity of preparing for a nuclear explosion. United States Office of Civil Defense and Archer Film Productions, 1951. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

The FCDA was pleased with the script, so Archer contracted with animator Leo Calonius, who had worked for Disney, to create the animated version. Bert's original tormentor was a skunk, but writers felt a monkey might be more appealing to girls and women. Anthony Rizzo, an Italian immigrant who arrived with his family at Ellis Island, directed *Duck and Cover*. Schoolchildren in New York City and Astoria, Queens participated in the film as actors due to budget constraints.¹⁹ The FCDA wanted to get

the film out as quickly as possible, believing Bert the Turtle might become as popular as Disney's Donald Duck or Pluto.²⁰

The Role of the Media and Dissemination

During the post-war years and into the 1950s, television in the lives of Americans grew considerably; the FCDA understood television's power. By 1951, 12 million Americans had televisions in their homes and by 1955 half the population had them. In 1951, the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) produced a seven-part series called *Survival* with the message, "If you think a falling A-bomb means the end of everything, this remarkable report will change your mind." An article in the national weekly *Collier's* magazine lauded the approach of civil defense, stating the "lethal power" of the atomic bomb was exaggerated; as long as you found an air-raid shelter you could survive as close as "three hundred feet to ground zero...."²¹ So experts from all over the country—including psychologists, psychiatrists, and physicians—now applied themselves to convincing the American public the atomic threat was not as bad as had been painted and their work "contributed powerfully to the emergence of a decisive and unsettling new state in American cultural and political engagement with atomic weapons."²²

The first public showing of *Duck and Cover* took place on January 9, 1952 at the launching of the Alert America convoy in Washington D.C.²³ The Alert American convoy was designed as three convoys with ten large trailers that toured the country for nine months in 1952. Approximately 1 million people ultimately viewed the exhibits which consisted of dioramas, posters, 3-D models, and a small theater showing *Duck and Cover*. The convoy also showed the more adult-oriented civil defense film *Our Cities Must Fight*,²⁴ the plot of which is built around two adult males in an office setting having a conversation about the atomic bomb. *Our Cities Must Fight* emphasizes the theme of American courage, characterized by this example of the characters' dialogue:

Everything we hope for, everything we believe in, everything America has fought for will depend on us and what we do. You know a lot of people behind the Iron Curtain are watching whether we can take it if we're attacked. They're carefully measuring our courage, our capacity to fight, our capacity for sacrifice.... The question is do Americans have the guts?²⁵

The Role of Schools

In essence, public schools became the first line of defense used to protect Americans from the atomic bomb, remaking schooling into a form of emotional management.²⁶ The country's hope and future then came to depend upon how the U.S. approached the atomic threat, as the popular magazine *Ladies Home Journal* urged in August 1951: "The inner citadel of

our safety lies in the hearts and minds of our people.”²⁷ However, serious concern emerged among civil defense administrators about how educators might respond to the inclusion of civil defense materials, including films, into the curriculum, so civil defense administrators sought and received the blessing of the National Education Association. To paraphrase Leo Langlois, who attended the NEA meeting in its Washington, D.C. office: the NEA meeting was merely civil defense administrators protecting their rear ends and making sure they had endorsement from the schools.²⁸

Educators most likely first saw *Duck and Cover* on January 24, 1952 in Manhattan; the film was noted for its “mental hygiene approach” and its “cheerfulness and optimism.” Students described the film as “interesting,” and as not too “babyish” or too “grown-up.”²⁹ By the end of 1952, 88% of U.S. schools, primary and secondary, had some form of civil defense preparation education in their curricula. In fact, in many ways other educational attempts with survival skills and proper training “fortified the institutional links between the schools and the national security state.”³⁰ Public school civil defense education, “when combined with organized community activities, “gave federal, state, and local government extra access” across the nation.³¹ Post-WWII, no institution was better suited than schools to build upon the patriotic fervor following the successful Soviet atomic bomb test in 1949.³²

