

The Origins of Preppers

The threat of nuclear attack loomed large for Americans in the 1950s. In an effort to prepare for such a scenario, President Truman formed the Federal Civil Defense Administration, and commissioned dozens of instructional videos about what to expect in the event of an attack, and how to protect one's family and home. "You are the target," [one of the videos] ominously begins, "of those who would trample the liberties of free men." [...] No matter whether you live in an industrial city, a "farming area with fertile fields," or a "mining region rich with vital ores and minerals," you have to be prepared for the worst, the video advises. In a deep voice, the narrator sets you on a clear path to survival, even providing a handy checklist. Some of the suggestions are quite useful: storing canned food and learning first aid could help you survive in a number of scenarios. Others, however, make you doubt whether you should ever follow government emergency plans. After all, it's unlikely that closing your blinds will make much of a difference in a nuclear apocalypse. But if the video fails at actually preparing people for a nuclear attack, it is very effective in doing two other things: striking fear into the hearts of Americans, and igniting passionate feelings of patriotism.

Mariana Zapata, *Atlas Obscura*, 29 September 2016