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The Atomic Cafe

1982. Color. 1.33 format. 87 min.

Producers-Directors: Kevin Rafferty, Jayne Loader, Pierce Rafferty/*Editors:* Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty/*Music:* Rick Eaker/*Production Company-Print Source:* The Archives Project, Inc.

The atomic age (circa 1945 through 1959) was a curious time in which a generation of Americans came to perceive the possibility of a nuclear war and in turn was taught how to perceive that possibility. *The Atomic Cafe*, constructed entirely from newsreel and documentary footage, television news kinescopes, Army training films and commercial pictures of the time, affords the audience a new way to rethink the unthinkable. It is, by turns, hilarious, thought-provoking and chilling.

The film juxtaposes history with propaganda material designed to shape the attitudes and actions of the American people. Some examples: a group of uncomprehending residents of Bikini atoll are herded before the camera so a young Naval officer can tell them why they will be happy to evacuate their homes forever; then-Senator Lyndon Baines Johnson patiently explains to his constituents how an atomic bomb could destroy any major city in Texas, "even Johnson City"; a film designed for school children tells the kids, via cartoons and jingles, how to "duck and cover" in a surprise nuclear attack; GIs forced to participate in open-air testing are first exposed to the blast, then ordered to move out toward the mushroom cloud.

There is also an exceptional soundtrack of songs of the period, featuring such gems as "Jesus Hits Like an Atom Bomb" (Lowell Blanchard with the Valley Trio), "Atom Boom Baby" (the Five Stars), "Atomic Love" (Little Caesar and the Red Callender Quartet), and "This Cold War With You" (Floyd Tillman).

—Paul Scanlon

Short First Winter

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