The Schools and Civil Defense Policy

What was the official civil defense policy for U.S. schools during the 1950s? The Civil Defense Education Project, in charge of public-school programs and under the FCDA, picked the slogan “education for national survival.”³³ Of course this implied that if one was properly prepared one could survive an atomic attack. It is important to keep in mind that this generation still recalled the “surprise” December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, and how the U.S. was caught off guard and not fully prepared. Additionally, the Civil Defense Education Project had a close relationship with the Boy Scouts of America, which makes sense based upon those patriotic values and survival skills taught informally to scouts, in contrast to the teachings of public schools. The National Parent Teachers Association, better known as the PTA, urged its members to “develop mental health programs in response to atomic anxiety. ...[and warning] the future mental health of an entire generation depended upon parents and teachers’ abilities to maintain calmness and transmit a feeling of assuredness.”³⁴

The Civil Defense Education Project created curricular materials for use in the home, such as skits parents could use to teach their children about civil defense. Some of the curriculum’s titles include: *Let’s Plan What to Do Now*, *Operation Home Shelter*, and *Until the Doctor Comes*—and these materials always promoted, by design, the “qualities of cheerfulness and

optimism.”³⁵ So, through the Civil Defense Education Project, schools became a primary disseminator of civil defense training and materials. The “central message, fundamental to all government civil defense materials, was that you could survive an atomic attack if you learned the preparatory steps and took the correct actions. Survival, therefore, was a choice.”³⁶ Also implied is assurance that governmental and community leaders, including teachers, are in control of the situation, so, by following a leader’s lead, not only will you will be safe, but social order and stability will be maintained. The Atomic Energy Commission actually recommends, “If all the school children in the nation could witness an A-Bomb test (as school children had in Indian Springs, Nevada) it would do much to destroy the fear and uncertainty which now exists.”³⁷

This knowledge raises a critical question: why were U.S. educators who participated in civil defense training so compliant, and why did they accept this governmental form of emotional management? From our 21st-century perspective these activities and recommendations seem beyond bizarre and totally irrational. But, as many educational historians point out, the U.S. educational establishment was under attack even before the beginning of the Cold War-era. As Herbert Kliebard argues in *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*, “Almost without warning, the decade of the 1950s became a period of criticism of American education unequalled in modern times.”³⁸ Yes, this was the McCarthy era, but in his argument Kliebard highlights critique by Arthur Bestor, Hyman Rickover, Robert Hutchins, and James Conant. Diane Ravitch surmises, “The theme that American education was being subverted by Communists and Socialists was publicized through the activities of such groups as Milo McDonald’s American Education Association, Lucille Crain’s *Educational Review*, and Allen Zoll’s National Council for American Education.”³⁹ In December 1949, *The American Legion Magazine* published the article, “The Commies Go After the Kids: How the Reds Inject Their Poison into Children,”⁴⁰ that attacks music, theater, after-school programs, comic books, and summer camps; it was reprinted by the right-wing National Council for American Education for “mass distribution.”⁴¹ The American Legion continued its focus, publishing the article, “Why You Buy Books that Sell Communism,” reprinted in *Catholic Digest*.⁴²

So education became the U.S.’ “first line of civil defense,” and our only hope for survival was the well-prepared citizen acting calmly and rationally, showing no sign of panic or fear. *The* key player in this first-line national defense was the classroom teacher. The teacher, a prominent figure in *Duck and Cover*, came to exemplify the well-prepared citizen by exhibiting a calm, in-control demeanor, just like Bert the Turtle.⁴³ At the time, the teacher, already generally perceived as a moral authority, represented a form of authority to be respected and listened to. The teacher became the model

to imitate: courageous, calm, and one to follow without reflection. Andrew Grossman, in *Neither Dead Nor Red*, describes the teacher's dutiful action as one form of the "militarization of civilian life. Educators [became] draftees in a civilian strategy preparing for the next war."⁴⁴

