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THE ARCHIVES PROJECT, INC.
P R E S E N T S

THE ATOMIC Cafe

Produced and Directed by
KEVIN RAFFERTY
JAYNE LOADER
PIERCE RAFFERTY

A hot spot in a Cold War.

THE ATOMIC CAFE
is a feature film about the
history and culture of the atomic
age. It is edited entirely from vintage
propaganda to recreate the atmosphere of fear,
conformity and official insanity which characterized the Cold War.

A Libra Films Release

"THE ATOMIC CAFE"

A-BOMB PROPAGANDA TURNED ON ITS HEAD

"The Atomic Cafe" is a feature-length film created entirely from American atomic propaganda of the 1940's and 1950's. With no narration, it tells its story by juxtaposing excerpts from newly-discovered and rarely-seen government and military propaganda, television and radio shows, cartoons, and the now-forgotten "bomb songs" that saturated the airways. The film then turns this material on itself by re-stitching it to reveal fifteen years of concerted efforts by the U.S. government and media to mislead the American public on the subject of nuclear warfare and atomic weapons testing.

By turns ridiculous and horrifying, "The Atomic Cafe" is a comic nightmare, a "Dr. Strangelove," a nuclear "Reefer Madness." It lays bare government efforts to promote the beauty, accuracy and strategic necessity of the Bomb, and the survivability of atomic war through the use of fallout shelters, while belittling the dangers of A-test fallout and the dead-end finality of nuclear war. "Though these films are from the 40's and 50's, it can be argued that many of the very same myths are being advanced today," says Pierce Rafferty, one of the filmmakers.

Never-before-released footage in "The Atomic Cafe" includes an Air Force interview with Colonel Paul Tibbets, the pilot of the atomic bomber Enola Gay, which annihilated Hiroshima. "I was accused of being insane, of being a drunkard, of being everything that you might imagine a derelict to be," says Tibbets, "as a result of guilty conscience for doing this." Tibbets suggests that, while the U.S. government might feel guilty about the bombing, he does not.

Graphic images of the official lunacy of the period include American soldiers witnessing an A-bomb test and then charging into ground zero after a chaplain regales them with tales of bomb-blast beauty; cartoon wiseguy Burt the Turtle advising schoolkids to "Duck and Cover" under their desks to live through an A-bomb attack; a concerned citizen who proudly presents the lead-lined snowsuit that will protect his children from Atomic death rays; basement rec rooms converted to periscope-equipped bunkers. Meanwhile, Civil Defense films like "Nuclearosis" and "How To Beat The Bomb" mock citizen concern by arithmetically proving "the fallacy of devoting 85% of one's worrying capacity to an agent that constitutes only about 15% of an atomic bomb's destroying potential" -- the radiation!

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"THE ATOMIC CAFE"
BIOGRAPHIES OF THE FILMMAKERS

Kevin Rafferty, 34, graduated from Harvard University with a degree in architecture and went to film school at the California Institute of the Arts. Working as his own cameraman and editor, he has been making films for 10 years, including (with Richard Cohen) "Hurry Tomorrow," an acclaimed expose of the forced drugging of mental patients at the Metropolitan State Hospital in Los Angeles.

Jayne Loader was born 30 years ago in Weatherford, Texas (birthplace of Mary Martin and Larry "J.R." Hagman). She graduated from Reed College and the University of Michigan with degrees in American Studies. Before joining "The Atomic Cafe" team, she worked as a freelance journalist, film reviewer and teacher, publicist and ghostwriter. She lives in an apartment in downtown Washington, where, over her morning coffee, she can watch the secretaries file documents in the FBI building.

Pierce Rafferty, 29, is a specialist in archival research. He has been a consultant and researcher on over 40 historical documentaries, including: "The Wobblies," "With Babies and Banners," "The War at Home," "The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter," "Americas in Transition," and "El Salvador - Another Vietnam."

Produced and Directed by: Kevin Rafferty, Jayne Loader, Pierce Rafferty

Edited by: Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty

Archival Research: Pierce Rafferty

Sound Editor: Margie Crimmins

Music Coordinator: Rick Eaker

Music Consultants: Richard Bass, David Dunaway, Dr. Charles Wolfe

Production Consultants: Obie Benz, Susan Kellam, George Pillsbury

Special Thanks: Bono Film Service, Washington, D.C.

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THE MAKING OF "THE ATOMIC CAFE"

Five Year Project Plunders National, Military Archives

It began in 1976 when filmmakers Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty and Pierce Rafferty decided to create a parody of American propaganda using the propaganda itself. The result, after a few twists and turns, is "The Atomic Cafe," a feature-length movie that captures the U.S. government and cooperative media indoctrinating the American public on how to stop worrying and love the Bomb. Dispensing with narration, the film uses judiciously edited excerpts from government and military propaganda, newsreels, training films, television and radio shows, cartoons, and the "Bomb songs" of the 1940s and 1950s to recreate the atmosphere of fear, conformity and official insanity that defined Cold War culture and politics.

