Laughter Louder Than Bombs: American Anti-Nuke Satire in the Cold War, 1946-59.

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts (History) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April 2015

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

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Entitled: Laughter Louder Than Bombs: American Anti-Nuke Satire in the Cold War, 1946-59.

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (History)

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ABSTRACT

Laughter Louder Than Bombs: American Anti-Nuke Satire

In the Cold War, 1946-59

Brandon Webb

This study investigates US political cartoons during the 1940s and 1950s that critiqued "Cold War culture" by incorporating nuclear themes into their satire. The cartoonists analyzed in this study—Herbert Block of the *Washington Post* and the *Village Voice*'s Jules Feiffer—used "the bomb" as a framing device to explore contested issues related to the arms race, civil defense, and atmospheric testing. In doing so both Block and Feiffer forged a "visual vocabulary" that reimagined the sources of conflict between the Soviet Union and the US as a self-imposed struggle that informed Americans needed to confront in a critical matter. In this way both cartoonists re-appropriated the bomb's projection as a cultural symbol of postwar American power, and refashioned its symbolic meaning to read as a threat to individual liberties in order to register their objections to US nuclear policy. The critiques embedded in their cartoons also furnished a sub-culture of humorous dissent that signalled to readers that satire remained an effective means of voicing opposition and venting frustrations during the Cold War era's stultifying political climate.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my supervisor Dr. Graham Carr for his patience and guidance. Throughout this process, Dr. Carr has posed thoughtful and probing questions that challenged me to rethink my approaches to the material and asked me to consider new angles and fresh perspectives.

I would also like to acknowledge Raymond and Janice Webb—two of the funniest parents one could ever hope for.

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List of Abbreviations

(AEC) Atomic Energy Commission

(FAS) Federation of Atomic Scientists

(FCDA) Federal Civil Defense Administration

(HUAC) House Committee Un-American Activities

(ICBM) Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles

(SAC) Strategic Air Command

(SALT) Strategic Arms Limitations Talks

(UN) United Nations

(UNAEC) United Nations Atomic Energy Commission

FIGURE 1: "Salute To Bikini," *Washington Post*, November 7, 1946.

Introduction

1.1: Dirt, Shovels, and Excavating Cold War Humor

In the autumn of 1981 Ronald Reagan's Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Strategic Nuclear Forces, Thomas K. Jones, or T.K. Jones as he liked to be called, caused a public stir after revealing his views on civil defense to journalist Robert Scheer. Excerpts from the interview were later published in Scheer's *Los Angeles Times* column in which Jones was quoted as saying the US could expect "recovery times" ranging from "two to four years" following a nuclear attack on its soil.[1] His estimate, which was a throwback to civil defense discourse in the 1950s, was predicated on the belief that effective public preparedness could significantly reduce casualties in the event of a nuclear war. Jones, who had lifted some of his ideas from Soviet civil defense manuals, explained to Scheer how Americans could survive nuclear attack:

> "In essence you dig a hole, take lumber, small saplings or something like that, and build this thing and cover it with dirt…[Americans] could make very good sheltering by taking the doors off your house, digging a trench, stacking the doors about two deep over that, covering it with plastic so that rain water or something doesn't screw up the glue in the

[1] Robert Scheer, "U.S. Could Survive in Administration's View," *Los Angeles Times,* January 16, 1982.

> door, then pile dirt over it…The dirt really is the thing that protects you from the blast as well as the radiation, if there's radiation. It protects you from the heat. You know, dirt is just great stuff…"

So convinced was Jones of his plan for civil defense that he told Scheer: "It's the dirt that does it…If there are enough shovels to go around, everybody's going to make it."[2]

Instead of shovels Jones' remarks were met with pitchforks because his comments raised troubling questions about the Reagan administration's grip on reality in pursuit of their hawkish nuclear policy. The timing of Jones' remarks coincided with a new wave of anti-nuke activism. Dormant for two decades, this resurgent movement seemed to be awakened by the new president who touted the "fantastic" notion of a "winnable" nuclear war while on the campaign trail in 1980.[3] The American public, once so susceptible to the scare tactics rooted in civil defense propaganda that was ubiquitous in early Cold War culture, was no longer willing to accept the shaky premise that nuclear war could be fought and won. The *New York Times* glibly asked, "Who is this Thomas K. Jones saying those funny things about civil defense?" Lampooning Jones' alleged $252 million plan for civil defense the *Times* mischievously remarked: "Evidently, most of that money will go for shovels."[4]

Congress, too, turned on the Reagan administration's ideological fixation with "nuclear Armageddon." Not long after Jones made his incendiary remarks Democratic Senator Paul Tsongas (Mass) said Jones "ought to be committed" while the senator held a hearing for Hiroshima survivors. Under the threat of subpoena a chastened Jones eventually testified on Capitol Hill. His testimony managed to avoid the apocalyptic fantasies he conveyed to Scheer but Jones' carefully constructed answers did not prevent the *Washington Post*'s Mary McGrory from describing the Pentagon official as, "[looking] like your uncle who ran away to the sea and came home with tales beyond verification."[5]

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[2] Robert Scheer, *With Enough Shovels: Reagan, Bush, and Nuclear War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 18-26.
[3] See Robert Scheer, *With Enough Shovels,* 66-82. Scheer's chapter, "The Window of Vulnerability," details the Reagan administration's belief that as a result of the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT I and II) treaties (the second of which was never ratified by Congress) the US was locked into "a position of strategic inferiority." Given this premise the administration worked hard to secure more funding for the defense budget with a significant amount allotted to developing more sophisticated weapon systems.
[4] "The Dirt on T.K. Jones," *New York Times,* March 19, 1982.
[5] Mary McGrory, "The Pentagon's Mr. T.K. Jones Shows Both Faces on the Hill," *Washington Post*, April 1, 1982.

Ridicule of Jones was revealing. In an earlier phase in the Cold War Jones' misplaced faith in what Scheer described as "the powerful defensive possibilities of dirt"[6] would not have appeared so far-fetched. Indeed, Jones' comments resembled the instructions found in information packets that agencies like the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) produced throughout the 1950s, albeit in cruder form. To a younger generation of activists who comprised the Nuclear Freeze Movement in the 1980s Jones may have appeared like a relic from an age rife with paranoia. But to an older generation weaned on animated shorts of "Bert the Turtle" explaining "duck-and-cover" drills to nervous schoolchildren,[7] Jones' calls for "dirt" and "shovels" may have sounded more like an echo—a discredited remnant from a bygone era.

This study is interested in exploring how ridicule and mockery of civil defense plans and support for nuclear weapons production were formulated during an earlier period in the putative Cold War struggle against the Soviet Union—at a time when Jones' civil defense views were commonplace. In 1982 Jones' comments were widely mocked because American public opinion towards civil defense and nuclear weapons had shifted considerably by the early eighties. What explains this change in public attitudes?

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FIGURE 2: "Bert the Turtle," Federal Civil Defense Administration, 1951.

[6] Scheer, *With Enough Shovels,* 19.

[7] "Bert the Turtle" was the civil defense mascot who appeared in films explaining "duck-and-cover" to elementary-age children.

In the 1950s civil defense authorities composed a plethora of pamphlets that stressed the importance of Americans taking part in "periodic drills and test exercises"[8] in order to prepare for a possible nuclear attack. Tracy Davis describes this effort as inherently "performative" and reliant on "an embodied mimetic methodology" that was "theatrical" in nature. For Davis, using "rehearsal" to describe civil defense preparations is not a "metaphoric motif"; rather, Davis employs the term to address how civil defense rehearsals in the Cold War era were "a technique and mode of being" that allowed planners to glean important insights from their "pageants of angst" while also instilling behaviours.[9]

Mocking and ridiculing these "pageants of angst" during the early Cold War era appeared to be a formidable task. While the potential for dark comedy was apparent to some, to most the darkness remained just that: dark. As one FCDA pamphlet from the 1950s worded it, America could be attacked "at any time." The only way to prevent a calamity was through "public education, training, and organization."[10]

In order to achieve these three goals the FCDA worked in tandem with local authorities to cultivate a culture of "preparedness" that monitored each stage of response in the event of a nuclear attack. The FCDA also collaborated with a wide array of professional organizations, including the American Medical Association (AMA), in its effort to maintain a wide network of professionals devoted to the task of coordinating shelter construction, evacuations and medical care during and after an attack.

In the 1950s many medical professionals who were keen advocates for civil defense aided the FCDA's goal of preparing the public for nuclear attack. Paul Boyer writes that the medical profession as a whole worked diligently to "cultivate an aura of mastery and total assurance" in preparing for the massive medical emergency which would follow an attack.[11] In a

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[8] New York State Civil Defense Commission, "Medical Aides," in Michael Scheibach, ed., "*In Case Atom Bombs Fall": An Anthology of Government Explanations, Instructions and Warnings from the 1940s to the 1960s* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009), 69-72.

[9] Tracy C. Davis, *Stages of Emergency: Cold War Nuclear Civil Defense* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), introduction, 1-5.

[10] Federal Civil Defense Administration, "This Is Civil Defense," in Michael Scheibach, ed., "*In Case Atom Bombs Fall": An Anthology of Government Explanations, Instructions and Warnings from the 1940s to the 1960s* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009), 5-9

[11] Cultural historian Paul S. Boyer has done much to further our understanding of how nuclear weapons have animated postwar American culture. In the historiography of "atomic culture" Boyer's research remains an important starting point. He will be quoted extensively throughout this study. For a larger discussion of the role medical professionals played in civil defense see Paul Boyer, "The American Medical Profession and the Threat of

1950 article in *Today's Health,* Dr. George F. Lull, secretary of the AMA, wrote that physicians occupied a "leading role in national preparedness for an atomic war," and needed "the help of every American" to ensure "smooth-operating" during an attack. In order to "help" those in need of medical attention, Americans needed to first "control [their] fear with reason instead of exaggerating it into hysteria."[12]

A 1950 pamphlet from the New York State Civil Defense Commission adopted a similarly measured tone as Lull's terse prose. At times pamphlets like these could intone banal advice. People who showed "any signs of radiation sickness. . . [needed to] go to a medical station at once," instructed the pamphleteers. If such stations were unavailable then the pamphlet urged readers to "keep warm" and "stay in bed if possible."[13]

On the surface such instructions seemed prosaic but embedded within the subtext was a tacit admission that in the event of an attack civil defense authorities would be unable to provide the requisite facilities needed to care for scores of injured victims. Because of this lack of resources, civil defense planners needed to project a coordinated response that was dependent on individualized action. "Each of us must have a job to do if trouble comes . . ." the FCDA instructed its readers.[14]

Women played an important role in coordinating local responses and were reminded that "Civil defense begins at home." Women's "first duty" was to "educate" their families and make the home "safe as possible from possible attack." Their "second duty" was to participate in a "community civil defense organization." Without these "fully organized communities," one FCDA pamphlet claimed, there could "be no adequate national civil defense program." By consigning women to the role of "medical aides" civil defense authorities reinforced the gendered thinking typical of many Cold War discourses.[15] In doing so they also sent signals that the "rehearsal" of civil defense was closely linked with inscribing "performative" habits.

Nuclear War," in *Fallout: A Historian Reflects on America's Half-Century Encounter with Nuclear Weapons* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 61-86.

[12] George F. Lull, *Today's Health*, 1950, as quoted in Boyer, *Fallout*, 79-80.

[13] New York State Civil Defense Commission, "You and the Atomic Bomb: What to Do in Case of an Atomic Attack, Public Pamphlet No.1," in Michael Scheibach, ed., "*In Case Atom Bombs Fall": An Anthology of Government Explanations, Instructions and Warnings from the 1940s to the 1960s* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009), 25-29.

[14] Ibid.

[15] FCDA "Women in Civil Defense," in Michael Scheibach, ed., "*In Case Atom Bombs Fall": An Anthology of Government Explanations, Instructions and Warnings from the 1940s to the 1960s* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009), 55-59.

In the mid-1950s rehearsal was put into practice on a nation-wide scale during simulated nuclear attacks that were part of the Operation Alert project. As Guy Oakes writes, Operation Alert was designed by civil defense planners in order to "test preattack plans for survival by fabricating . . . the actual conditions of a nuclear attack." This "yearly ritual," which ran from 1954 to 1961, summoned massive resources and was conducted as "an elaborate national sociodrama." President Eisenhower's participation in Operation Alert 1955's "ambitious enterprise," which included the participation of over two hundred cities, underscored the importance of the exercise in cultivating a perception of "nuclear mastery" that such a crisis would require if lives were to be saved.[16]

Operation Alert became a media event that the new medium of television was well-equipped to handle. Media executives suggested to the event's planners that the president give "live radio and television" updates from his underground quarters in order for the "theatrics" to more closely resemble the conditions of an actual attack.[17] Through his participation, Eisenhower, who Thomas Doherty describes as "the reigning master of television and politics" in the 1950s,[18] lent considerable credence to exercises like Operation Alert despite his misgivings about their efficacy. His role in Operation Alert's "sociodrama" also had a political dimension.

In the mid-1950s the adoption of "massive retaliation" as a military strategy was part of the administration's "New Look" defence policy which James Patterson argues relied heavily on the ability of the Strategic Air Command (SAC) to react to crises with a nuclear response. The "New Look" anticipated emerging military technologies, namely "missiles carrying nuclear warheads," or what would be called Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM), and which became "main-line military weapons" in the years ahead. In formulating the "New Look" Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles recognized how the new policy was "politically attractive" in that it sidestepped what they believed was Americans' "aversion to large standing armies in times of peace."[19] These domestic considerations were important for

[16] For more insight into how civil defense planners prepared and propagandized subsequent Operation Alert exercises see Guy Oakes, *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), ch.3, 78-95.
[17] Ibid., 88.
[18] For more on Eisenhower's mastery of the medium see *Thomas Doherty, Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture* (New York: University Press, 2003), ch. 5, 96-104
[19] For a larger discussion of how "massive retaliation" and the "New Look" defense complemented Cold War aims while remaining "politically attractive" see James T. Patterson, *Great Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 287-291.

procuring support for the administration's shift to reorienting defense spending towards greater nuclear weapons production. As Guy Oakes observes, confronting the "problem of national will" could only be waged effectively if Americans accepted "the logic of keeping peace by threatening nuclear war."[20] The public's acceptance of "massive retaliation," and the build-up in nuclear arms this would entail, was predicated on a belief that survival of an attack was possible if individuals made the necessary preparations. Thus, the link between civil defense rehearsals and support for "massive retaliation" complemented the administration's goal of avoiding war by preparing for it.

In adopting a defense policy that increased pressure on the Soviets to keep pace in the arms race, the Eisenhower administration relied on discourses from the Truman era which imagined the Cold War rivalry as a "struggle" between "slave world" and "free." This Manichean way of viewing foreign affairs is described by Susan Carruthers as a "dichotomy between mobility and captivity."[21] While cold warriors imagined Marxist ideology and Soviet foreign policy working in tandem to hold millions of eastern Europeans "captive," they also projected an image of "mobility" for Americans by proclaiming a "declaratory language of freedom" in their rhetoric.[22]

Within a cultural climate riven by anticommunism rhetoric that demarcated nations as "free" and "slave", how was ridicule of civil defense and US nuclear policy formulated? Did it change people's perceptions of what contemporaries referred to as "the bomb"?[23] And if so, did this humor galvanise social protest of nuclear weapons or did it become a substitute for struggle?

This study will engage these questions by analyzing political cartoons from two leading cartoonists from the era, Herbert Block from the *Washington Post,* or Herblock as he was known to his readership, and the *Village Voice*'s Jules Feiffer. Both Herblock and Feiffer drew nuclear-themed cartoons with a regularity that suggested the issue was pressing for both cartoonists. As will be explained further in following chapters, their cartoons also adopted characteristics more commonly associated with satire which, Stephen Kercher defines as "those forms of humor which are spurred by anger or by other moral motives and which use irony to criticize, provoke

[20] Oakes, *The Imaginary War,* 165.
[21] Susan L. Carruthers, *Cold War Captives: Imprisonment, Escape, and Brainwashing* (Berkley and London: University of California Press, 2009), introduction 1-22.
[22] Ibid., 20.
[23] This study will adopt "the bomb" because contemporaries in the 1940s and '50s often used the colloquial "bomb" to refer to the atom and hydrogen bombs. This use continues being used today.

thought, and raise awareness."[24] The satire discussed here takes the prefix "anti" to highlight how "anti-nuke satire" assumed an oppositional stance to a host of issues related to the nation's burgeoning nuclear weapon arsenal, including the entrenchment of a nuclear arms race, civil defense exercises, and the unlimited atmospheric testing used to test the efficacy of new weapons.