When it came to civil defense preparation, civil defense authorities found educators to be in an "extremely cooperative mood, eager to show their loyalty and worth by contributing to national defense. In fact, educators sometimes seemed more anxious to help the FCDA promote civil defense than the FCDA was to use their help."⁴⁵ By jumping on the civil defense bandwagon, schools may have been able to deflect public education's criticism of the time and to present teachers as patriotic citizens, not people who put the "nation at risk," so to speak. So "public school officials recognized in the new civil defense [program] an opportunity to serve their country while fortifying their profession," and, in so doing, demonstrate "the importance of the nation's schools to national security, thereby justifying federal aid to education."⁴⁶

One notable example of civil defense education for schools took place in upstate New York in 1951. Edwin van Kleeck, assistant New York state commissioner for education who coordinated civil defense for schools and colleges in New York, seemed concerned civil defense activities might affect the "emotional health" of students, yet appeared pleased when students took to their "drills calmly."⁴⁷ Van Kleeck emphasized, "With civil defense in the schools, the key success is the teacher," and NYC teachers—all 37,000 of them—were required to complete Red Cross training.⁴⁸ Van Kleeck's concern brings up an important question: Were there psychological effects on students in the early 1950s due to drilling and participating in civil defense educational techniques such as duck and cover? Writing in 1951, a New Jersey assistant commissioner of education stated, "Our experience in the public school has shown that many children in the kindergarten and the primary grades have been upset by mismanaged air drills, some of them to such an extent that they were afraid to go to school."⁴⁹ A Michigan educator in 1952 noted a decline in the number of civil defense drills because of the anxiety exhibited in some students. One teacher used duck-and-cover drills to punish misbehaving students. Harold Lane, in the article "What Are We Doing to Our Children?" published in *The National Elementary Principal*, calls showing *Duck and Cover* "undesirable" as "it can only create fear in children with which their resources are inadequate to deal."⁵⁰

A student during the early 1950s, sociologist Todd Gitlin recalls, "Every so often, out of the blue a teacher would pause in the middle of class and call out, 'Take cover!'" Another child of the Cold War era, Robert Musil, writes about his experience growing up in the early 1950s. He recalls, "it was with that awful knowledge—we were not safe at all—that I experienced duck and cover drills and developed an early disillusionment with, even disdain for, authority."⁵¹

Civil Defense Education's Critics

Historian Guy Oakes writes,

...one of the most fascinating aspects of the civil defense program was the tension between the official conception, promoted to the public as self-protection for survival, and the unofficial conception, which held that self-protection was a vain but not utterly feasible illusion, useful and even necessary to produce the public resolve necessary to prosecute the Cold War.⁵²

Oakes alludes to connections between public policy, propaganda, marketing, and ethics. Civil defense planning education in schools became the primary means to convince the public that they might survive an atomic attack, creating a form of political legitimacy through consensus to protect "freedom and democracy."⁵³ Yet a problem arises when the attempt to protect actually results in the undermining of freedom and democracy. Children and adults were taught that fear threatens national security, that Americans must not panic and must stand steadfast against a common enemy, in this case the Soviet bloc and its attempt at expansion. So, "civil defense became a way of life in American schools, not by the concerted efforts of federal agents, but in preconceived fashion, as each group incorporated the new demands of the atomic age into its traditional preoccupations."⁵⁴

Civil defense education, exemplified by films like *Duck and Cover*, was not universally adored. The Levittown, New York Educational Association and the national Members of the Committee for the Study of War Tensions in Children saw *Duck and Cover* as a "terrifying concept" and as doing an actual disservice to children. But supporters of *Duck and Cover*, such as one civil defense official from New York, challenged the critics, claiming critics were following the Communist party line in attacking civil defense policy and associated activities.

Conclusion

Grossman concludes that the FCDA and its civil defense education programs, exemplified by *Duck and Cover*, operated as a "quasi-militarization" of civilian life used as the best way to manage and shape how the polity viewed nuclear war. "The Cold War was serious business," he argues, and "the institutions for shaping public opinion and public culture were tied directly to the wartime state between 1939 and 1945. They are still with us today."⁵⁵ Grossman expresses concern that films easily accessed on YouTube, like *Atomic Café* (1982), that mock the era and educational programs like *Duck and Cover* "miss the point of why such a program was launched, how it functioned, and what consequences it produced."⁵⁶ Teachers played a central role in the dissemination of civil defense materials and coordinating bomb drills such as duck-and-cover.

