

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, 5 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 10 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 15 Americans, and igniting passionate feelings of patriotism.

Mariana Zapata, *Atlas Obscura*, 29 September 2016