The term "visual satirist" will often be used to describe the two cartoonists whose anti-nuke cartoons will comprise this study. The term is not meant to obfuscate; rather, "visual satirist" more accurately reflects how Herblock and Feiffer, fit together within a comparative framework. Because of the relative differences in their publications—Herblock was a daily cartoonist responding to events as they unfolded, while Feiffer worked for a counter-culture weekly publication and avoided topical issues in his cartoons—referring to both collectively as "political cartoonists" is misleading. The term visual satirist better describes how Herblock and Feiffer used an established forum—political cartooning—to satirize larger socio-political developments in order to advance important critiques.[25]

In the 1940s and 1950s Herblock and Feiffer did not write weighty treatises or moody meditations lamenting the nation's current state of intellectual conformity; rather, they illustrated cartoons that effectively mocked and ridiculed important assumptions undergirding support for US nuclear policy. They accomplished this by forging a "visual vocabulary"[26] that reimagined the sources of conflict between the Soviet Union and the US as a self-imposed struggle—one entirely dependent on viewing all forms of Soviet aggression as proof of international communism's inexorable march. In this way both Herblock and Feiffer re-appropriated the bomb

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[24] Stephen E. Kercher's 2000 dissertation, "The Limits of Irreverence: 'Sick' Humor and Satire in America, 1950-64," (Indiana University) offers keen insights into satire's political dimensions during this period. This research developed into his monograph *Revel with a Cause: Liberal Satire in Postwar America* (Chicago: IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006) Kercher's definition is worth noting because of the overlap in themes and periodization this study shares with his ground-breaking work. While there are similarities in the source-base the hope here is that a different analytical focus will render some already discussed sources fresh.

[25] For a larger discussion of how political cartoons operate in authoritarian regimes see Patrick Merziger, "Humour in Nazi Germany: Resistance and Propagnda? The Popular Desire for an All-Embracing Laughter," *Humour and Social Protest* Marjolein't Hart and Dennis Bos, eds. (New York and Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2007), 275-290.

[26] The idea of "visual vocabulary" will be elaborated more in chapter one. The term is adopted from Michael Cohen's recent research into radical socialist cartoonists from the Progressive era. See Michael Cohen, "'Cartooning Capitalism': Radical Cartooning and the Making of American Popular Radicalism in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Humour and Social Protest* Marjolein't Hart and Dennis Bos, eds. (New York and Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2007), 35-58.

as a cultural symbol of postwar American power, and refashioned its symbolic meaning to read as a threat to individual liberties in order to register their objections to the drift in US nuclear policy in the 1950s. In doing so, they carved a space within Cold War culture to wage important criticisms of their government's evolving nuclear policy, and asked readers to critically reflect on Cold War orthodoxy. The critiques embedded in their cartoons also furnished a sub-culture of humorous dissent that signalled to readers that satire remained an effective means of voicing opposition and venting frustrations during the era's stultifying political climate.

But how effective was anti-nuke satire in changing public perceptions of a contested issue such as the nuclear one? Laughter rarely transfers neatly from one historical context to another. The public response to Jones' remarks on civil defense in the early eighties reveals a historical shift in public attitudes towards nuclear warfare—a shift that can be detected through analyzing how humor satirized the US government's nuclear policy during the first two decades of the Cold War. Ridiculing civil defense advocates was not without precedent; indeed, mockery of public officials is as old as the republic itself.[27] But in the late 1940s and 1950s individuals who ridiculed the culture of "preparedness" ran the risk of being labelled "un-American." Understanding how Herblock and Feiffer escaped the censoring tendencies of the era requires an analytical focus that places humor in the forefront, rather than in the background.

In 1958, in the first issue of the underground humor magazine the *Realist*, editor Paul Krassner quoted his fellow satirist Jo Coppola as saying:

> "For comedy is, after all, a look at ourselves, not as we pretend to be when we look in the mirror of our imagination, but as we really are. Look at the comedy of any age and you will know volumes about that period and its people which neither historian nor anthropologist can tell you."[28]

The following study hopes to amend Coppola's insight some. Historians who analyze "the comedy of any age" have long understood how historical actors gazing into "the mirror" of their "imagination" often used humor as a framing device. During the 1940s and 1950s Herblock and Feiffer looked into the mirror of their culture's imagination and saw the era's ubiquitous mushroom cloud—"how does one tell a joke about that?" they may have pondered. The fears and

[27] In fact the tradition of American political cartooning predates the republic. Debates still continue over who drew America's first political cartoon. A popular candidate is Benjamin Franklin. For more on the roots of political cartooning see Donald Dewey, *The Art of Ill Will: The Story of American Political Cartoons* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2007), introduction, 1-73.

[28] Satirist Jo Coppola as quoted by editor and founder Paul Krasner in the inaugural issue of *The Realist*, no.1, 1958.

anxieties associated with the bomb did not easily lend itself to humorous portrayal. The following study will discuss how Herblock and Feiffer overcame this aesthetic hurdle by injecting their satire with trenchant criticism of US nuclear policy.

* * * *

This study addresses two emerging scholarly fields. Within the vast historiography of Cold War studies the bomb figures prominently. However, most scholars have focused their efforts on understanding how nuclear weapons influenced defense spending and military strategy. These histories, while crucial to our understanding of the role nuclear weapons played in the Cold War drama, have been written from a diplomatic or political historiographical perspective. Less attention has been paid to how the bomb inspired what Boyer dubbed "atomic culture."[29]

In the postwar years this "atomic culture" made its presence felt in fashion (the new two-piece "Bikini" swimsuit took its name from a series of atomic tests conducted at Bikini Atoll in 1946) in popular song (Amos Milburn's 1950 hit "Atomic Baby" among many) in consumer goods (action figurines proliferated, many carrying mini-Geiger Counters which could be found in cereal boxes) and in film (a host of science-fiction movies featured mutated monsters who had been exposed to radiation).[30] While intellectuals like Norman Cousins wrote wearily of nuclear weapons making modern man "obsolete,"[31] cultural producers, marketers, and manufactures were busy incorporating the atom into consumer and popular culture.

Boyer's research into the creation of an atomic culture in the 1940s and 1950s has configured the bomb as a source of fear and anxiety that left an indelible mark on postwar American culture. In his first monograph on the topic, *By the Bombs' Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*, Boyer connects the burgeoning nuclear ephemera that constituted this atomic culture with larger socio-political debates centered on the movement for international regulation of atomic energy in the late forties. These debates also

[29] For a larger discussion of how a "nuclear consciousness" led to an atomic culture see Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).
[30] The website *CONELRAD: Atomic Platters* is an excellent source for "all things atomic." In addition to collecting and archiving a number of Cold War pop culture sources, *CONELRAD*'s web masters have compiled an exhaustive list of "Cold War music from the golden age of homeland security." <http://www.atomicplatters.com/index.php>
[31] Norman Cousins, "Modern Man Is Obsolete," *Saturday Review of Literature*, 1945, as quoted in Boyer, *Fallout*, 6.

stimulated larger discussions of the nation's postwar role in shaping what Garry Wills calls "a peace to be based on a weapon."[32]

Many recent studies of the bomb's cultural history have registered a partial dissent from some of Boyer's claims. In his discussion of "atomic bomb cinema" Jerome Shapiro argues that films which incorporated nuclear themes into their narratives were part of a longer tradition of apocalyptic narratives. For Shapiro the cultural marketplace of atomic bomb cinema in the postwar period, and Hollywood's relative steadiness in producing bomb films, confirms that narratives preoccupied with the destruction of the world have always proven popular across different cultures.[33]

These debates revolving around the cultural impact of the bomb mirror a larger debate within Cold War studies centered on conceptual distinctions and periodization.[34] A number of recent scholars argue that the trends that were constitutive of "Cold War culture"—the postwar economic boom, anticommunism, the arms race—had their roots in the Second World War, making the application of the term problematic.[35] What is more, recent historiography has questioned the impact the Cold War rivalry had on the daily lives of Americans in the postwar period.

Peter Filene has argued that historians' use of the term "Cold War culture" has become an "all-purpose interpretation" that has skewed our understanding of what Americans cared most about in the postwar years.[36] For Filene, "the Cold War was fought primarily at an elite level," while most Americans continued defining "their world in personal terms."[37]

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[32] Gary Wills, *Bomb Power: The Modern Presidency and the National Security State* (New York, NY: The Penguin Press, 2010), 41.

[33] Shapiro's insights, namely his argument that atomic bomb cinema reflects popular engagement with an "apocalyptic imagination" will be discussed in chapter two. See Jerome F. Shapiro, *Atomic Bomb Cinema: The Apocalyptic Imagination on Film* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), introduction, PDF e-book.

[34] Recent debates within Cold War historiography have centered on periodization and definition. For two contrasting looks at this methodological and conceptual problem see Anders Stephenson, "Cold War Degree Zero," 19-39 and Odd Arne Westad, "Exploring the Histories of the Cold War: A Pluralist Approach," 51-59, both in *Uncertain Empire: American History and the Idea of the Cold War*, eds Joel Isaac and Duncan Bell (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[35] Essays from the *Rethinking Cold War Culture* Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2001), will be cited throughout this study. Each contribution engages questions surrounding periodization, methodology, and terminology but within a framework of each contributors' own research. "Cold War culture" is also not synonymous with postwar culture. As a number of scholars argued in *Rethinking Cold War Culture* many postwar trends had their roots in the Second World War, if not before.

[36] Peter Filene, "'Cold War Culture' Doesn't Say It All," in *Rethinking Cold War Culture* Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2001), ch.7, 156-174, PDF e-book.

[37] Ibid.

Filene is right to remind us that not all Americans, or even most, were preoccupied with the Cold War rivalry. As Filene's research suggests most Americans were more likely to rank the economy's health a more pressing concern. But this view is limiting when trying to understand the ubiquitous Cold War cultural signs and symbols that contemporaries encountered in their daily lives. However much the Cold War struggle may have been fought at an "elite level," it was experienced on many levels that included all strata of postwar American society. Many ordinary Americans still shared the same social and political assumptions regarding international communism as elites did. What is more, the consumer culture they participated in reinforced these views. Work, family life, and leisure may have been their main priorities but this did not mean these private concerns were exempt from Cold War culture's considerable reach. Seen this way, when historicizing the cultural products of Cold War culture, it does not really matter if a majority of Americans ever listed the so-called "superpower" rivalry as their main worry; anti-Communist discourses ensured the Cold War struggle would continue informing their daily lives in countless ways.

* * * *

Given the historical sources used in this study, the following analysis also places itself in conversation with another scholarly field that bears mentioning, the relatively recent field of humor studies. Following the "cultural turn" in the mid-eighties scholars from disciplines outside the humanities—sociologists, linguists, psychologists—began subjecting humor texts—jokes, cartoons, film parodies, satiric literature—to scholarly scrutiny and through these efforts a burgeoning field of research emerged. Few historians of the Cold War, however, have shown interest in treating humor from the period as "a category of historical analysis." This is an unfortunate gap in the historiography of the Cold War and perhaps reveals a disciplinary bias that needs to be addressed. As Martini Kessel reminds us "humor and laughter have not figured high on historians' agendas."[38] Much of this reluctance stems from the conceptual difficulty of studying the fleeting nature of laughter.[39] Recent trends within humor studies have shifted the

[38] Martini Kessel, "Introduction," *The Politics of Humour: Laughter, Inclusion and Exclusion in the Twentieth Century,* Martini Kessel and Patrick Merziger, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 3.

[39] Unlike other emotions such as fear, anger and anxiety, laughter rarely lingers, leaving only faint traces for historians to study. In devising ways to historicize humor, Marjolein't Hart explains that humor scholars have reconfigured laughter as a "mood" rather than emotion. By adopting terms such as "mirth" and "amusement" to describe the effects of laughter, humor has been reconceptualised as an emotion and thus, has become a unit of analysis more amendable to historical study. See Marjolein't Hart, "Humour and Social Protest: An Introduction,"

focus from defining laughter's innate characteristics to asking how consumers of humorous content read humor texts.[40]

Recent research into how "joke-scripts"[41] operate in authoritarian cultures demonstrate how studying laughter can yield similar insights to the historical study of emotions. Like other emotions, laughter can be viewed as a "thermometer" indicating what motivated historical actors. However, as humor scholar Christie Davies notes, the difficultly in historicizing humor stems from researchers' imposed dichotomy that assesses humour with oppositional characteristics as either a form of "resistance" or as a harmless "safety valve" that authorities tolerate because it is "counter-productive" to suppress it.[42] A third category has recently emerged that posits that humor aimed at authorities can have the unintended effect of facilitating "escapism and acquiescence." In this third formulation humor is viewed as a "surrogate for conflict" that runs counter to political aims.[43]

This raises several questions that will be addressed throughout this study: did readers in the 1940 and 1950s adopt a different perspective on the nuclear issue after encountering a Herblock Mr. Atom cartoon in the *Post*'s editorial section? Did Feiffer fans imbibe his irreverence towards civil defense and the implications of Eisenhower's "New Look" defense policy when reading his comic strip in the *Voice*? Or did Herblock and Feiffer address readerships who already shared their outlook in regards to the nuclear issue? The archival record has many gaps and silences that make these questions difficult to answer. However, by connecting anti-nuke satire with socio-political developments, some tentative conclusions can be ventured. By posing these historical questions this study will address how readers invested their own meaning into humor texts that may have conflicted or confirmed the views of their authors.

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in *Humour and Social Protest* Marjolein't Hart and Dennis Bos, eds. (New York and Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2007), 12.

[40]For a larger discussion of the development of humor theory see Arthur Asa Berger. "Coda: Humor, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies." In *A Decade of Dark Humor: How Comedy, Irony, and Satire Shaped Post-9/11 America.* Eds., Ted Gournelos and Viveca Greene (Jackson: University Press of Mississipi, 2011), 233-241.

[41] "Joke-scripts" refer to the structure of a joke. Recent research in humor studies has focused on how historical actors import their own concerns into a "joke-script" in order to address larger socio-political debates.

[42] For a larger critique of tendencies within humor studies to view humor texts as subversive see Christie Davies, "Humour and Protest: Jokes under Communism," in *Humour and Social Protest,* Marjolein't Hart and Dennis Bos, eds. (New York and Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2007), 291-305.

[43] Nathanial Hong, "Mow 'em All Down Grandma: The "Weapon" of Humor in two World War II Occupation Scrapbooks," *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research* 23, no.1 (2010): 27. Hong's conclusions will be discussed more thoroughly in the epilogue of this study.

Ethan Thompson's work on subversive humor in 1950s television culture has provided some methodological guides to approaching how historical actors read humor texts. In his discussion of *MAD* magazine Thompson argues *MAD* encouraged its readers to use "decoding strategies" in order to critique the targets in their parodies. Understanding what made a *MAD* parody funny required going "outside the text." Thompson argues once readers adopted this reading practice they were "armed with protocols" that allowed them to fashion their own counter-narratives.[44] This study will adopt Thompson's focus on "refunctioning" and "restructuring" in order to explain how Herblock and Feiffer encouraged their readers to adopt similar discursive practices in order to create counter-narratives of the bomb.

Thompson's methodology dovetails with recent scholarship that has refined approaches to studying humor by incorporating the concept of "framing" into humor studies. As an analytical tool framing helps elucidate how Herblock and Feiffer defined, articulated, and translated "ideological beliefs into an existing, practical framework" while also giving meaning to "events and experiences" as they unfolded.[45] By applying the concept of framing to Herblock's Mr. Atom cartoons and Feiffer's nuclear-themed cartoons we can uncover the discourses embedded in their work.

Chapter one will discusses how Herblock used framing strategies to formulate a coherent and explicit editorial position on the issue of "world atomic control."[46] One year after Hiroshima Herblock introduced a character that his readers came to know as Mr. Atom. From 1946 onwards the anthropomorphic Mr. Atom would appear in the *Post*'s editorial section with increased frequency as the movement for international control of the atom began losing steam. In these cartoons Herblock often placed his towering Mr. Atom next to cowering politicians and

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[44] For a broader discussion of how *MAD* endorsed "critical reading strategies" of television culture see Ethan Thompson, "What Me Subversive? *MAD* Magazine and the Textual Strategies and Cultural Politics of Parody," in *Parody and Taste in Postwar American Television Culture,* 45-75. Thompson's distinction of parody and satire is also worth noting. Working from Margaret A. Rose's definition, Thompson describes how the "target" in parody becomes "part of its own structure, in order to somehow refunction it," while the "target" in satire remains "external" to this "structure." But Thompson contends in the 1950s the terms were used "interchangeably" and more often than not the lines separating the two were "blurred."