The goal of the FCDA was emotional management of the populace: keeping citizens calm, ideally avoiding panic in the event of an atomic explosion. To understand teacher complicity at this time it is necessary to understand their world post-WWII. The Cold War era fostered a conservative political climate which affected schools. At the time, public schools were under attack and participation in civil defense provided a sort of defensive message: that teachers were an instrumental force in fostering American patriotism through civil defense activities. Furthermore, teacher participation suggested to the American public that schools would protect their children while they were under the schools' care.⁵⁷ By the mid-1950s, authorities began to phase out use of films like *Duck and Cover* and *Our Cities Must Fight*, and the FCDA actually recommended that early civil defense "films be returned to the FCDA's Motion Picture Board, presumably so that they could be destroyed," since these films were made obsolete due to new weapons technology.⁵⁸ But if we think the concept of civil defense education through public schooling is merely historical, that would be a mistake. In the early years of the Reagan administration, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) created guidelines to teach U.S. children that nuclear war was survivable. On May 25, 1983 the San Francisco board of education voted against use of this program, insisting it would give "false hope" to children. One page in the federal guide "suggested that children plan a dinner menu for a bomb shelter."⁵⁹

In 2003, federal agencies, including the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Homeland Security, the CIA, the Department of Labor, FEMA, the CDC, etc., created a guide specifically for federal employees, largely directed to Washington, D.C.-area employees. "While radioactive, biological, and chemical weapons do pose a threat," states the guide, "they are attacks that you and your family as federal employees can survive if you keep a cool head and follow the instructions given by your local responders."⁶⁰ So the purpose and message of *Duck and Cover* is alive and well! Some observers argue U.S. schools' recent institution of lockdown procedures, active-shooter drills, and the notion of shelter-in-place may have the same psychological impact on children that civil defense drills had in the 1950s. Indeed, there is evidence schoolchildren have begun to have nightmares after being told to hide themselves in their cubbies while the police and school staff conduct active-shooter drills.⁶¹

The civil defense education programs of the 1950s were a form of emotional management wherein public schooling was effectively remade into the means of that management. A concept that mimics modern participation in activities like 1950s' civil defense education drills is "theater of reassurance." Coined in the aftermath of 9/11, it is defined as a performance that helps people get through their daily lives without being paralyzed by traumatic memories of past events.⁶²

In his 1949 Nobel Prize in Literature banquet speech William Faulkner opines, “Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: When will I be blown up?”⁶³ One year after atomic bombs were dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Lewis Mumford writes,

Life is now reduced to purely existential terms: existence toward death...the young who grow up in this world are completely demoralized...the belief in continuity, the sense of future that holds promises disappears: the certainty of sudden obliteration cuts across every long term plan, and every activity is more or less reduced to the time-span of a single day, on the assumption that it may be the last day.⁶⁴

As we read Mumford’s Cold War-era words in 2020, his words have a prophetic ring. While the world struggles to cope with a global pandemic and systemic racism’s effects, Americans are once again experiencing a dramatic, traumatic fear of the unknown. While seeking physical safety from those who “might” have the virus, we struggle to balance our own emotional stability with the human need for social interaction. Today we are being told by the authorities we must protect ourselves, we must remain vigilant, self-reliant, steadfast, and shelter in place, directions eerily reminiscent of Cold War-era fallout shelter precautions. We are told we must obey and listen to the authorities, for they are knowledgeable and have our best interest in mind—although they send mixed and confused messages. As African Americans are particularly susceptible to the SARS-CoV-2 virus due largely to systemic poverty arising from racism, the inequitable outcomes of the virus paired with police brutality have left people of color demoralized, with no trust in authority, seeing no future under the present system, and never knowing when it might be the last day. In fact, it seems to me the Cold War-era title of Mumford’s article comes across as more-than-relevant to today’s dilemma: “Gentlemen, Are You Mad?”⁶⁵