The movie was conceived as an expansive history of American propaganda, but the filmmakers soon focused their sights on the subject of the atomic bomb. Even so, their task was daunting. "We exhausted the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and dozens of military archives," says Pierce Rafferty. "Of course, the '50s were unique in the level of film idiocy they achieved, but we managed to survive viewing literally thousands of films of this vintage. The ratio of what we viewed to what we ended up using was maybe 10,000 to one."

Jayne Loader recalls going through every single card in the Library of Congress film division, which has no subject index. "It took about a week to do that, and three weeks to view the films we thought might be useful," she notes, "and ultimately one shot out of all that ended up in our film."

The trio had better luck at various military film archives. Pierce recalls the Audio-Visual Depot at the Tobyhanna Army Base in Pennsylvania: "It was like the very last scene in 'Raiders of the Lost Ark.' You peek through this little window and there's film as far as the eye can see, a warehouse full of film, because the Army's been making films on every conceivable subject since before the first World War, just churning out millions and millions of feet of film."

As the project progressed, Pierce continued foraging in the field for new material, while Jayne and Kevin moved to a basement cutting room in Arlington, Virginia where "The Atomic Cafe" was structured and edited. "We were trying to do something fairly new," says Jayne. "Structure a movie with no narration -- which meant we had a lot of false starts. People have commented on our film's smoothness, but to create that effect each separate piece had to be highly edited. For example, the original 'Duck and Cover' is 30 minutes long. We've condensed it to about three minutes and, even so, that includes clips from about 30 other films of all the shots we could find of kids ducking under their desks."

Despite their division of labor, the three stress the democratically collaborative nature of the project. "Film is like architecture," says Kevin Rafferty. "Both require expensive materials and collaboration, which means that you can't do it alone. I got an education about this working on 'The Atomic Cafe.'"

As the film neared completion, the team became obsessed with tracking down every image of the Bomb they'd ever heard of, and with combining those images into a coherent whole. It wasn't the kind of project easy to leave behind at the end of a day's work. "We all had these intense atomic nightmares," says Jayne. She notes the cumulative psychological impact of the films that comprise "The Atomic Cafe": "People who were kids in the '50s can see how we were channeled into thinking about the realities of nuclear war. Some will recall it as a funny period--"Ha,ha, remember how we had to crouch under our desks?"

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"But I can also remember the fear and fatalism: 'What are you going to be when you grow up?' 'What do you mean when I grow up? If I grow up!'"

Regarding the relevance of "The Atomic Cafe" to the current political climate, Pierce notes "Not since the Cuban Missile Crisis in the early '60s has there been as much press, as much talk, as much interest in the Bomb as there is right now." Specifically, he cites President Reagan and Secretary of State Haig's resurrection of the Cold War, the movement for disarmament in Europe, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's plans to revive Civil Defense, and continuing revelations about the longterm effects of bomb tests conducted years ago.

Jayne concludes that people today "have this built-in defense mechanism against even thinking about the nuclear war because it's too awful to contemplate. So what we're trying to do is to make them a little more skeptical about what they're hearing today on the subject."

"THE ATOMIC CAFE" SOUNDTRACK ALBUM

A Treasury of Radioactive Rock 'N Roll, Blues, Country and Gospel

While researching their feature documentary, "The Atomic Cafe," filmmakers Kevin Rafferty, Jayne Loader and Pierce Rafferty stumbled upon a treasure trove of American popular songs devoted to the A-bomb. The result is the Rounder Records soundtrack album: "The Atomic Cafe: Radioactive rock 'n' roll, blues, country and gospel."

Four months after Hiroshima, country singers Karl and Harty opened the "Bomb song" sweepstakes with "When the Atom Bomb Fell," a war's-end celebration that justified the use of the A-bomb in Japan as "the answer to our fighting boys' prayer." Half a year later, the Buchanan Brothers' "Atomic Power" expressed reservations about technology run amuck, while the Golden Gate Quartet weighed in with the gospel parable, "Atom and Evil": "Now Atom was an honest, hardworking man/He wanted to help out the human clan/But Evil got him drunk on prejudice and hate/And she taught him how to gamble with humanity's fate."

By the rock 'n' roll era, the American public had been debating the social, moral and sexual implications of atomic weaponry for nearly ten years in music. Americans had grown so used to the threat of atomic extermination that it became usable as a metaphor for simple sexual heat and intensity of feeling, as in the Five Stars' "Atom Bomb Baby" and Little Caesar's suave "Atomic Love."

Filmmakers Rafferty, Loader and Rafferty found the music that punctuates their film through wide-ranging research. After looking for likely suspects in the song title files of the music division of the Library of Congress,

"The Atomic Cafe" was produced over a period of five years by filmmakers Jayne Loader and brothers Kevin and Pierce Rafferty. Together they combed through every major government and military film archive in the country for raw material. "We took months and months to view and re-edit literally thousands of films," says Pierce.

The filmmakers insist upon the contemporary relevance of the historical material they've used in "The Atomic Cafe." "Let's face it," says Jayne Loader, "propaganda is as pervasive today as it was then, if not more so. And some of the politicians who were active in promoting the nuclear arms race in the 1950's are still making policy in Washington today."

"Right," says Pierce, "and if a healthy skepticism about official voices of reassurance comes out of viewing 'The Atomic Cafe,' that would be a satisfying accomplishment."