[45] Marjolein't Hart argues framing is "a way to link interests to social action." But framing alone does not lead to social change. "Political opportunities" which are "partly structural, partly eventful" also affect outcomes, Hart, *Humour and Social Protest*, 9.

[46] "World atomic control" is the term Herblock used in his cartoons commenting on the movement towards international control of atomic energy and the fate of the Baruch Plan in the UN. This study will follow his usage when referring to the broader movement for atomic control in the 1940s.

accompanied these illustrations with a brief text that ridiculed the inefficacy of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) and its UN equivalent, the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission (UNAEC). A Herblock Mr. Atom cartoon reminded *Post* readers that the failure to establish a plan for international regulation of atomic energy would have grave consequences. In this way Mr. Atom became an important cultural symbol for the liberal goal of international cooperation on the nuclear issue. When the Soviets successfully exploded their first nuclear device in 1949 Herblock responded with one of his most iconic cartoons. An analysis of this cartoon, along with several others that appeared in the *Post* between 1946 and 1955, will form the basis of chapter one.

Chapter two will focus on innovative cartoonist Jules Feiffer, who in the mid-fifties, began experimenting with long-form comics whose subject matter touched on many facets of postwar American culture. In 1956 Feiffer was hired as the editorial cartoonist for an upstart avant-garde weekly called the *Village Voice*. Thereafter *Voice* readers could find Feiffer's Freudian characters grappling with a host of issues associated with modernity, including the theme of "atomic anxiety." Feiffer's anti-nuke cartoons suggested that Americans, who wistfully participated in the postwar economic boom while turning a blind eye to the militarization of America's hinterlands, were repressing subterranean fears nurtured by the Cold War rivalry and its attending arms race. In addition to analyzing four anti-nuke cartoons that appeared in the *Voice* between 1956 and 1958 this chapter will also subject two of Feiffer's long-form comics, the unpublished *Rollie* which dated from this time, and *Boom,* published in 1959, to close readings in order to show how their author explored the theme of "atomic anxiety"[47] in his satire.

Like all bracketed dates, the ones chosen here are somewhat arbitrary. Nineteen forty-six seems like a logical starting point given Herblock's debut of Mr. Atom in that year. Likewise, 1959 was chosen as an end point because in that year satire fans could finally read Feiffer's previously unpublished *Boom*. As the epilogue in this study will discuss, by the 1960s other

[47] The term "atomic anxiety" can be problematic. Often it used as a catch-all phrase. When used in this study "atomic anxiety" is meant to refer to cultural works that expressed an unease with the bomb's looming presence, scepticism over the US's nuclear policy, and/or a sense of fatigue towards civil defense drills. Not all cultural responses to the bomb stemmed from "atomic anxiety." Only those works expressing fears and frustrations of US nuclear policy can be considered products of the era's anxieties. The plethora of kitsch products produced within atomic culture reflected the optimism of the postwar era's buoyant consumer culture. In contrast Herblock and Feiffer illustrated cartoons that critiqued this culture and when they adopted images from atomic culture they did so with the intention of subverting it.

satirists practicing "sick" humor took up the nuclear theme in their work.[48] By then much was changing in Cold War culture. As Stephen Whitfield notes the postwar trends which shaped this culture had, by the mid-sixties, "decomposed."[49]

Decomposition, however, is rarely visible to those witnessing it. Often, it is slow, subtle, and hard to detect. To contemporaries in the late fifties it may have seemed the inverse was true. Civil defense continued insinuating itself into many pockets of American life. Private bomb shelters proliferated in the late fifties while Eisenhower's "New Look" defense policy directed a greater share of defense spending to nuclear weapons production. The widespread fear that hydrogen bombs tests were releasing potentially lethal amounts of radioactive fallout into the atmosphere further added to the sense of foreboding engendered by the bomb.

Within this cultural climate humor thrived because it offered a venue to explore these contemporary concerns. In arguing for humor's place as a "category of historical analysis," this study follows Joseph Boskin in claiming "considerable cultural power for humor."[50] As numerous scholars have noted, humor has the capacity to offend, enrage, and provoke, but it also can ask people to rethink what Warren Susman argues are the "fundamental assumptions" and "implicit knowledge" embedded within every culture.[51]

In the 1940s and 1950s "implicit knowledge" often found expression in anti-Communist discourses that stressed the immutability of Soviet aggression and Marxist ideology. These "fundamental assumptions" within Cold War culture were challenged when "implicit knowledge" was subjected to explicit criticism.

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[48] A 1959 article from *Time* described comedians Lenny Bruce and Mort Stahl as "sicknits." The epilogue of this study will briefly discuss how "sick" humor circumvented power structures by critiquing anti-Communist hysteria, the rigidity within postwar gender politics, the injustices of racial inequality, and the dictates of consumer culture.

[49] Stephen Whitfield's work on "Cold War culture" has been an important source of reflection. This quote was taken from Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (New York: Hopkins Fulfillment Service, 1996). For a larger discussion of how novelist Joseph Heller's satiric *Catch-22* set the standard for Cold War satire see Stephen J. Whitfield, "Still the Best Catch There Is," in *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2001).

[50] Joseph Boskin, *Rebellious Laughter: People's Humour in American Culture* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 2.

[51] Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003), 288.

1.2: The Age of Anxiety?

What contemporaries in the 1950s referred to as the "Age of Anxiety" took its name from a 1947 W.H. Auden poem that Cammie McAtee claims lamented the "heightening anxiety and stress" of the postwar period. Arthur Schlesinger's influential 1949 book *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*, reified Auden's insight, by naming one chapter title, "Politics in an Age of Anxiety." A year later existential psychologist Rollo May borrowed from Auden's language in his pioneering work *The Meaning of Anxiety*. For May, Americans had many reason to feel anxious in a postmodern world but one source of contemporary anxiety stemmed from fears "of the uncontrolled atom bomb."[52]

From its inception deep within the armed fortress of Los Alamos to its first explosion within the dusty hills of New Mexico's Jemez Mountains, the atom bomb has inspired the kind of anxieties that Auden, Schlesinger, and May referred to in their works. The successful Trinity test at Alamogordo in July, 1946 moved "father of the bomb," physicist Robert Oppenheimer, to recite the Hindu proverb: "I am become death, destroyer of worlds." Harry Truman had a less poetic response but equally revealing one after he authorized the use of the two remaining bombs in the US's arsenal on Japan. While sailing home from the Potsdam Conference on August 6, the new president learned one bomb named Little Boy had successfully exploded over Hiroshima. Truman exclaimed to a group of sailors, "This is the greatest thing in history!"[53] Three days later a second bomb, Fat Man, laid waste to Nagasaki. Fearing more atomic reprisals on their shaken population, Japanese leaders finally surrendered. The war was over.

Truman's comments, however, did not reflect his complex relationship to the bomb. In a diary entry written after he learned of the successful Alamogordo test, Truman ruminated that the "most terrible bomb in the history of the world . . . may be the fire destruction prophesised in the Euphrates Valley era, after Noah and his fabulous Ark."[54] Critics did not reflect Truman's biblical language after learning of Hiroshima but they did express similar concerns. With fires still smoldering in the two devastated Japanese cities American editors and intellectuals began dissecting the moral dimensions of Truman's decision to drop the bomb. In the coming weeks

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[52] As quoted in Cammie McAtee, "Taking Comfort in The Age of Anxiety: Eero Saarinen's Easy Chair," in *Atomic Dwellings: Anxiety, Domesticity, and Postwar Architecture*, ed. Robin Schuldenfrei (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 3-25.

[53] For a larger discussion of Truman's reaction to Hiroshima and his later private reflections see Boyer, "President Truman, the American People, and the Atomic Bomb," in *Fallout,* 17-40.

[54] As quoted in Boyer, *Fallout,* 32.

many were moved to write essays and columns that sharply contrasted with the celebratory mood. Norman Cousins, editor for the *Saturday Review of Literature*, spent the night of August 6 writing an essay entitled, "Modern Man is Obsolete." The liberal *New Republic* opined that a nuclear war would leave only "scattered remnants of humanity living on the periphery of civilization." Even the conservative *Chicago Tribune*, anticipating the nightmare scenarios a future arms race might facilitate, speculated that nuclear warfare would reduce the earth to "a barren waste" forcing survivors to "hide in caves or live among ruins."[55] Such conclusions were formed in the absence of scant photo evidence as the US Army barred any release of footage detailing the destruction at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.[56]

"A barren waste" was hardly the image the Truman administration wanted to project for the future of atomic energy. In its first press release following Hiroshima the administration linked the two atomic weapons used on Japan with the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor—a link that for many Americans justified the massive Japanese civilian causalities.[57] Also embedded in these war-sloganeering paragraphs, however, were peppy phrases which depicted a bright future for the atom. The "greatest scientific gamble in history" had paid off; "harnessing the basic power of the universe" and opening unlimited possibilities.[58] Soon the AEC began projecting "the soothing image of a peaceful atom"[59] while former Manhattan Project veterans began rallying around the banner of World Government in the hopes of submitting their new Frankenstein creation to international controls under the auspices of the newly-created United Nations (UN).

Within this cultural climate "anxiety" became a recurring theme that intellectuals like Schlesinger and May incorporated into their critiques of postwar American culture. Herblock and

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[55] As quoted in Boyer, *Fallout,* 6-7.

[56] Despite our access to countless images from the atomic age, contemporaries in the 1940s were often bereft of such images until the 1950s. On the September 25, 1949 issue of the *New York Times* featured a series of photos from each atomic blast since Hiroshima. One glaring omission, however, remained: no image had been released of the Soviet blast which had been confirmed two days earlier.

[57] Public polling taken immediately after WWII ended indicates strong public support for Truman's decision to drop the bomb. But its military use has remained a point of heated debate. After the war the United States Strategic Bombing Survey concluded a Japanese surrender was imminent before both bombs were dropped in early August. The Survey estimated "in all probability" the Japanese would have surrendered prior to November 1, 1945 "even if no invasion had been planned" or atomic bombs had been dropped. As quoted in Boyer, *Fallout*, 24.

[58] President Harry Truman, "Statement on Atomic Power, August 7, 1945," in *"In case Atom Bombs Fall": An Anthology of Governmental Explanations, Instructions and Warnings from the 1940s to the 1960s,* Michael Scheibach, ed, (Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009), 13-15.

[59] Boyer, *Fallout*, 40.

Feiffer made use of the "anxiety" theme in their satire by exploring the bomb's tightening grip over Americans' imaginations. Because Herblock and Feiffer's careers started at slightly different times, and under different circumstances, they also enter the debate on anti-nuke satire at different moments in the evolution of the topic. While their careers overlap Feiffer did not achieve national notoriety until a full decade after Herblock got his start with the *Post,* at which point anticommunism had lots some of its intensity. In this climate Feiffer could adopt a more critical stance towards postwar American culture without fearing a backlash from ardent Cold Warriors. The liberal Herblock meanwhile established himself as a cartoonist just as anticommunism was gathering force in the late forties, prompting him to illustrate anti-Communist cartoons of his own.[60]

Analyzing both Herblock's and Feiffer's satire invites us to compare how each man approached the question of "anxiety" in their cartoons. Such comparisons offer an opportunity for contrast. While Feiffer admired Herblock, the former's *Village Voice* cartoons broke with previous cartooning traditions by introducing a narrative structure into his work that allowed Feiffer to explore more complex themes. In a Feiffer cartoon a character's inner monologue would be explored in a multi-frame lay-out that allowed for a story to emerge. Herblock, on the other hand, held fast to the tradition of illustrating a single-frame cartoon whose text was limited. As an editorial cartoonist expected to deliver cartoons on a daily basis, Herblock's work also reflected a more topical approach to cartooning that emphasized pithy commentary on current events.

Other examples distinguishing the two men abound. Their differing positions along the ideological spectrum invites analysis of how their politics informed their assessment of the role of satire in American politics.[61] Stephen Kercher's study of "liberal" humor and "sick" humor during the postwar era is an important entry point in any discussion of the period's changing notions of humor. For Kercher liberal humorists like Herblock espoused a "traditional civic idealism" that expressed faith in established American institutions. By the mid-fifties this liberal approach to satire was being eclipsed by "sick" humor, which emphasized more critical

[60] Herblock's caricatures of Stalin and Mao were deemed anti-communist enough to be used by the State Department in a 1951 pamphlet titled *Herblock Looks at Communism.* See Kercher, *The Limits of Irreverence*, 36.
[61] This is aided by the fact that both cartoonists wrote memoirs and gave ample interviews over the years. Herblock also published compilations of his work replete with his own commentary that details his motivations for some of his most well-known cartoons.

perspectives on previously taboo subjects.[62] As will be explored more fully in chapter two, Feiffer's role in popularizing "sick" humor helped expand American satire's topical terrain. His satire did not provide easy answers; instead it raised questions that few cultural creators at the time were willing to ask.

It is important to remember the debates over fallout in the mid-1950s took place during a time of retreat for anti-Communists. The constitutive structure of Cold War culture was changing, and many cracks and crevices previously sealed from scrutiny appeared to be opening. It is unlikely that Cold war culture could have sustained its strength without the support from an influential and diverse group of shareholders who benefited from it. Scholars have used the term "Cold War consensus" to describe the outlook held by diverse policymakers, defense contractors, and rabid anti-Communists who facilitated the Red Scare and sanctioned the excesses of McCarthyism. The anticommunism espoused by this Cold War consensus, not to mention the many ways in which it manifested itself in the postwar period, breathed life into Cold War culture throughout the fifties, even as McCarthyism ebbed mid-decade.

The Cold War consensus also threw firm support behind the US's evolving nuclear policy. Boyer that argues in the 1950s "most Americans concluded that safety lay in possessing more and bigger nuclear weapons than anyone else." The "terrible simplification of Cold War thinking"[63] which motivated such conclusions ensured continual support for increased nuclear weapons production and future research into developing a hydrogen bomb, the so-called "super" bomb. Even in periods when the Cold War seemed to be thawing nuclear weapons remained an enduring reality. In 1961 Americans could read a letter from President Kennedy in *Life* magazine that called for a national program of shelter construction.[64] None of this seems possible without a vigorous Cold War consensus emphasizing that the struggle against international communism must be sustained.

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[62] The epilogue of this study will briefly discuss "sick" comics such as Lenny Bruce and satirical writers such as Paul Krassner. This new form of humor circumvented power structures by critiquing anti-Communist hysteria, the rigidity within postwar gender politics, the injustices of racial inequality, and the dictates of consumer culture.
[63] Boyer, *Fallout,* 172.
[64] Kennedy's letter prefaced an in-depth article on how to survive an atomic attack. One section concentrated on shelter construction. Most assumed a nuclear attack could be survived with sufficient preparation. See *LIFE*, September 15, 1961, 95-108.

For Kessel studying historical humor texts can lead us to discover "a cultural practice that both organized social order and revealed shared assumptions about society and politics."[65] Scholars who dismiss the importance of this "cultural practice" in the Cold War miss an opportunity to see how humor is often "constructing and deconstructing identity, disputing boundaries, and negotiating appearances."[66]

At various points in the Cold War a "cultural practice" emerged that challenged official discourses. In the late 1940s, Herblock's Mr. Atom cartoons help construct a liberal "identity" that opposed an unregulated nuclear arms industry and promoted international cooperation. When others took his lead by using satire to challenge the legitimacy of congressional committees infringing on Americans' First Amendment rights during McCarthyite witch hunts they were disputing the "boundaries" being transgressed. And when Feiffer took aim at the period's misleading uniformity in the larger culture he was "negotiating appearances" of the age on terms more representative of the cultural pluralist milieu of mid-fifties New York.

Humor, however, could also reinforce dominant discourses. The sitcom remains a telling example of how humor worked to establish cultural norms. *I Love Lucy* and *The Honeymooners* may have featured characters representative of a diverse ethnicity and working class within the US but in the end their ambitions and goals did not differ significantly from the millions of Americans who had fled to the suburbs following WWII. When Lucille Ball, television's highest paid star, was accused of harbouring communist sympathies her fictional and real-life husband Desi Arnez defended her by appealing to consumer culture: "The only thing red about this kid is her hair—and even that is not legitimately red."[67]

No war is without casualties. Those who did not follow Arnez' lead ran the risk of being tarred with the Communist brush. Many learned the hard way after being fired, blacklisted, or forced to testify in front of congressional committees. This more immediate threat to basic civil liberties seems like a more pressing concern from hindsight's perch. But satirists in the fifties often did not distinguish between the civil liberties threat and the nuclear threat. For many the

[65] Martini Kessel, *The Politics of Humour: Laughter, Inclusion and Exclusion in the Twentieth Century,* Martini Kessel and Patrick Merziger, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), preface, 3.
[66] Ibid., 16.
[67] Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), 53.

two were entwined. Throughout the Cold War the existential stirred with the political in an unholy mix of dread.