Endnotes

- ¹ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2005), 35. Also see Ross Gregory, *Cold War in America, 1946–1990* (New York, NY: Facts on File, Inc., 2003).
- ² The Federal Civil Defense Act of 1950, P. L. 920, 81st Congress (64 Stat. 1245).
- ³ JoAnne Brown, “A Is for Atom, B Is for Bomb: Civil Defense in American Public Education, 1948–1963,” *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (June 1988): 70. Also see Andrew Grossman, *Neither*

- Dead Nor Red: Civilian Defense and American Political Development During the Early Cold War* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001), 39. The FCDA consolidated the Office of Civil Defense and the National Securities Research Board.
- 4 Guy Oakes, *The Imaginary War* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 52; Mary McCarthy, "America the Beautiful: Humanist in the Bath tub," *Commentary* 4 (December 1947): 205.
 - 5 Oakes, *The Imaginary War*, 52.
 - 6 *Ibid.*, 63.
 - 7 *Ibid.*, 80.
 - 8 Helen Seth-Smith was a native of the United Kingdom and taught at the Potomac School from 1938–1961. She also held an interest in introducing her girls to principles and activities similar to those of the Boy Scouts of America.
 - 9 Richard Johnson, "Three Problematics: Elements of a Theory of Working-Class Culture," *Working-Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory*, eds. John Clarke, Chas Critcher, and Richard Johnson (London, UK: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 234. See also Geoffrey Ely, "What Is Cultural History?," *New German Critique* 65 (Spring–Summer, 1995): 19–36.
 - 10 Tom Gunning, "Film Studies," *The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Analysis* (London, UK: SAGE, 2008): 194.
 - 11 *Duck and Cover*, directed by Anthony Rizzo (United States Office of Civil Defense and Archer Film Productions, 1951), short film, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mbrs01836081/>
 - 12 Dick Baker, vocalist, *Bert the Turtle (Duck and Cover)*, by Leon Carr, Leo Corday, and Leo Langlois, recorded 1951, Coral Records/Decca, vinyl single. Not only did this tune serve as the theme for *Duck and Cover*, it was released as a single by Two Ton Baker in 1953, selling three million copies. See Daniel Eagan, *America's Film Legacy: The Authoritative Guide to the Landmark Movies in the National Film Registry* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010), 452, <https://archive.org/details/americasfilmlega0000eaga/page/452/mode/2up>
 - 13 Brown, "A Is for Atom, B Is for Bomb," 82. Brown notes that due to the post-WWII baby boom public school enrollments "jumped from 25 million in 1950, to 30 million in 1955, to 40 million in 1965," 87. Ads for children's identification necklaces appear in the April 1951 issue of the periodical *The School Executive*.
 - 14 Edward Geist, *Armageddon Insurance: Civil Defense in the United States and Soviet Union, 1945–1991* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 70–71.

