

Sample Research Proposal 2

Bombs on the Periphery: A Vision of Civil Defense in the 1950s and 1960s

Short Description:

This paper will examine civil defense as a coping mechanism for the American public in the face of seemingly inevitable annihilation via nuclear war during the early nuclear age. It will cover the transition from evacuation planning to duck-and-cover methods and discuss the persistence of civil defense mentalities through the twentieth century.

Overview:

I am going to cover the progression then recession of civil defense measures throughout the 1950s and 1960s until the height of the Cold War—the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. Civil defense served as a coping mechanism for the American public following the use of the atomic bomb in World War II and the creation of the Hydrogen bomb by both the United States and the Soviet Union in the 1950s. In the face of such destructive forces, the public needed hope in the form of actions they could take autonomously that would provide for a future for themselves and their families. I will cover the transition from evacuation plans to the construction of fallout shelters and discuss why civil defense deteriorated after 1963, was it no longer a concern? Lack of funding? Did détente between the US and Soviet Union provide enough assurance that civil defense programs were deemed unnecessary? The term “nuclear winter” was not coined until 1985, but it is clear from advertisements and newspaper articles toting the efficacy of fallout shelters that the public believed such a phenomenon was possible, even inevitable.

Working Thesis:

For the American public, the civil defense program was a coping mechanism used during the early nuclear age to assuage fears of annihilation via nuclear attack. At both the national and local levels, this program ultimately gave Americans a false sense of security and deteriorated when the public acknowledged there was no salvation from the true destructive power of nuclear weapons following the Cuban Missile Crisis. The nuclear fears of the civil defense era have rippled through time fueling the public’s opposition of nuclear power.

Sources:

I will be using books such as *One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture* by Kenneth Rose and *Dr. Strangelove’s America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age* by Margot

Henriksen as well as various newspaper articles that capture the people's perspective of civil defense and a report compiled by the Office of Civil Defense Planning, "Civil Defense for National Security." Speeches given by President Truman, President, Eisenhower, or President Kennedy on the subject of civil defense will illuminate the governments' goal for the people regarding civil defense.

Context:

Civil defense movements were not unique to the United States, European countries and Canada also had programs in which citizens could take action to protect themselves against the dangers of nuclear attack. The lasting impacts of these movements, however, have been and continue to be manifested in the failure of the public to accept nuclear power as a viable energy source to solve the world's energy needs. Though civil defense provided hope for survival in the event of World War III, it also contributed to the installation a deep-seated fear of the power of the atom.