Given how stultifying Cold War culture could be, one might expect satirists to tread carefully. *MAD* magazine, which debuted in 1952 and quickly became a cultural sensation, steered clear of controversial political issues. Instead it created controversy by satirizing consumer and celebrity culture. Their parodies of popular culture prompted a host of letters to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover from concerned parents wanting to know if the magazine was spreading communist ideas. Such worries seem "quaint" from today's perspective but to many Americans who watched Cold War fantasies projected into their living rooms via television the threat of communist infiltration seemed frighteningly real.[68]

Perhaps the parents who wrote Hoover may have canceled their subscriptions to the *Washington Post* a few years prior after encountering a Herblock cartoon. No doubt they would have done so if they came across Jules Feiffer's work in the *Village Voice*. Both men offered far more trenchant commentary on postwar America than *MAD* ever attempted. However, in most accounts of humor in this period *MAD* often overshadows other forms of visual satire. This study hopes to correct this imbalance by looking at two visual satirists whose insights into postwar American culture were more penetrating than *MAD*'s caustic but apolitical approach.[69]

In some ways our understanding of the era's atomic culture remains as monochromatic as the black-and-white civil defense films which history has recorded. This study concurs with Boyer that: "post-1945 American culture makes no sense without taking into account the atomic bomb."[70] However, in Boyer's otherwise exhaustive account humor bears mentioning only in a few sparse footnotes. Anti-nuke satire was a constitutive element of atomic culture as it added some splashes of colour to the period's palette by asking Americans to reflect on their government's nuclear policy. Seen this way, Herblock and Feiffer were not mere jesters. Given

[68] Thompson, *Parody and Taste,* 45-75.
[69] Despite forming a friendship with *MAD*'s founding editor Harvey Kurtzman, Jules Feiffer never considered himself a "fan of *MAD*." See Jules Feiffer, *Backing Into Forward: A Memoir* (New York: Nan A. Talese and Doubleday, 2010), 243.
[70] Paul S. Boyer, "Sixty Years and Counting: Nuclear Themes in American Culture, 1945 to the Present," in *The Atomic Bomb and American Society: New Perspectives,* Rosemary B. Mariner and G.Kurt Piehler, eds. (TN: The University of Tennessee Press/Knoxville, 2009), 4.

their criticism of postwar trends it is hard to imagine those holding court ever forming a receptive audience for their satire.[71]

To the readers who encountered anti-nuke cartoons in the *Post* and *Voice* during "the long fifties,"[72] this satire provoked more than laughter. It also presented a counter-image of how to survive in the nuclear age. In doing so, it helped change contemporary notions of humor by selecting targets of derision—military and governmental leadership—immune from critical mockery during WWII. Like *MAD*, Herblock and Feiffer can be seen as a bridge to later sixties satirists who used humor to frame their opposition to the Vietnam War.

As much as anti-Communist zealots facilitated a climate of fear, they also inspired opposition. Herblock's and Feiffer's anti-nuke satire suggested Americans did not need to accept the logic of nuclear deterrence in order to stay safe. Other options remained available, if only their leaders would pursue them. Likewise, their satire expressed misgivings towards civil defense that many of their readers may have shared. Such scepticism raised important questions: Wouldn't those Americans "lucky" enough to survive an atomic attack be too staggered by the sight of charred corpses and ashen landscapes to rebuild their ruined cities? After an attack—while governments conducted relief efforts from underground bunkers and anxious Americans huddled around radios waited for the latest CONELRAD update—would radioactive fallout prove to be more the lethal, lasting threat? In such a post-apocalyptic world, wouldn't the living then envy the dead?

Both Herblock and Feiffer illustrated cartoons that suggested that in the event of an attack, answers to these questions would register in the affirmative. By using humor to problematize issues related to the bomb, Herblock and Feiffer demonstrated how laughter took on larger social meaning when the source of mockery is institutionalized authority. But the question remains whether their satire challenged existing relations of power or served to

[71] Then Vice-President Nixon is rumoured to have canceled his subscription to the *Washington Post* after encountering a particularly unflattering Herblock caricature of himself.

[72] Decades rarely conform neatly to what our calendars tell us. The "long fifties" may have started in 1946-47 when Leo P. Ribuffo argues "the anticommunist consensus congealed" and lasted until 1964-65 "when opposition to the Vietnam War prompted the reopening of dormant questions about the American way of life." See Leo P. Ribuffo "Will the Sixties Never End? Or Perhaps at least the Thirties? Or maybe Even the Progressive Era? Contrarian Thoughts on Change and Continuity in American Political Culture at the Turn of the Millennium," in *Rethinking Cold War Culture:* Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2001), PDF e-book.

consolidate them. Was it a "surrogate for action"[73] or a "coalescing agent"[74] that forged a sense of community among readers who "got" the joke?

To borrow Michael Cohen's phrase, the possible enjoyment *Post* and *Voice* readers took from anti-nuke cartoons had the potential to create a "politics of laughter"[75] that challenged Cold War discourses, foreign policies, military strategies, defense spending, and civil defense plans because of the incisive criticisms embedded within these humor texts. When the "politics of laughter" were directed towards the cultural symbolism of "bomb power"[76] laughter in the Cold War era had the potential to become subversive.

[73] Hong, "Mow 'em all down grandma," 61.
[74] Boskin, *Rebellious Laughter,* 2.
[75] Cohen, "Cartooning Capitalism," 35.
[76] Wills, *Bomb Power.*

Chapter One

1.1: The Day the West Stood Still[77]

Gloria Nutter's response on September 24, 1949, suggested "atomic anxiety" could be activated at any moment. The *Washington Post* asked the British Admiralty employee[78] for her response to recent news the United States had gathered evidence of an "atomic explosion" in the Soviet Union.[79] When asked for her take on how this development would affect Soviet-American relations, the unfortunately named Ms. Nutter replied: "Nothing can be done by people like me." Although she did not fear an immediate nuclear war between the two superpowers, Ms. Nutter added that "diplomatic relations are bound to be strained" now that both sides possessed nuclear capabilities. Summing up her feelings, Ms. Nutter stated, she felt "just helpless."[80]

The Americans interviewed for the *Post*'s "man-on-the-street" column echoed Ms. Nutter's belief that any future negotiations with the Soviets over international control of atomic energy would be "strained." However, the American interviewees also seemed to reflect an emerging consensus that the US needed to shift its focus from negotiation to increased bomb production. C. Almario, "a technical assistant to the Philippine Embassy," said Americans "should be worried." In order to alleviate these worries Almario suggested the US needed to get "tougher" in its dealing with the Soviets while improving "our own atomic weapons." Mrs. Hallie Jetton, a Washington housewife, added, "We ought to think seriously about how we can make our bombs do the most good right now."[81]

The *Post*'s survey, while hardly scientific, did capture the uneasy mood at the capitol. But not everyone was moved by the "momentous news."[82] Federal employee Raph H. Gibeaux told the *Post* the news was already "old" since the announcement confirmed what US officials

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[77] The popular sci-film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (directed by Robert Wise, Twentieth Century Fox) was not released until 1951, two years after the Soviets acquired nuclear capabilities. The film's message—an alien visits earth and warns humanity it must find a way to coexist peacefully—seems particularly well-tailored to moments of crisis in the Cold War.

[78] Ms. Nutter was the only British citizen interviewed for this column. Most interviewees were American citizens, many of whom worked for the federal government.

[79] The administration released its statement announcing it had "evidence" of an "atomic explosion" late in the evening of September 23. Edward T. Folliard, "President's Announcement Does Not Say Reds Have Bomb," *Washington Post*, September 24, 1949.

[80] Benjamin C. Bradlee, "At 13 and F Sts. N.W.: A-Blast News Is Sobering But Few Express Fear," *Washington Post*, September 24, 1949.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Folliard, "President's Announcement Does Not Say Reds Have Bomb."

had been stating since 1945—the US's nuclear monopoly would not last.[83] At the UN an unperturbed Secretary of State Dean Acheson echoed this sentiment. The *Post* paraphrased Acheson as saying "that people should not be shocked by the announcement" since he, the president and AEC chairman David E. Lilienthal had been preparing the nation for this eventuality. For Acheson the "business" of preserving peace would continue to "proceed in a normal way."[84]

An editorial from that day's *Post* tried to describe what this "normal" might look like.[85] Now that "the existence of a Russian bomb" had altered "the balance of power in the world," the editorial stated, the US needed to pursue "a calm and sensible policy" while avoiding "panic." A renewed emphasis on "quantity" and "quality" in nuclear production would help quell fears and prevent a "hysterical reaction" from Americans. The editorial urged readers to consider that "the tactical offensive use of the atom bomb" was already considered "limited" within military circles. Quoting General Omar Bradley, who in August was appointed Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the *Post* argued the bomb had become more "defensive instrument" than offensive weapon.[86]

While the editorial urged that negotiations in the UN Security Council should continue being pursued "vigorously," it offset this conciliatory tone by recommending the US strengthen ties with its western European allies while ensuring a "full partnership" with Britain and Canada in nuclear research. Reminding its readers that the news might "be the impetus that will weld the Western World together,"[87] the *Post* echoed the assumptions underpinning George Kennan's formulation of containment which the Truman Doctrine adopted in its handling of the Greece

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[83] Bradlee, "A-Blast News Is Sobering But Few Express Fear."

[84] "World Should Not Be Shocked By Atom Blast, Acheson Says," *Washington Post*, September24, 1949.

[85] In London the *New York Times* reported the *Daily Herald* "called for the renewal of efforts to attain international control of atomic energy" while the *Daily Mail* argued the Soviet Union "would be less likely now to submit to control," suggesting talks would hold little promise for joint-agreement. Taking stock of the public mood on the island nation whose memories of the London Blitz remained vivid, the *Times* also reported that "no firm and unanimous opinion" on the Soviet threat had emerged in Britain but the news "reminded Britons that their island is extremely vulnerable to atomic attack." See Clifton Daniel, "British Also Urge Effective Control," *New York Times,* September 24, 1949. The *Times* also noted that "diplomatic observers" in Moscow believed a "great disparity of bargaining powers" had been "removed" following the successful test, prompting the paper to suggest the new nuclear "equality" could become "A Spur to Peace." See "A Spur to Peace Seen in Moscow," *New York Times,* September 26, 1949.

[86] This early formulation of nuclear deterrence was a precursor to the Eisenhower administration's policy of massive retaliation.

[87] "Editorial—The Russian Bomb," *Washington Post*, September 24, 1949.

crisis in early 1947. Failing to criticize what Patterson describes as "half-hearted efforts to accommodate the Soviets,"[88] the *Post* missed an opportunity to highlight how proposals such as the Baruch Plan tilted towards the US and its allies.[89] The Soviets, unlikely to submit to international inspection as the Baruch Plan proposed, were made to seem as transgressors.

In this way the *Post*'s bylines on September 24 spoke to concerns that had been mounting for four years: "Grave Senate Hears Soviet A-Bomb News"[90] read one; "Stockpiling May Be Speeded"[91] read another. By mirroring the administration's "studied language"[92] the *Post*'s editorial avoided fear-laced rhetoric and instead embraced what it called "hard thinking."[93] But "hard thinking," as formulated by the *Post*, also reflected "the simplification of Cold War thinking."[94] Given this editorial slant one might expect their editorial cartoonist to express a similar position. Did Herblock's September 24 cartoon offer an alternative reading of events?

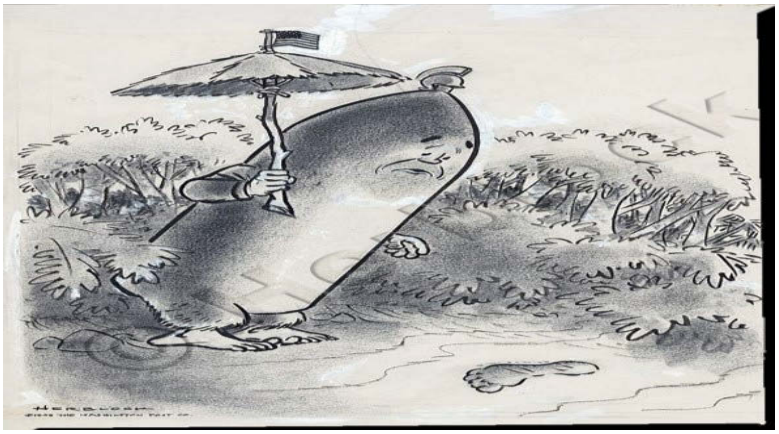

FIGURE 3: Herblock, "Mr. Atom Footprint," *Washington Post*, September 24, 1949.

[88] Patterson identifies three distinct phases in Truman's foreign policy. The first lasted until early 1946 and "exposed a good deal of floundering and inconsistency." The second phase began late in '46 and featured "a stiffening of purpose" towards the Soviets. The final phase in '47 saw the creation of "a more consistent, clearly articulated policy" of containment. See Patterson, *Great Expectations,* ch.5, 105-136.

[89] The Baruch Plan was based on the Acheson-Lilienthal Report and proposed to the UNAEC in June, 1946. The proposal called on the US to destroy its nuclear arsenal if each signee to the proposed treaty refrained from producing their own weapons while opening themselves up to international inspection teams. An international governing body then would regulate the production of atomic energy. But it was a plan the Soviets were likely to reject while the US remained the only nuclear power. Abstaining from the Security Council vote in 1946, the Soviet Union did just this and by early 1947 the proposal was dead. See Campbell Craig and Sergey Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), introduction, 1-43.

[90] Robert C. Albright, "Grave Senate Hears Soviet A-Bomb News," *Washington Post,* September 24, 1949.

[91] "Truman Reveals Red A-Blast; No Widespread Alarm Felt; Stockpiling May Be Speeded," *Washington Post*. September 24, 1949.

[92] Folliard, "President's Announcement Does Not Say Reds Have Bomb."

[93] "Editorial—The Russian Bomb."

[94] Boyer, *Fallout*, 172.

Next to the *Post*'s editorial on page six, and placed above published "Letters to the Editors," readers could find one of Herblock's most salient Mr. Atom cartoons. The anthropomorphic character—with short arms and stout legs—wore a sad expression on his face that day. Standing alone on the shore, Mr. Atom gazes down at a large footprint made in the sand. He holds an umbrella (perhaps to shield himself from radioactive fallout?) topped with an American flag. Taking stock of the unseen colossus' mark, Mr. Atom's face registers the presence of another. No longer alone on his island, Mr. Atom's solitude, much like the US's nuclear monopoly, is no more. *Post* readers that day could imagine that beyond Mr. Atom's island lay a calm blue sea whose placidity had been disrupted by the era's atomic tests. Eventually, the relentless waves would wash up on the shore and erase from view the giant footprint that had captured Mr. Atom's attention. While the footprint will dissolve into water, the radioactive residue will remain, mixing the contaminated sand with the salty sea, and leaving the ocean to carry to other distant shores its toxic mixture.[95]

This chapter will situate this Herblock cartoon, along with several others that appeared in the *Post* between 1946 and 1955, in the larger atomic culture that had taken root in the US following Hiroshima. It will also chart the evolution of Herblock's Mr. Atom character in order to show how the *Post*'s cartoonist responded to the failure of what he referred to in his cartoons as "world atomic control." With the liberal goal of international cooperation seemingly disappearing in a billowing mushroom cloud after news of the Soviet atomic test, Herblock shifted the focus of his Mr. Atom cartoons to address emerging debates centered on proposals to build a "super bomb."

Ms. Nutter, the British interviewee for the *Post*'s "man-on-the-street" column, had cause to feel "helpless" that day. The "strange disquiet" and "very great apprehension" that theologian Reinhold Niebuhr believed was taking hold in "the more sober and thoughtful sections" of the nation following Hiroshima began resurfacing as the 1940s drew to a close.[96] As Boyer observes, such fears were not confined to intellectual circles as Americans wrote letters to the editor with bylines that read, "Science Moving Too Fast."[97]

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[95] Herblock,"Mr. Atom 1949 Island Imprint," *Washington Post*, September 24, 1949.
[96] Boyer, *Fallout*, 32.
[97] Ibid., 33.

After learning of the successful Alamogordo test on July 16, 1945, Truman confided similar fears in his diary: "I fear machines are ahead of mortals. . . we are only termites on a planet and maybe when we bore too deeply into the planet there'll [be] a reckoning—who knows?"[98] Was Ms. Nutter's "helpless" feeling related to the unimpeded speed in nuclear development and research? Would science burrow further? If Ms. Nutter had encountered Herblock's September 24 cartoon would she have read Mr. Atom's pensive expression as a sad lament for the goal of world atomic energy?