- ¹⁵ At the time of *Duck and Cover*, Disney was working on multiple, feature-length, animated films such as *Cinderella* (1950), *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), and *Peter Pan* (1953).
- ¹⁶ Arnold Ringstad, "The Evolution of American Civil Defense Film Rhetoric," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14, no. 4 (2012), 100. See also John Hart to John DeChant, NSRB, 18 October 1950, Box 13, Folder E4-31, National Archives Record Group 304, The National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD; and John Bradley to Leslie Kullenberg, 18 October 1950, Box 13, Folder E4-31, National Archives Record Group 304, The National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.
- ¹⁷ conelrad.com, *All Things Atomic: The Golden Age of Homeland Security*, n.d., 4, <http://www.conelrad.com/index.php>. "Conelrad" is an abbreviation for Control of Electronic Radiation. See also Geist, *Armageddon Insurance*, 70.
- ¹⁸ Robert A. Jacobs, "Atomic Kids: Duck and Cover and Atomic Alert Teach American Children How to Survive Atomic Attack," *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 40, no. 1 (2010): 28.
- ¹⁹ conelrad.com, *All Things Atomic*, Part 2, 2. Robert Middleton, a character actor and frequent hire of Archer narrates the film. Another character actor, Carl Richey, speaks Bert's only line in the film: "Remember what to do friends. Now tell me right out loud. What are you supposed to do when you see a flash? Duck and Cover!"; *Ibid.*, Part 3, 1.
- ²⁰ Ringstad, "The Evolution of American Civil Defense Film Rhetoric," 100.
- ²¹ Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York, NY, 1985), 325. The *Collier's* article was based on a publication by Richard Gerstell, *How to Survive an Atomic Bomb* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1950). Gerstell was a radiologist and consultant to the Pentagon's Office of Civil Defense. Of course, one had to be alerted to go to a civil defense shelter, usually by an air-raid siren. Public shelters were identified by a black and yellow civil defense triangle symbol, the air-raid shelter being the safest choice for protection from an atomic bomb. Duck and cover was the procedure if one did not have immediate access to an air-raid shelter. See John M. Lawlor, Jr., *Photographs and Pamphlet about Nuclear Fallout: The Constitution Community: Postwar United States (1945–1970)* (College Park, MD: The National Archives and Records Administration, 2000), 3.
- ²² Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, 333.
- ²³ Photos can be viewed at <https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/alert-america-u-s-national-archives/cwJCMrc3sxGJLg?hl=en>

- ²⁴ *Our Cities Must Fight*, directed by Anthony Rizzo (New York, NY: Archer Film Productions, 1951), short film.
- ²⁵ Ringstad, “The Evolution of American Civil Defense Film Rhetoric,” 103. This quotation is from the 1951 short film *Our Cities Must Fight*.
- ²⁶ Charles A. Quattlebaum, “Federal Activities in Education for the Defense of the United States,” *Education* 72 (June 1952): 693. Quattlebaum argues that the Morrill Act, ROTC, military colleges, WWII training, and the army and naval war colleges are examples of the U.S. using education as a line of defense. One could contend that the National Defense Education Act and most educational reform reports since the 1980s, beginning with *A Nation at Risk* and continuing through *America 2000*, *Goals 2000*, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, *Race to the Top*, and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, are also forms of defense.
- ²⁷ Michael J. Carey, “The Schools and Self-Defense: The Fifties Revisited,” *Teachers College Record* 84, no. 1 (1982): 119. The original *Ladies Home Journal* article appears in the August 1951 issue, 4.
- ²⁸ conelrad.com, *All Things Atomic*, Part 2.
- ²⁹ Ibid., Part 3, 3. There were approximately 20 teachers at the NEA meeting in Washington, including Helen Seth-Smith from the Potomac School mentioned previously. Geist (2019), in *Armageddon Insurance*, points out that the first use of the duck-and-cover maneuver may have been in Nagasaki and Hiroshima, since survivors reported that when they saw the bomb’s flash they immediately went into a form of the duck-and-cover position for protection, 71.
- ³⁰ Andrew Hartman, *Education and the Cold War: The Battle for the American School* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 72. See also Robert Luke, “The Educational Requirements of Civil Defense,” *Adult Education* 1 (February 1951): 83–90.
- ³¹ Grossman, *Neither Red Nor Dead*, 83.
- ³² Hartman, *Education and the Cold War*, 71. Hartman places a great deal of emphasis on how the life adjustment movement in education set the stage for the Cold War-era critique of education. He argues one reason educators responded so positively to civil defense education was to show their own patriotism. I am not convinced that the life adjustment movement had much impact on public schools, but it did serve as a lightning rod for critique by Arthur Bestor and others. See Arthur Bestor, *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in Our Public Schools* (Urbana, IL: The University of Illinois Press, 1953); and Arthur Bestor, “Life Adjustment: A Critique,” *American Association of University Professors Bulletin* 38 (1952): 413–414. For a discussion of the critics see Mary Anne Raywid, *The Ax-Grinders: Critics of Our Public Schools* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1962).