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1.2: Mr. Herblock Goes to Washington

Given his position as an editorial cartoonist for a leading daily based in the nation's capital, one might assume that Herblock was the ultimate "Beltway" cartoonist. However, Herblock's independent streak often made him an outsider in Washington politics. At times he clashed with his own paper's editorial board. After the *Washington Post* endorsed Eisenhower for president in 1952 Herblock, one of the few prominent voices who proclaimed he didn't "like Ike," stopped cartooning for the *Post* for a brief period.[99]

His penchant for independence is perhaps one reason why Kercher argues his fellow cartoonists considered Herblock "by far the most skilled and most influential member of their profession."[100] Contemporaries like the *St. Louis Dispatch*'s cartoonist Daniel Fitzgerald, lauded Herblock for his fearlessness in attacking Red-baiting politicians like Nixon and McCarthy.[101] Many *Post* readers agreed. Washington resident Elbert Baldwin wrote a "Letter to the Editor" praising Herblock as a "great cartoonist" who had "the ability to make an issue succinctly graphic in slashingly (sic) strong drawing."[102] Another Washington resident, Jeremiah Digges, hailed Herblock as an "outstanding artist" who would one day rank alongside the legendary Thomas Nast as one of the nation's "greatest" cartoonists.[103] Following Herblock's September

[98] As quoted in Boyer, *Fallout*, 32.

[99] Eisenhower remained a favourite satiric target for Herblock. School integration was usually one issue Herblock took the president to task for in his cartoons. The genial grandfatherly image the ex-general projected also was critiqued by Herblock in his Eisenhower caricatures as the *Post*'s cartoonist interpreted the president's aloofness as a sign of irresponsible leadership.

[100] Kercher, *The Limits of Irreverence*, 29.

[101] Fitzpatrick was no stranger himself to satirizing the bomb in postwar America. The *St. Louis Dispatch* cartoonist won two Pulitzer Prizes during his time at the *Dispatch* (1913-58). The second of these prizes was awarded in 1955 for a cartoon critiquing the US and French involvement in Indochina.

[102] Elbert Baldwin, "Letters to the Editor," *Washington Post*, October 13, 1947.

[103] Jeremiah Digges, "Letters to the Editor," *Washington Post*, October 18, 1949.

24 Mr. Atom cartoon, Anne Norton of Oak Ridge, Texas wrote: "There is no better man in the business than your Herblock."[104] With such fanfare it's no wonder the *New Yorker*'s Richard Rovere singled out Herblock in the 1950s as "possibly the country's best bet to revive an American art that can stand plenty of reviving."[105]

Born in 1909 to a Catholic mother and a Jewish father, the precocious Herbert Block exhibited an early talent for drawing that would later position him as a candidate to revive this "American art." Encouraged by his father, himself an amateur cartoonist, Block began taking drawing classes at the Art Institute of Chicago at the age of eleven. Soon after, his older brother, a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune,* exposed Herblock to "the fast-pace world of print journalism."[106] While still in high school Block began submitting his first cartoons for publication in the *Evanston News-Index*; the familiar moniker, "Herblock," already accompanying his drawings.

In 1929 Herblock ended his formal education after leaving Forest Hills College in his second year to work for the *Chicago Daily News* as a staff cartoonist. While with the *Daily News* he worked alongside one of the era's most respected cartoonists, Vaughn "Shoes" Shoemaker, famous for his creation of the recurring John Q. Public character.[107] Like Shoemaker, Herblock buttressed his social satire with established drawing techniques then popular within the profession. Herblock used "vertical orientation" in his drawings along with "heavy crayon shading" that made "the clear, simple labeling" of his characters stand out.[108]

In 1933 Herblock left the *Daily News* for Cleveland where he landed a position with the Newspaper Enterprise Association (NEA), which syndicated his cartoons to a national audience. Surrounded by "progressive columnists and editorialists" at the NEA, Herblock's raised profile coincided with his embrace of New Deal-era liberalism.[109] Yet Herblock's staunch support for Roosevelt did not prevent the cartoonist from satirizing the president. After Roosevelt's "court-packing scheme" drew accusations of unconstitutional overreach, Herblock drew the dapper

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[104] Anne Norton, "Letters to the Editor," *Washington Post*, October 1, 1949.
[105] As quoted in Kercher, *The Limits of Irreverence*, 40.
[106] Kercher, *The Limits of Irreverence*, 29.
[107] Donald Dewey, *The Art of Ill Will: The Story of American Political Cartoons* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2007), 20.
[108] Taking nothing for granted, Herblock labeled his caricatures with names in case readers had trouble identifying them based on appearance alone.
[109] Kercher, *The Limits of Irreverence*, 30.

patrician politician whacking a bamboozled congress with a cartoonish Supreme Court building. The caption that day read: "YOU CAN'T HAVE EVERYTHING."[110]

When war broke out in Europe caricatures remained a potent tool in Herblock's cartooning arsenal. Naturally, Hitler and Mussolini received the Herblock treatment. Already politicized by the Great Depression, Herblock gave "graphic form and visual power"[111] to Nazi atrocities. Before the US entered the war, Herblock's cartoons also took aim at isolationists at home. After Pearl Harbor Herblock continued satirizing fascism and in 1942 he was awarded the first of an eventual three Pulitzer Prizes for his efforts.[112] A year later he was drafted and he began drawing cartoons for the Army. When the war in the Pacific drew to a close following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Herblock quickly landed a position with the then "struggling" *Washington Post*[113] where he would remain until his death in 2001.

In the postwar years the *Post*'s influence grew alongside Herblock's own. By 1958 Herblock's cartoons were syndicated in 266 newspapers through the *Post* and the Hall Syndicate. His work was also reprinted in progressive magazines such as the *New Republic* and *The Progressive* which helped to burnish his liberal credentials.[114] Winning numerous accolades along the way—including a Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1994—Herblock became a cultural institution.[115] But rarely did he rest on his laurels.

In the early fifties Herblock began publishing his most renowned cartoons in anthologies accompanied with his own commentary.[116] In these books Herblock adopted a "plain and folksy" tone which "helped defuse what many might consider subversive about his message." The ideals articulated in these books—democratic rights, equality, freedom of expression—coalesced into what Kercher describes as a "traditional civic idealism."[117] This "traditional civic idealism"

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[110] Herbert Block, "You Can't Have Everything," January 26, 1938. *Herblock's Presidents: Puncturing Pomposity.* http://www.npg.si.edu/exhibit/herblock/roosevelt.html

[111] Library of Congress, "Herblock's History—Political Cartoons from the Crash to the Millennium," accessed March, 2015. <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/herblocks-history/about.html>

[112] Ibid.

[113] Kercher, *Limits of Irreverence*, 30.

[114] Ibid.

[115] In 2014, HBO documentary titled *Herblock: The Black & the White* highlighted Herblock's enduring cultural influence on contemporary comics. Comedians Jon Stewart and Lewis Black were featured in the documentary alongside such heavyweights in journalism as Tom Brokaw and Bob Woodward.

[116] Four such anthologies were published within this study's timeframe: *The Herblock Book* (1952), *Herblock's Here and Now* (1955), *Special For Today* (1958), and *Straight Herblock* (1964).

[117] Kercher, *The Limits of Irreverence*, 31.

reflected the optimism of postwar liberalism and underscored Herblock's faith in American approaches to democracy. For Herblock, "trust in each other, dedication to free inquiry, and confidence in the collective wisdom of an informed public," were the building blocks found in any democracy.[118]

In the late 1940s and early 1950s these liberals ideals were threatened by the era's anti-Communist zealots whose tendency to view dissent as "communistic" stifled public debate of pressing issues such as world atomic control. Given Herblock's support for this goal, anti-Communist rhetorical excesses became an important target for his cartoons.

Herblock's approach to cartoons about anticommunism's infringement on Americans' civil liberties were similar to the cartoons he drew criticizing Roosevelt's constitutional overreach in the late thirties. In both cases Herblock supported the general aims but took issue with the methods used to achieve them. In this way, his "traditional civic idealism" reaffirmed the importance of placing checks on presidential and congressional authority in order to preserve a democratic balance. In the case of his cartoons criticizing anticommunism, Herblock placed "dedication to free inquiry" above the hunt for "Reds" and "fellow travellers."

However, Herblock's relationship to anticommunism was more complex then is often remembered. As his 1953 Pulitzer-winning cartoon commenting on the death of Joseph Stalin showed, Herblock's liberalism viewed the Soviet system as inherently antithetical to his ideals. Like many postwar liberals Herblock considered Marxist ideology as a threat to the "collective wisdom of an informed public." His celebrated caricatures of Richard Nixon and Joseph McCarthy need to be balanced with his own anti-Communist cartoons.[119] Herblock did not displace the Soviet Union as a foe that needed to be confronted; rather his critiques of communism fit within the framework of his "traditional civic idealism."

Kercher argues that Herblock's cartoons commenting on communism reflected ideas "more consistent with views of mainstream, anticommunist Democrats."[120] However, Kercher adds that Mr. Atom represented a "significant caveat to cold war foreign policy" by warning his

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[118] Herbert Block, *Special for Today* {Hew York: Simon and Schuster, 1958), 25.

[119] Will Kaufman used this tern to denote the large swath of Nixon jokes, caricatures and parodies that mocked the man throughout his career. The relevancy of "anti-Nixon satire" to anti-nuke humor will be explored more fully in the last section of this chapter. See Will Kaufman, "What's So Funny About Richard Nixon? Vonnegut's 'Jailbird' and the Limits of Comedy," *Journal of American Studies* 41, no.3 (2007): 623-639.

[120] Kercher, *The Limits of Irreverence*, 35.

readers "against the dangers of expanding nuclear arsenals."[121] Herblock viewed the nuclear issue as a similar destabilizing postwar trend that needed to be solved within the venue of the UN. Mr. Atom, who proved to have a longer shelf-life than McCarthy and more comebacks than Nixon, was an equally important character in Herblock's oeuvre that demonstrated how his liberalism approached the issue of world atomic control.

* * * *

On August 3, 1946, Herblock marked the one year anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima with a cartoon that spoke to the bomb's contentious past and uncertain future. Herblock used the occasion to remind his readers that negotiations within the UNAEC had yet to achieve any results. In that day's *Post* he drew the Grim Reaper's skeletal hands clutching an atomic weapon. The bomb hangs over the globe like the sword of Damocles as faceless bureaucrats try to hammer out agreements on "WORLD ATOMIC CONTROL."[122]

In the following weeks the *Post* published a number of Herblock cartoons that explored nuclear themes. On August 11 he drew a nuclear weapon aimed at the sun. A team of UN inspectors huddle around the weapon while a character resembling Truman works on the bomb with a screwdriver.[123] Two days later Herblock referenced the recent atomic tests that took place in the Bikini Atoll of the Marshall Islands a month earlier. In this August 13 cartoon Herblock drew a question mark in the form of a mushroom cloud. Within it contained a question: "SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME?"[124]

As an editorial cartoonist it is hardly surprising Herblock would feature commentary in his cartoons that reflected contemporary events. In the summer of 1946 Herblock had ample evidence from the wider culture to suggest the nation was both fascinated and horrified by the bomb. In July the Bikini Tests that were part of Operation Crossroads signalled that the atomic age was more than an instant flash in the sky over the doomed cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.[125] A preliminary report released by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on July 31 noted that the first bomb tested in Operation Crossroads produced a "flash of radiation [that] was not of high

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[121] Ibid., 36.
[122] Herbert Block, "One Year Since Hiroshima," *Washington Post*, August 3, 1946.
[123] Herbert Block, "Any Prospect Within The Next Year Or So?" *Washington Post*, August 11, 1946.
[124] Herbert Block, "Shape Of Things To Come?" *Washington Post*, August 13, 1946.
[125] The Bikini tests in 1946 were covered by print and radio. But the first tests to be broadcasted live happened on February 6, 1951. Los Angeles stations KTLA and KTTV "caught the flash of eerie white light" while field reporter Gill Martin provided "play-by-play commentary." See Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium*, 8-11.

order." However, the explosion from the second bomb turned the sleek decks of nearby anchored battleships into "radioactive stoves" after waves of "highly radioactive water" washed "into the hulls of the vessels." According to the report these "radioactive stoves" would have "burned all living things aboard them with invisible and painless but deadly radiation."[126]

Only a few weeks before the report's release the *New Yorker* published John Hersey's article detailing the harrowing experiences of Hiroshima survivors. Later released in book form as *Hiroshima,* Hersey's account provided a human component to the "mind-numbing statistics" and abstract science of the bomb. According to Boyer, Hersey's "gripping interwoven narrative" of six individuals who survived the Hiroshima blast deepened "emotional sensibilities" of the bomb's use by personalizing the horrors experienced by those on the ground.[127]

In his early explorations of nuclear themes Herblock's cartoons lacked such "emotional sensibilities." Rather, he focused on political leaders like the president and UN diplomats. While his cartoons reflected their author's preoccupation with the movement for international control of atomic energy, as well his worries over the ecological effects of the Bikini tests, none of these early efforts encapsulated his concerns effectively as Mr. Atom.

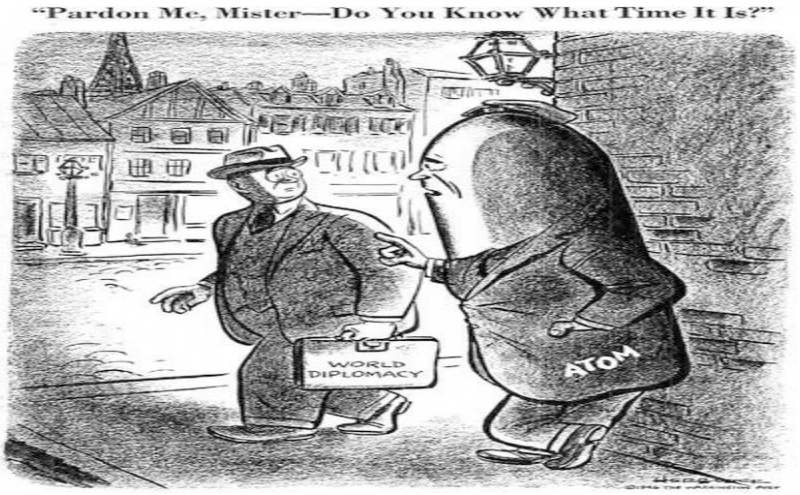

FIGURE 4: Herblock, "Pardon Me, Mister—Do You Know What Time It Is?" Washington Post, August 27, 1946.

[126] The cultural impact of *Operation Crossroads* was as far-reaching as the operation itself. Observing the two atomic tests—the first, named *Able*, was exploded underwater while the second bomb, named *Baker,* was detonated above the surface in mid-air—were some 40,000 army and navy personnel, 90 battleships, and a Noah's Arc of test animals used to register the radioactive impact. See Joint Chiefs of Staff Evaluation Board, "Section III: Observations and Conclusions, Both Tests," July 31, 1946. Michael Scheibach, ed, *"In Case Atom Bombs Fall": An Anthology of Governmental Explanations, Instructions and Warnings from the 1940s to the 1960s* (Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009), 19-24.

[127] Hersey expanded the article and published *Hiroshima* in book form in 1946. See Boyer, *Fallout*, 230-231.

On August 27, *Post* readers encountered an early incarnation of Mr. Atom who is dressed in respectable clothes—blazer, tie and shoes—lending the character a human form that later cartoons dropped. In subsequent versions Mr. Atom usually dwarfed the human characters in the drawings which further distinguished humanity from the anthropomorphic bomb. In his debut Mr. Atom's near human dimensions make him appear more peer than monster. Proportionally, the man holding the briefcase labelled, "WORLD DEMOCRACY" meets Mr. Atom at eye level which emphasizes their similar facial expressions. It is difficult to gauge who is more frightened: the startled man ostensibly working through the UNAEC to procure agreements on atomic energy or the anthropomorphic bomb whose explosiveness has made such efforts so crucial to preserving the postwar peace. Unlike the character who would greet news of the successful Soviet blast in 1949 with sad resignation, the Mr. Atom portrayed here appears lost. His face, gripped with fear, suggests he too is frightened by what lies ahead.

The clandestine setting in this drawing anticipates the aura of secrecy that would envelop Cold War culture in the 1950s. Mr. Atom's placement in what appears to be a back alley invokes the secrecy that pervaded the Manhattan Project. But it also would frame the "cloak-and-dagger" espionage that the Alger Hiss hearings in the House Un-American Activities (HUAC) conducted in 1948.

As in most of Herblock's cartoons, the caption framed the issues at stake. When formulated as a question, these captions asked readers to reflect on the discourse embedded in Herblock's cartoons. In this case the question, "Do You Know What Time It Is?" introduced a time motif that Herblock would return to in future cartoons. This emphasis on time underscored the sense of urgency that liberals like Herblock believed was needed if negotiations within the UN were to prove successful.

This early version of Mr. Atom hinted at the "strange disquiet" that Niebuhr identified in the aftermath of Hiroshima. In his debut Mr. Atom seems as frightened as the humans he is haunting. Former Manhattan Project scientists used fear as a tactic in their campaign to warn the public of nuclear proliferation.[128] The newly-created AEC,[129] led by David Lilienthal, counteracted this public discourse with a campaign of its own. Through Lilienthal's efforts

[128] For a larger discussion of how the "scientists movement" incorporated fear into their discourses see Boyer, *By The Bomb's Early Light*, 65-75.

[129] On August 1, 1946 Truman signed the McMahon/Atomic Energy Act, effectively transferring oversight of the US's developing atomic arsenal to the civilian agency, the AEC.

articles detailing the benefits of atomic energy began cropping up in mainstream news outlets.[130] Herblock's Mr. Atom seemed to side with the scientists. By depicting both characters as scared, Herblock foreshadows later public worries that the bright future of atomic energy that many contemporaries in the 1940s clung to also contained some dark currents.

The day after Herblock introduced his Mr. Atom character he returned to the nuclear theme. On August 28 Herblock presented *Post* readers with "BIKINI MICE." The cartoon showed mice gathered around a newspaper with headlines detailing how the "BIKINI MICE ARE STILL FERTILE." One mouse holds a placard proclaiming the rodents' intentions to claim the earth. The cartoon's caption screams: "One More War And Then We Take Over!"[131] But like Herblock's other nuclear-themed cartoons published in the *Post* in the weeks leading up to Mr. Atom's debut, "BIKINI MICE" did not distill the issues surrounding public debate of world atomic control as effectively as Mr. Atom. Herblock's personification of the bomb made the abstract fears of a future nuclear arms race more identifiable by presenting *Post* readers with a character that embodied these worries.

Post readers would encounter Mr. Atom five more times in 1946.[132] These early efforts continued referencing negotiations in the UN while urging some form of international agreement on the nuclear issue. By 1947 these debates intensified and Herblock responded to the public discourse by illustrating several cartoons that highlighted the issues at stake.

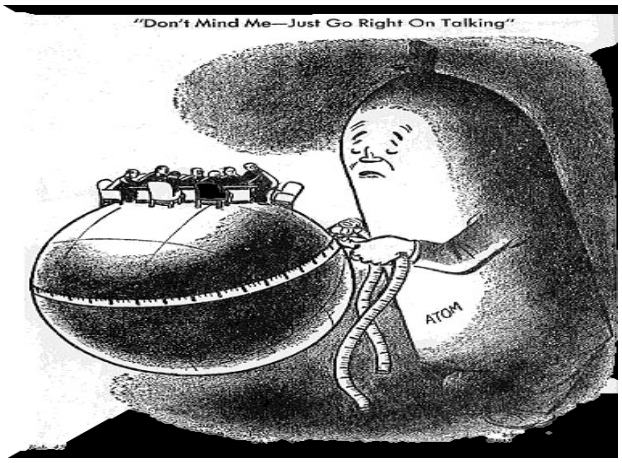

FIGURE 5: Herblock, "Don't Mind Me—Just Go Right On Talking!" *Washington Post*. February 5, 1947.

[130] Boyer, *Fallout*, 29-31.
[131] Herbert Block, "One More War And Then We Take Over," *Washington Post*, August 28, 1946.
[132] This data was obtained by using a keyword search of "Mr. Atom" in Sasha Hoffman's database, *Drawing the Bomb*. Accessed March, 2015.
<http://nuclearcartoons.sashahoffman.org/SearchResults.php?actors=29&keywords=0>

On February 5 Herblock addressed these debates by presenting *Post* readers with a domineering Mr. Atom. In this cartoon Herblock substituted Mr. Atom's frightful expression for a blasé one. His size is notably different than his near-human proportions featured in his debut. Together this suggests the bomb is controlling the agenda—not the faceless men crouched over their boardroom table discussing how atomic energy could be regulated through an international governing body. Measuring the circumference of the globe in cool detachment, Mr. Atom appears to be the one dictating the agenda if sensible men fail to find agreement over his control. The understated caption contrasts with Mr. Atom's looming presence and speaks to worries that the Baruch Plan was stalled. "Don't Mind Me—Just Go Right On Talking," addresses the cartoon's non-descript bureaucrats and policymakers while also inviting *Post* readers to consider if "Talking" in the UN could lead to anything of substance.

Four days later on February 9 Herblock briefly restored Mr. Atom to his original proportions in order to show him on par with an angry character labeled "ARMAMENTS." Both struggle to find entrance into the UN while jostling with the other. If both had made it inside while the UN had been in session, perhaps they would have encountered more struggle as the Baruch Plan seemed at an impasse by 1947.

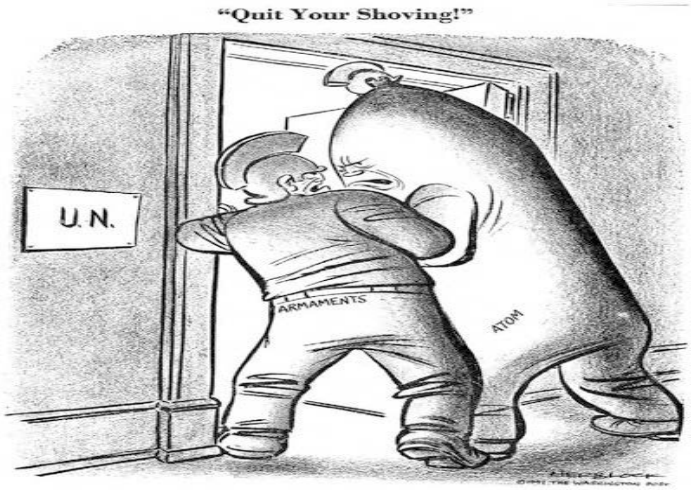

FIGURE 6: Herblock, "Quit Your Shoving!" *Washington Post*, February 9, 1947.

This impasse, frustrating to liberals like Herblock who placed so much faith in the newly-established UN, prompted more comment from the *Post*'s cartoonist on March 11. In this cartoon Herblock once again portrayed Mr. Atom as an out-sized monster who appears more in control than his previous appearance implied. The caption, "You Tell 'Em Kid—I'm A Sovereign Power Myself," creates a power dynamic that favours the smug, relaxed version of Mr. Atom.

FIGURE 7: Herblock, "You Tell 'Em, Kid—I'm A Sovereign Power Myself." *Washington Post*, March 11, 1947.

The "Kid" in this cartoon is Soviet Ambassador to the UN Andrei Gromyko, who was then proposing an alternative plan for atomic energy which would move the debate to the UN's Security Council. With Mr. Atom leaning nonchalantly behind him the Soviet diplomat reads a bulletin with the heading "NO INTERNATIONAL CONTROL." Standing behind a lectern the reader can imagine that Gromyko's audience consists of UN diplomats. Herblock's cartoon suggests Gromyko would be better served by paying attention to who was behind him.

This set of cartoons from 1947 did an effective job of addressing public worries of the fate of efforts to secure some form of world atomic control. In the early part of 1947 the *Post* stressed a similar tone in its coverage of negotiations at the UN. A February 9 editorial posed the question if it was not more prudent to worry "less about secrecy and more about international control?" During these heady months the *Post* urged readers to consider that US security "does not lie in monopoly."[133] Herblock echoed this editorial line in a February 27 cartoon depicting the US as an old man stranded alone on an "ATOMIC SECRET ISLAND." The old man searches for a footprint that would not appear until September, 1949.[134]

Debates over the future of world atomic control coincided with an increase of anticommunism in the US. In March, 1947, Truman asked Congress for military aid for Communist-besieged Greece. A March 16 *Post* editorial voiced support for this decision—it called it "novel" and "daring"—but its editorial that day failed to connect how the

[133] "Editorial—Atomic Monopoly," *Washington Post*, February, 9.
[134] Herbert Block, "I Keep Thinking I See Footprints," *Washington Post*, February, 27.

administration's foreign policy might hinder efforts to reach agreement with the Soviet Union on a host of issues, including atomic energy.[135]

Through the remainder of the year into 1949 Herblock refrained from demonstrating this relationship in his Mr. Atom cartoons. Instead he kept the focus of his Mr. Atom cartoons trained on the UN. Mr. Atom remained an important vehicle for this commentary, appearing in the *Post* a total ten times in 1947. In 1948 Herblock drew six Mr. Atom cartoons that the *Post* published.[136]

FIGURE 8: Herblock, "Tick-Tock, Tick-Tock," *Washington Post*, January 11, 1949.

In his first Mr. Atom cartoon in 1949 Herblock drew a self-assured Mr. Atom twirling what appears to be the symbol for the AEC. As was quickly becoming a trend in Mr. Atom cartoons, Herblock positioned his character so he could tower over the human subjects. To the reader his presence looms large. But to the human subjects in these cartoons Mr. Atom's presence goes unacknowledged. This way of presenting Mr. Atom rendered the character a more haunting figure.

The caption in this cartoon references the recently created atomic clock scientists had developed to measure time more accurately. Such a reference invoked the presence of another clock—the "Doomsday Clock" which had adorned the cover of the *Bulletin of the Atomic*

[135] "Editorial—Roots of the Truman Doctrine," *Washington Post*, March 16, 1947.
[136] Hoffman, *Drawing the Bomb*, accessed March, 2015.
<http://nuclearcartoons.sashahoffman.org/SearchResults.php?actors=29&keywords=0>

Scientists since June, 1947.[137] The *Bulletin*'s clock showed the minute hand indicating the time was seven minutes to midnight—the hour when humanity's "time" would run out. To *Post* readers who were aware of the *Bulletin*'s clock, connections between Herblock's "Tick-Tock, Tick-Tock" and the "doomsday" clock could easily be made, rendering this Mr. Atom cartoon a particularly gloomy portrait.

According to data assembled by Sasha Hoffman, 1949 was one of the peak years for Herblock cartoons containing nuclear themes.[138] In this pivotal year Mr. Atom appeared in the *Post* on eight occasions, including an August 3 cartoon commemorating the four year anniversary of Hiroshima. On a day of reflection Herblock chose to show Mr. Atom blowing out the earth's candles. The headlines in Herblock's cartoon newspapers declare the "U.N. COMMISSION GIVES UP ON ATOM CONTROL" and "A.E.C. REPORTS MORE EFFECTIVE A-WEAPONS."[139] Within weeks real newspapers would be reporting the Soviets now had the bomb.

The idyllic scenery of Herblock's September 24, 1949 cartoon marking news of the Soviet's successful test, represented a brief pause in the character's evolution. Given the spate of tests conducted by the US in the South Pacific since 1946, choosing an island for this drawing spoke to the bomb's past while also hinting at its possible future. But what would this future entail now that Soviets also had the bomb?

In Mr. Atom cartoons featured from 1947-49 Herblock's alarm-raising tone reminded readers that a grim future awaited the US if world atomic control failed. While subscribers to the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* would have agreed with the tone of Herblock's cartoons, commentators in the late forties who believed the Soviets lagged behind in the necessary science and technological knowledge needed to construct an atomic bomb were proven wrong. The *Bulletin*'s "doomsday" clock and Herblock's Mr. Atom cartoons did a better job of anticipating the end of the US's nuclear monopoly. Through the remainder of the year into 1950, public debates in the US began centering on how the US should respond to the Soviet's ascension into the nuclear club. As the Post editorial at the beginning of this chapter suggested, the question

[137] *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 3, no. 6, June, 1947.
[138] Hoffman, *Drawing the Bomb*, accessed March, 2015.
<http://nuclearcartoons.sashahoffman.org/SearchResults.php?actors=29&keywords=0>
[139] Herblock, "Want To See Me Puff Everything Out?" *Washington Post*, August 3, 1949.

hinged on building a "super bomb" or pursuing an agreement with the Soviets on world atomic control. Liberals like Herblock pressed for the latter.

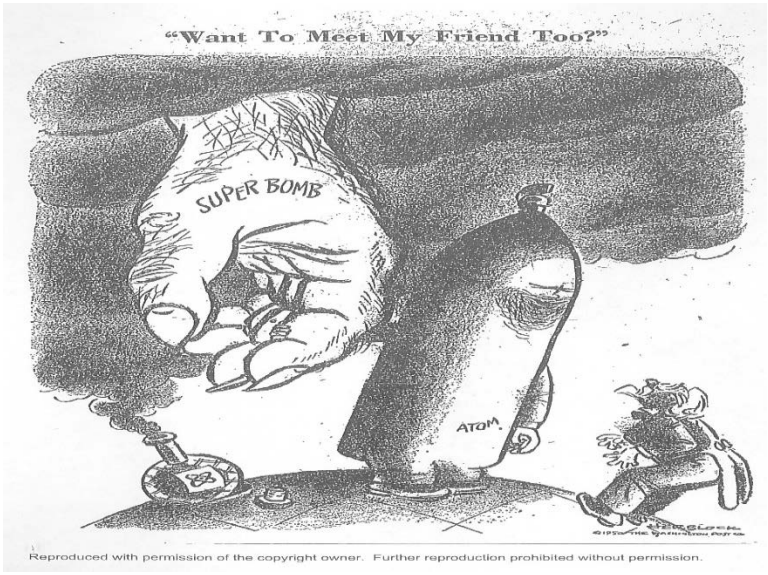

FIGURE 9: Herblock, "Want To Meet My Friend Too?" *Washington Post*, January 17, 1950.

Debate continued in 1950. Herblock waded into the discussion by subjecting his lead character to a supporting role. The character's proportions in this cartoon are revealing as the giant hand labelled "SUPER BOMB" dwarfs Mr. Atom's body. His facial expression, so crucial to deciphering past Mr. Atom cartoons, is also harder to discern. The reader's eyes shift to the giant hand stretching out from the overcast skies. A bottle imprinted with the AEC's symbol releases a billow of smoke that curls into the darkened clouds. For those opposing the hydrogen bomb project Herblock did not draw a silver lining in this cartoon.

On January 31 Truman confirmed that the US would move forward on construction and development of the "Super"—a decision many liberals lamented.[140] Herblock protested this decision in his work. Through the remainder of the year the *Post* continued publishing nuclear-themed cartoons from Herblock. However, only four from 1950 included Mr. Atom, two of which also featured a reference to the "Super." From 1951-52 Mr. Atom appeared in the *Post*'s editorial section a total of ten times, a drop from its peak in 1949.[141]

After debates over the "Super" began fading from public discourse, Herblock began using Mr. Atom to comment on the issue of joint collaboration of atomic science with Britain in

[140] Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 173-176.
[141] Hoffman, *Drawing the Bomb*, accessed March, 2015.
<http://nuclearcartoons.sashahoffman.org/SearchResults.php?actors=29&keywords=0>

a series of cartoons from 1952. With proposals for world atomic control stalled, and the new realities of this "frigid" phase of the Cold War hardening positions between the two Cold War rivals,[142] this theme suggested Herblock supported goals to strengthen the US's nuclear position. The framing of joint collaboration in these cartoons from 1952 also complemented Herblock's approach to drawing cartoons that commented on civil defense. From 1950-55 the *Post* published twelve Herblock cartoons featuring some reference to civil defense, five of which included Mr. Atom.[143]

As the bombs grew in size so too did the need for establishing a civil defense infrastructure. In the last years of the Truman administration civil defense exercises and its attending propaganda added a new component to Cold War culture. In 1953 these civil defense programs were being expanded by the incoming Eisenhower administration whose "New Look" defense policy adopted "massive retaliation" as a military strategy that would deter any possible Soviet attack. As part of this reshuffling of defense priorities the FCDA requested more funding from Congress for civil defense. Herblock responded to the FCDA requests by using his Mr. Atom to comment on the massive federal appropriations that would be earmarked for civil defense programs. However, Herblock's ambivalence to civil defense complicate any reading of Mr. Atom's appearance.

FIGURE 10: Herblock, "It Looks Darling," *Washington Post*, July 23, 1953.