- ³³ Grossman, *Neither Red Nor Dead*, 81; Carey, “The Schools and Self-Defense,” 118. Harry L. Walen, “A School Program in Civil Defense,” *Educational Leadership* (November 1951): 90–93, 93.
- ³⁴ Brown, “A Is for Atom, B Is for Bomb,” 76. See also “A Civil Defense Program for Parent–Teacher Associations,” *National Parent Teacher* 45 (June 1951): 34–35.
- ³⁵ Grossman, *Neither Red Nor Dead*, 84. Grossman notes that civil defense literature tended to focus more on suburban rather than urban settings, although the film *Duck and Cover* seems to depict both.
- ³⁶ Jacobs, “Atomic Kids,” 26.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 25, emphasis added.
- ³⁸ Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum: 1893–1958*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995), 222.
- ³⁹ Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education 1945–1980* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1983). Ravitch also lists the Sons and Daughters of the American revolution and the Minute Women as critics.
- ⁴⁰ J. B. Matthews, “The Commies Go After the Kids: How the Reds Inject Their Poison into Children,” *The American Legion Magazine* 47, no. 6 (December 1949): 14–15, <https://archive.legion.org/handle/20.500.12203/3964>
- ⁴¹ Julia L. Mickenberg, *Learning from the Left: Children’s Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006).
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 126. “Why You Buy Books that Sell Communism,” was written by Irene Kuhn.
- ⁴³ Carey, “The Schools and Self-Defense,” 119.
- ⁴⁴ Grossman, *Neither Red Nor Dead*, 83.
- ⁴⁵ Brown, “A Is for Atom, B Is for Bomb,” 74.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.
- ⁴⁷ Edwin R. Van Kleeck, “A Is for Atom, B Is for Bomb,” *National Elementary Principal* 30 (June 1951): 24.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.
- ⁴⁹ Carey, “The Schools and Self-Defense,” 121.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ⁵¹ Jacobs, “Atomic Kids,” 38. See also Robert K. Musil, “Growing Up Nuclear,” *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientist* 38, no. 1 (1998): 19; Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York, NY: Bantam,

- 1981); and Michael Carey, "Psychological Fallout," *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientist* 38, no. 1 (1982): 20. For a more recent discussion see Robert Wuthnow, *Be Very Afraid: The Cultural Response to Terror, Pandemics, Environmental Devastation, Nuclear Annihilation and Other Threats* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- ⁵² Oakes, *The Imaginary War*, 8.
- ⁵³ Grossman, *Neither Red Nor Dead*, 129.
- ⁵⁴ Brown, "A Is for Atom, B Is for Bomb," 90.
- ⁵⁵ Grossman, *Neither Red Nor Dead*, xiii.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁷ Brown, "A Is for Atom, B Is for Bomb," 89–90.
- ⁵⁸ Geist, *Armageddon Insurance*, 78.
- ⁵⁹ Johnny Miller, "End of the Duck and Cover Era," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 25, 2008, 54; via *NewsBank: America's News*, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.wvu.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/document-view?p=NewsBank&docref=news/120DB7ECE0F4CC50>
- ⁶⁰ United States Office of Personnel Management, *A Federal Employee's Family Preparedness Guide* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2003), 9. See also Jack Healy, "In the Age of School Shootings, Lockdown Drills Are the New Duck and Cover," *The New York Times*, January 17, 2014, 2, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/17/us/in-age-of-school-shootings-lockdown-drills-are-the-new-duck-and-cover.html>
- ⁶¹ Healy, "In the Age of School Shootings," 2.
- ⁶² Donald Luzatto, "Opinion: Duck and Cover and Hope," *The Virginian-Pilot*, December 3, 2019, 2; Trent Davis, "For Credibility's Sake Let's Start with the Bad News: A Pessimistic Pedagogy in the Age of Spectacle," *Philosophy of Education Yearbook* (2011): 260–267.
- ⁶³ Faulkner quoted in Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, 251. Faulkner won the 1949 Nobel Prize in Literature and delivered his banquet speech on December 10, 1950. The full text can be accessed at <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1949/faulkner/speech/>
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 287. Original source is Lewis Mumford, "Gentlemen: You Are Mad!" *The Saturday Review of Literature*, March 2, 1946, 5.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

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