[142] Patterson, "Red Scares Abroad and at Home, *Grand Expectations*, ch.7, 165-205.
[143] Hoffman, *Drawing the Bomb*, accessed March, 2015.
<http://nuclearcartoons.sashahoffman.org/SearchResults.php?actors=29&keywords=0>

In this cartoon from 1953 Herblock renders a hapless Uncle Sam a quaint figure next to the imposing Mr. Atom. Holding an umbrella labelled, "CIVIL DEFENSE APPROPIATIONS," Uncle Sam peers out to the reader in desperation. The cartoon's caption, "It Looks Darling," mocks the faith the FCDA placed in their goals of cultivating a culture of "preparedness." Mr. Atom offers a limp wave as if to say such funds were unnecessary—his destructive capabilities would render any funds devoted to civil defense a waste of spending.

Nine Mr. Atom cartoons made it into the *Post* from 1953-54. A December 8, 1953 cartoon is worth singling out for it featured Mr. Atom casting his shadow over the UN.[144] The UN was a recurring setting used by Herblock even after the goal of world atomic control was no longer being pursued. By this point in the character's evolution Mr. Atom had become more specter than comic figure.

In the mid-fifties fears over the ecological effects of radioactive fallout shifted debates of the nuclear issue from world atomic control to securing an international ban on atmospheric testing. Boyer traces the origins of the public alarm over fallout to the US's Bravo tests in March, 1954. Although the world's first thermonuclear explosion occurred in the Pacific Atoll of Eniwetok in November, 1952, the Bravo tests in '54 is what first alerted the world to fallout dangers.[145] The fifteen megaton blast "proved to be 750 times more powerful than the A-bomb dropped at Hiroshima"[146] and created a crater "250 feet deep and more than a mile across" that was detected as far as 200 miles away from the test site. Japanese fisherman aboard the fishing vessel *Lucky Dragon*, and anchored some 80 miles from the test site, were exposed to radioactive fallout carried downwind. Most of the crew showed some signs of radiation sickness in the following weeks and soon the thermonuclear age claimed its first victim after one crewman died.

Herblock referenced "fallout" in three cartoons in 1955,[147] none of which included Mr. Atom. But as he did in his December, 1953 cartoon, Herblock used the shadow of a bomb to invoke Mr. Atom presence. On February 20, 1955 the *Post* published Herblock's "Shape of Things to Go." The reader can only glimpse the bottom half of the imposing figure whose feet are firmly planted on the globe. He projects a shadow whose silhouette resembles an atomic

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[144] Herblock, "Untitled," *Washington Post*, December 8, 1953.

[145] For a broader discussion of how the medical community responded to fallout worries, and begin shifting its support away from atmospheric testing, see Boyer, *Fallout*, 61-86.

[146] Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 276.

[147] From 1955-63 the *Post* published sixteen Herblock cartoons referencing "fallout." Hoffman, *Drawing the Bomb*, <http://nuclearcartoons.sashahoffman.org/SearchResults.php?actors=0&keywords=170>

bomb. A black pall darkens a large swath of the planet. Written into the bomb's shadow are the words, "H-BOMB FALL-OUT AREA." The cartoon's caption, "Shape of Things To Go," reconfigures a question posed in an earlier cartoon from August, 1946—"Shape of Things to Come?" Herblock then asked.[148] In 1955 Herblock dropped the question mark and reworded the phrase to read as a declarative statement.

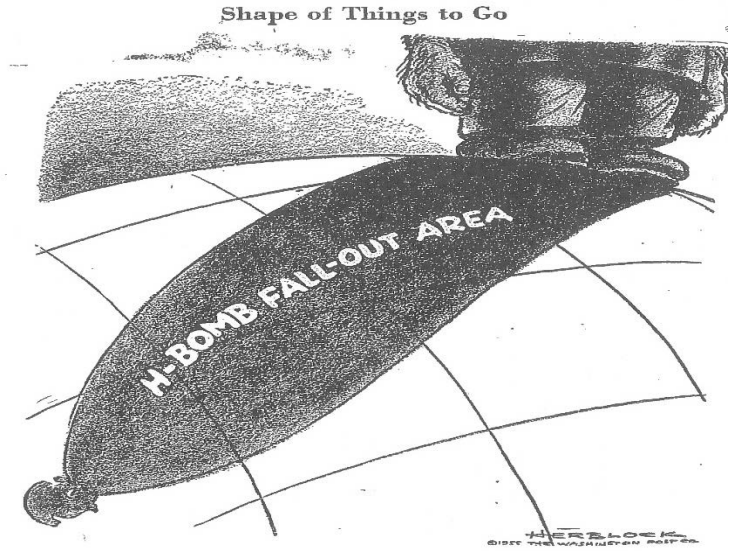

FIGURE 11: Herblock, "Shape of Things to Go," *Washington Post*, February 20, 1955.

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Concern that radiation was a cancer-causing agent that could also lead to "long-term genetic damage," centered on the radioactive isotope strontium 90, which was "pumped into the earth by thermonuclear explosions" and returned to earth in rain before entering the food chain. Such worries prompted Khrushchev's remark to Eisenhower, "We get your dust, you get our dust, the winds blow, and nobody's safe."[149] Publicly the Eisenhower administration tended towards obfuscation of the effects of radiation and continued "to ignore or to dismiss such alarming reports."[150]

Given Herblock's continuing criticism of the Eisenhower administration's policy of "massive retaliation" and unrestrained atmospheric testing, the *Post* cartoonist most likely would have concurred with the Soviet leader's dour assessment. Unfortunately for test-ban advocates

[148] Herbert Block, "Shape Of Things To Come?" *Washington Post*, August 13, 1946.
[149] John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 229.
[150] Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 278.

like Herblock, neither side was willing to curtail atmospheric testing until the Eisenhower administration called for a moratorium in 1958.

By this point in the cultural history of the bomb fallout fears had rescinded the optimism that liberals like Herblock had exhibited in their earlier quest for world atomic control. Herblock's 1955 cartoon featuring the shadow of a bomb looming over the globe did not signal the end of the character's presence in the *Post*. Between 1946 and 1964 the *Post* published ninety-four Mr. Atom cartoons, fifty-seven of which appeared between 1946 and 1955, the timeframe being discussed here.[151]

But by the mid-sixties Herblock expressed doubts that his character was making a difference in changing the public's perceptions of the nuclear issue. Reflecting on the meaning of his Mr. Atom creation in 1964, Herblock lamented that many readers may have missed the point of his character:

> "If in some way the happy day should come when there would be no nuclear weapons to fear and no possibility of war in the world ever again, I know that some kind, well-meaning person would come running to share my 'misfortune' and to say, 'Golly, it's too bad you won't have your old A-bomb character to draw any more. Tough luck!"[152]

No doubt Herblock would have welcomed such "tough luck" in 1947 if the Baruch Plan succeeded in keeping the nuclear threat in check. Had world atomic control been implemented and enforced by the UN the need for illustrating Mr. Atom would have not been as apparent. History, of course, did not oblige Herblock's aims. However, Herblock never relinquished the liberal dream that bilateral negotiations with the Soviets could alleviate some of the global risks engendered by the nuclear arms race. In 1968 Herblock elaborated on this goal: "After a couple decades in the nuclear age, we're reconciled to living with the Bombs—as long as we can keep on living." For liberals like Herblock the only path to a "safer and saner world" was through negotiation since unilateral disarmament was a non-starter in the frigidity of Cold War politics. For Herblock "more progress in bomb control" lay in the twin features of "diplomatic restraint and patience."[153]

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[151] Hoffman, *Drawing the Bomb*, accessed March, 2015. <http://nuclearcartoons.sashahoffman.org/SearchResults.php?actors=29&keywords=0>

[152] Herbert Block, *Straight Herblock* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), 13.

[153] Herbert Block, *The Herblock Gallery,* "Chapter 7: Boom Everyone's Dead,"(New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968) 95. Herblock also expressed that during the Cuban Missile Crisis "confrontation with Russia was necessary" (Ibid).

Post readers who encountered Mr. Atom between 1946 and 1949 may not have recognized Herblock's plea for "patience" in these cartoons. Like his other nuclear-themed cartoons Mr. Atom communicated a sense of urgency that Herblock clearly intended to convey to his readership. As the culture around them began incorporating nuclear themes into popular songs, films, and literature, Americans in the late forties were increasingly exposed to an "atomic culture" which Herblock's Mr. Atom cartoons helped define. Only instead of capitalizing on the bomb's power to inspire kitsch consumer goods, and sensational science fiction plots, Herblock's contributions to atomic culture encouraged a critical reading of the US's "half-hearted" effort at wooing the Soviets. Readers who encountered Herblock's Mr. Atom cartoons in the *Post* or in syndication through the vast newspaper network of the Hall syndicate may have not detected a change in Herblock's approach to drawing Mr. Atom after 1949. But those readers who followed the character's evolution since 1946 could see how Mr. Atom became an increasingly domineering presence in Herblock's cartoons. The cynicism Mr. Atom seemed to convey reflected a growing pessimism that many liberals felt towards the nuclear threat in the 1950s.

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1.3: Laughing in Cold War Culture

Sociologists George E.C. Paton and Chris Powell argue scholars who study "the use of humor by social actors" can contextualize a humor text by evaluating how it registered "a means of social control or resistance to such control." Through such a lens Paton and Powell contend scholars can approach humor as a "social indicator of historical developments and social change."[154]

Contrasting Herblock's Mr. Atom cartoons in the late 1940s with his nuclear-themed cartoons from the 1950s indicates "social change" on the nuclear issue had taken place. The arc in Mr. Atom's character evolution parallels Herblock's shifting concerns on the topic. Herblock's Mr. Atom cartoons from 1950-55 lacked the urgency of earlier cartoons because there was no obvious goal for internationalist liberals like himself to promote once the realities of the arms race became entrenched. His framing of civil defense during this period was ambiguous, suggesting he remained ambivalent towards the FCDA's efforts to cultivate a culture of "preparedness." In the early fifties Mr. Atom began reflecting cynicism and defeat. Not until

[154] See Chris Powell and George E.C. Paton, eds. "Introduction," xiii-xxii, in *Humor in Society: Resistance and Control* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1988). For a larger discussion of conceptual categories of humor see Chris Powell, "A Phenomenological Analysis of Humour in Society," in the same volume, 86-105.

1955, when fallout fears reignited public worries over the ecological consequences of atmospheric testing, did Herblock recapture the focus of his earlier work. Working towards a ban on atmospheric testing replaced world atomic control as a goal for liberal activists.

However, defining what Mr. Atom meant to readers within Patton and Powell's binary notions of "resistance" and "social control" poses problems. For one, Herblock's nuclear-themed cartoons in the 1940s did not adopt or advocate "resistance" so much as they urged readers to consider how the goal of world atomic control could be achieved through an institutional framework such as the UN. As much as Herblock's Mr. Atom cartoons mocked the inefficacy of UNAEC to solve this issue, his cartoons did not put forth alternative solutions. Rather, the motif of time in Herblock's early Mr. Atom cartoons suggested the US needed to prioritize efforts like the Baruch Plan in order to avoid a future arms race. Likewise, employing binary notions of "resistance" to explain Mr. Atom does not account for the many ways Herblock's "traditional civic idealism" complemented editorials from the *Post*—a newspaper that reflected discourses from within the "Beltway." Only after the Soviets obtained the bomb did Herblock's nuclear-themed cartoons depart from the *Post*'s editorial line and even then such disparities were rare and subtle. Where subtleties did exist, as in the case of Herblock's September, 1949 cartoon commenting on the successful Soviet test, readers may not have necessarily picked up on these discrepancies.

Given the stultifying political culture of the Cold War, comparing Herblock's nuclear-themed cartoons to cartooning traditions in authoritarian cultures would appear to be one way of explaining how readers read the *Post* cartoonist's work. On the surface such comparisons appear inviting. In the immediate postwar years anti-Communist excesses undermined the image of a free, democratic society that Cold Warriors projected abroad when contrasting the US with the Soviet Union. However, despite the litany of civil liberty abuses that dated to the Truman administration's loyalty oath program for federal employees in the late forties, and which continued into the McCarthy era, the Cold War consensus was never complete. Even as many elites continued viewing the struggle against international communism through what Alan Brinkley calls "the prism of a simple ideological lens,"[155] critics like Herblock found important crevices in Cold War culture from which to articulate their critiques. The public-building consensus mechanisms which characterize many authoritarian cultures shared similarities with

[155] Brinkley, "The Illusion of Unity in Cold War Culture," ch.3, 61-73.

postwar America but important caveats need to be registered—the postwar economic boom, the creation of a mass consumer culture promoting consumer participation, and appeals to constitutionally protected speech provided some counterweights to the authoritarian impulses embedded within Cold War culture. Using a comparative framework that draws examples from cartoonists labouring in authoritarian cultures then can lead to a totalizing explanation of Herblock's work that fails in capturing the nuances and ambiguities that softened the blunt edges of Cold War culture.

Comparing Herblock's cartoons to American cartoonists from earlier eras also has its difficulties. Nineteenth-century cartoonist Thomas Nast seems at first glance like a fitting comparison. A *Post* reader quoted at the beginning of this chapter made this link.[156] Both Nash and Herblock exhibited a healthy distrust of public officials and used their cartoons to draw the public's attention to corruption and abuses of power. However, important differences remained. Nash never shared Herblock's faith in the ability of government to deliver social good.[157] Likewise, Nash's libertarianism, pronounced anti-Catholicism, and his reliance on racialized caricatures typical of the "scurrility" of late nineteenth-century American political cartooning, makes him a problematic candidate for comparison with the liberal Herblock.[158]

From the Progressive era, socialist cartoonist Art Young, whose satire "riotously mocked the values of the capitalist system" while dramatizing "radical solutions,"[159] shared some common traits with Herblock. However, Young's invocation "that laughing at the capitalist system was a necessary element in defeating it,"[160] places him further left on the political spectrum to the *Post* cartoonist. In the case of the Baruch Plan, Herblock did not urge its defeat. Instead, like many postwar liberals Herblock stressed working within existing power structures. Likewise Young's socialist readership had a far more articulated set of goals than *Post* readers in the late forties and early fifties that further complicates any comparison between the two cartoonists.

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[156] Digges, "Letters to the Editor."
[157] Michael Cohen's research into radical cartoonists during the first two decades of twentieth century who articulated "anti-capitalist values" in their work demonstrated how socialist cartoonists like Art Young framed "socialist ideology and goals" through "a class politics of laughter." See Cohen, "Cartooning Capitalism," 35.
[158] For more discussion of the role racialized stereotyping played in nineteenth century cartooning see Dewey, *The Art of Ill Will*, 25-32.
[159] Cohen, "Cartooning Capitalism," 36.
[160] Ibid., 37.

While the comparisons to Nast and Young fall short, Michael Cohen's recent work on Progressive era radical cartooning does provide some insights that can be applied to Herblock's Mr. Atom cartoons. Cohen argues that radical cartoonists from the Progressive era "established a coherent visual vocabulary of class struggle and socialist possibility that influenced the entire movement."[161] Herblock's liberalism precluded any support for "class struggle." However, like Young, Herblock created "a coherent visual vocabulary" for his readers. In his early Mr. Atom cartoons Herblock framed what was at stake if the movement for world atomic control failed to procure meaningful commitments from nations. Herblock achieved this by illustrating Mr. Atom as an imposing figure who often loomed over the shoulders of UN delegates. By incorporating the recurring time motif in these cartoons Herblock underscored a sense of urgency that other world atomic control advocates stressed in their discourses. Likewise, his choice of setting for Mr. Atom cartoons—back alleyways, deserted islands—spoke to fears that the US would not remain the sole nuclear power for long. To readers who picked up on these visual cues Mr. Atom cartoons could be read as both a portent of doom or call to action, depending on one's faith in the ability of the UN to solve the nuclear issue.

Using Cohen's concept of "visual vocabulary" can tease out similarities between Herblock's nuclear-themed cartoons and his cartoons criticizing anti-Communist excesses. The *Post* cartoonist's framing of the nuclear issue resembled his approach to caricaturing noted anti-Communists such as Nixon and McCarthy. As already discussed, Herblock's "traditional civic liberalism" placed a premium on protection of civil liberties. Despite his own anticommunism, in the late 1940s and early 1950s Herblock remained vigilant against assaults on free speech that many liberal commentators believed characterized HUAC's hearings and McCarthy's demagoguery. A mere six weeks after McCarthy made headlines by claiming he had a list of "250 subversives" in the State Department, Herblock turned the junior senator from Wisconsin into an "ism" when he coined the phrase "McCarthyism" in a March 29, 1950 cartoon.[162] Throughout the second Red Scare Herblock displayed his partisanship by drawing the Republican Party as a cowering elephant being led by a demagogic McCarthy.

Just as his branding of "McCarthyism" helped define the era, so too did Herblock's caricatures of Richard Nixon come to define the man. The permanent five o'clock shadow, the

[161] Ibid., 40.
[162] Herbert Block, "McCarthyism," *Washington Post,* March 29, 1950.

arched bushy eyebrows and gyrating jowls—Herblock exaggerated these features to great effect, and by doing so crafted an image of Nixon that followed him throughout his political life.[163]

Arthur P. Dudden described the flood of anti-Nixon satire which dominated the Watergate era as "malicious," "violent," and "without quarter."[164] But the discursive groundwork for this humor had been established a generation earlier. Before Nixon became a "comic figure" and "a magnetic field that attracted the darts of deflation"[165] his anti-Communist rhetoric made him a satirical target for cartoonists like Herblock who feared his Red-baiting stifled public debate. Will Kaufman identifies Herblock as one of the original progenitors of anti-Nixon satire. For Kaufman "an awesome barrage of comedic weaponry had been trained on Nixon" since he first appeared on the national stage during his senatorial campaign.[166] In 1948 Herblock drew then Congressman Nixon as a Puritan scaling a witch-clad Statue of Liberty in order to light its torch. Another Herblock cartoon from 1954 featured then Vice-President Nixon crawling out of a sewer on his way to a campaign stop. Whitfield names this caricature as Herblock's "most famous" or "notorious" cartoon and a good example of how Nixon became "virtually a serial character" in postwar American politics.[167]

But beyond mocking Nixon what did Herblock's caricatures achieve? Anti-Nixon satire from the 1940s and the 1950s did not dissuade the electorate from granting "Tricky Dick" a landslide re-election in 1972; nor did it curb the presidential abuses of authority while he held office. Even "Nixon's henchmen" Bob Haldeman and John Erlichman saw little harm in Herblock's caricatures. They asked the *Post* cartoonist for originals so they could display them proudly in their West Wing offices.[168] The question then of what effect Herblock's anti-Nixon satire had on *Post* readers in the late forties and early fifties needs to be reformulated so as to consider how such cartoons created a reservoir of counter-images that helped forge later public perceptions of Nixon. The same can be said for Herblock's caricatures of McCarthy. Both created a "visual vocabulary" for others cartoonists to use in their critiques of anticommunism. Herblock's choice of setting in these cartoons—sewers, circuses—along with the heavy shading

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[163] Stephen J. Whitfield, "Richard Nixon as a Comic Figure," *American Quarterly* 37, no.1 (Spring 1985): 114-132.
[164] Arthur P. Dudden, "The Record of Political Humor," *American Quarterly*, 37, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 50-70.
[165] Whitfield, "Richard Nixon as a Comic Figure," 124.
[166] Will Kaufman, "What's So Funny About Richard Nixon? Vonnegut's 'Jailbird' and the Limits of Comedy," *Journal of American Studies* 41, no.3 (2007): 623-639.
[167] As described in Whitfield, "Richard Nixon as a Comic Figure," 115-116.
[168] Kaufman, "What's So Funny About Richard Nixon?" 630.

he applied to Nixon and McCarthy ensured that readers would interpret these visual cues as disapproval with the methods employed by anti-Communists. In the process, this "visual vocabulary" demonstrated how criticism of anti-Communists could be framed during periods when liberals remained on the defensive.

As Kercher reminds us, it was no accident that Nixon and McCarthy featured a similar five o'clock shadow to the one Herblock gave Mr. Atom.[169] For Herblock all three represented threats to individual liberties. However, caricaturing the two "practitioners of the Black-Magic oaths,"[170] during times when neither Nixon nor McCarthy welded power served little purpose for the editorial cartoonist. While Nixon and McCarthy commanded the nation's political stage, Herblock showed "no quarter." But when Red-baiting lost its ability to move voters Herblock moved on to other topics.[171] In the case of Nixon, however, the image of a tar-smearing duplicitous politician stuck. When later Nixon critics wanted to take their own tar brush to the president during the Watergate era, they already had a good idea of what that image would look like. Herblock's "visual vocabulary" had already given Americans that version of Nixon in the 1950s.

The parallels between Herblock's nuclear themed cartoons from 1946-55 and his anti-Nixon cartoons are worth noting for several reasons. For one, both sets of cartoons shared a "visual vocabulary" that exhibited similar aesthetic features. Readers who encountered a Herblock caricature of Nixon and McCarthy could also draw connections with the *Post* cartoonist's approach to illustrating Mr. Atom. From there readers could interpret caricatures of Nixon and McCarthy as belonging to a larger pool of cartoons critiquing Cold War culture.

Secondly, while neither form of satire succeeded in advancing Herblock's goals—world atomic control failed and Nixon kept making "comebacks"—both sets of cartoons also contained appeals to core liberal values that allowed Herblock to promote his own political ideals. This liberal approach to caricaturing anti-Communists and drawing Mr. Atom had the ancillary effect of protecting Herblock from the censoring tendencies of the era. Both sets of cartoons reinforced

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[169] Kercher, *The Limits of Irreverence*, 36.
[170] Block, *Straight Herblock*, 120.
[171] During Nixon's failed 1962 gubernatorial campaign for California's governorship Herblock believed his old nemesis had reverted to his old tactics of using his "tarbrush" and "red-paint bucket" in order to ingratiate himself to "party hacks." This prompted a fresh round of Nixon caricatures from Herblock. After Nixon's defeat Herblock would not return to this favourite target until Nixon ran for president a second time. Herblock explained, "I said what I had to say about him." See Block, *Straight Herblock*, 118-119.

liberal themes of international cooperation and protection of civil liberties that anti-Communists tried to project in their rhetoric. Given this dynamic, attacking a liberal cartoonist like Herblock would prove difficult.

Finally, recalling how Herblock's caricatures of Nixon helped spawn a cottage-industry of anti-Nixon satire reminds us that images can remain potent long after the issue which sparked their creation ceases to exist. When Watergate prompted a new generation of cartoonists to mock "Tricky Dick" Herblock's Nixon resurfaced to devastating effect. This new wave of anti-Nixon satire in the 1970s did not focus on Nixon's anti-Communist rhetoric or the tactics he employed against political opponents. It did, however, make use of the duplicitousness associated with Nixon, and thus contributed to the public discourse surrounding Watergate. In this way the "visual vocabulary" Herblock established two decades earlier demonstrated the malleability of his caricaturized Nixon. Future satirists could work within the established forms and update the content to address their own concerns.

Herblock's Mr. Atom cartoons had a similar effect. The Post cartoonist did not intend his creation to become a "serial character" the same way Nixon had. Reflecting on Mr. Atom Herblock wrote:

> "He wasn't planned as a continuing character, but after his first appearance he kept muscling into the pictures as a warning that he wasn't going to be permanently on our side alone and that if he weren't controlled he would cut loose on the whole world."[172]

By the mid-fifties it appeared Mr. Atom had been "cut loose on the whole world." Icy relations with the Soviets continued into the Eisenhower years. Efforts like the "Atoms For Peace" speech Eisenhower gave in the UN in December, 1953 did not achieve much. By mid-decade both superpowers had completed and tested hydrogen bombs that contained far more explosive power than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Other political cartoonists who shared Herblock's concerns began incorporating nuclear themes into their cartoons in the 1950s. However, many took a different tack than Herblock by adopting an aggressive anti-Soviet stance in their cartoons. In 1953 the NEA's John Fischetti illustrated a cartoon that commented on the Soviet's "peace offensive." Fishetti drew a giant stick labeled "SOVIET DEEDS" with a carrot dangling from it. Above the carrot "PEACE

[172] Library of Congress, "Pointing Their Pens: Herblock and Other Cartoonists Confront the Issues." http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/pointing-their-pens-editorial-cartoons/cold-war.html

TALK" was inscribed. Also in 1953 the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat'*s Don Hesse illustrated a nuclear missile with the words "FREE WORLD DEFENSE" scribbled on it.[173]

Both cartoons from Fischetti and Hesse demonstrate a more conservative approach to drawing the bomb. Herblock's staunch liberalism and willingness to stake unpopular positions ensured his nuclear-theme cartoons would adopt a more critical perspective on the bomb.

* * * *

As an editorial cartoonist Herblock needed to be topical in order to correspond to the day's news. This became a limiting factor in his approach to satirizing the bomb. By the mid-fifties another media form, the comic book, whose roots date to the 1930s, allowed for presented new ways of illustrating and commenting on contemporary events.

In 1952 the first issue of *MAD* was released. Four years later it developed from a comic satirizing other comics, to a magazine that incorporated parodies of consumer and celebrity culture. The demographic make-up of its readership—mostly young, white teenage males—signalled a market shift in the consumers of satire. By 1960 *MAD*'s circulation reached over one million with "a pass-along rate estimated to be six times that."[174]

The commercial success of *MAD* shared many resemblances with the cultural impact newspaper comic strips had on consumer habits a half-century before *MAD*'s debut. Ian Gordon argues that comic strips were "an outcome of the process of modernization" that took place in the last decades of the nineteenth century and were a "humor-based response to the problems of representation faced by a society in transition."[175] Linking this visual culture to a growing newspaper industry Gordon also argues these "visual images were an important element in the emergence of the culture of consumption."[176]

In the 1950s this "culture of consumption" was being bolstered by the pent-up consumer demands unleashed by postwar spending habits. *MAD* was both a by-product and benefactor of the 1950s consumer culture. Thompson argues *MAD* was also instrumental in satire's 1950s revival. By promoting "parody as a strategy to negotiate [the] contradictions of postwar life,"

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[173] Library of Congress, "Pointing Their Pens," accessed March, 2015. <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/pointing-their-pens-editorial-cartoons/cold-war.html>

[174] Thompson, Postwar *Television Culture*, 46.

[175] Ian Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture 1890-1945* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 6.

[176] Ibid.

MAD helped popularize the new "sick comedy" that expanded satire's topical terrain in the 1950s.[177]

Within this changing cultural climate Jules Feiffer began illustrating long-form comics that borrowed the narrative structures found in comic books. By the mid-fifties the expanding possibilities that comics provided were incorporated into Feiffer's satire. Readers who were familiar with the specter of an imposing Mr. Atom looming large over UN delegates, already had a counter-image of the bomb they could use to frame their reading of the nuclear issue. Feiffer used similar images only within a narrative structure that allowed him to explore more issues related to the bomb.

As the following chapter will discuss, Feiffer expanded criticism of the US's nuclear policy by taking aim at a host of issues buried in the subtext of Herblock's nuclear-themed cartoons. Unlike Herblock, Feiffer did not work for a leading daily. Instead he criticized atmospheric testing, the expansion of civil defense, and the encroaching military-industrial complex that the nuclear arms industry helped facilitate from the confines of a progressive weekly whose audience was small in comparison to the *Post*. The *Village Voice'*s counter-culture ethic provided Feiffer a chance to "map out" his own "psychic geography."[178] Within Feiffer's "psychic geography" the bomb loomed large.

[177] Thompson, Postwar *Television Culture*, 46.
[178] Ellen Frankfort, *The Voice: Life at the Village Voice* (New York: William Morrow and Company Inc, 1976), 31.

Chapter 2

2.1: What's So Funny about Fallout?

The pamphlet's title made its intentions clear while simultaneously obfuscating them: "What you should know about RADIOACTIVE FALLOUT." As a matter of phrasing, the title's wording in this 1958 pamphlet from the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) is revealing for several reasons. By using the demonstrative "should" the authors limited the scope of inquiry of "what" Americans *should* know about fallout to *what* the FCDA deemed worth knowing. In other words, inside the pamphlet readers would only encounter *what* the FCDA's authors were willing to share about exposure to radioactive fallout.

The use of "you" as a subject in its title is also telling. By using "you" the FCDA authors reinforced the notion that individual Americans would be responsible for knowing how to survive in a post-attack world. However, one major obstacle for the FCDA in the late fifties was convincing Americans they still stood a chance to see this post-attack world if they survived an initial attack. In the late 1950s no national strategy for shelter construction had been implemented. The dirty secret of civil defense was that in the event of an attack millions of Americans would be left without shelter. In order to compensate for this shelter shortage an overlap of civil defense agencies at the municipal, state and federal levels refocused their efforts on coordinating and promoting evacuation plans.[179] The 1958 FCDA pamphlet reflected this new focus by detailing how a civil defense infrastructure comprised of "warning systems, operational exercises, and drills" would "remove civilians from the areas of blast and fire damage."[180] But the dangers would not end there; surviving in this post-attack world would be equally perilous.

Since the Bikini tests in 1946 the dangers associated with releasing radioactive materials into the atmosphere had been acknowledged by those who had encountered the bomb firsthand. Army physician David Bradley, who would become an outspoken critic of atomic testing, urged

[179] Insufficient budgets from Congress in the early 1950s led civil defense agencies to concentrate on evacuation as a strategy rather than shelter construction. In 1961 President Kennedy would return the debate to shelters after he called for a national program of shelter construction. During LBJ's presidency civil defense would remain underfunded but new buildings, such as Boston's City Hall, would be designed in the "bunker style" preferred by civil defense officials. For a larger discussion of the role architects played in this effort see David Monteyne, *Fallout Shelter: Designing for Civil Defense in the Cold War* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

[180] Federal Civil Defense Administration, "What You Should Know About Radioactive Fallout," (1958) in Michael Scheibach, ed., "*In Case Atom Bombs Fall": An Anthology of Government Explanations, Instructions and Warnings from the 1940s to the 1960s* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009), 39-44.

the marines he encountered during Operation Crossroads to take precautions when boarding the test ships' "radioactive stoves."[181] His 1948 book *No Place to Hide* followed in the tradition of Hersey's *Hiroshima,* which had detailed the harrowing circumstances survivors confronted long after the last fires from Fat Man had been extinguished. Both books inserted fallout into the national conversation of atomic weapons. However, despite mounting evidence of the calamitous effects of atomic blasts, the American public's understanding of the impact of fallout remained in its infancy until the 1954 Bravo test. Following the Bravo test a shaken Eisenhower admitted at a press conference that scientists were "surprised" and "astonished" with the results. Fallout, and its subsequent capacity to wreak untold environmental damage long after the last bombs were dropped, made the prospects of "thermonuclear conflagration" all the more terrifying.[182]

Given the ensuing controversy the FCDA had little choice but to acknowledge Bravo had unleashed what it termed "terrors of the unknown." According to the pamphlet's authors, "rumors" and "conflicting reports" of fallout prompted President Eisenhower to authorize the AEC and FCDA to educate the American public on the "facts" of fallout. Since "people are always inclined to fear what they do not fully understand" explained the authors, demystifying this "new peril to civilian populations" was crucial for combating its deleterious effects.[183]

One way to condition the public to accept the possibility of thermonuclear war was to create a narrative that projected an image of scientific mastery over "the unknown." The FCDA authors, who described fallout as being "composed of particles of dirt, stone and other debris…contaminated by radioactive products of the bomb," did this by linking a new "unknown" with known natural forms of radiation such as "cosmic rays" and other "mildly radioactive materials."[184] Presumably such a link would soften the public's perceptions of fallout.

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[181] Military physician David Bradley, who was present at the Trinity tests in Los Alamogordo, kept a diary of his experiences observing Operation Crossroads. His entries were later published in an article for *Atlantic Monthly* which was then turned into the best-selling book, *No Place to Hide* (1948). Boyer writes that *No Place to Hide* was "structured around the contrast between the edenic setting and Bradley's awakening to the magnitude of the test's radiological aftereffects." Bradley also "stood nearly alone" among physicians in the late forties and early fifties who wrote and lectured about the bomb's "medical and environmental hazards." See Boyer, *Fallout*, 66-67.
[182] Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 223-226.
[183] Federal Civil Defense Administration, "What You Should Know About Radioactive Fallout," in *In Case Atom Bombs Fall,* 39.
[184] Ibid., 40.

This strategy also complemented the FCDA's goal of projecting authority over the evacuation process that would follow an attack even if their presence was not felt. In a section titled "Household Decontamination" the FCDA authors highlighted safe ways to consume water and food following an attack. If possible contamination was suspected, the pamphlet urged survivors to find alternative food sources and bury their clothing. These "protective measures" ostensibly were designed to keep Americans safe while they awaited "official information" updating levels of radiation in a designated "Fallout Area."[185]

As other civil defense pamphlets from this era demonstrate, evacuees would need to rely on official organs for fallout updates. A pamphlet from the Milwaukee Civil Defense Administration made a similar point when it reminded its readers that when it came to fallout, "You can't smell it"; "You can't taste it"; "You can't hear it"; and "You can't touch it."[186] Because of this invisible, nearly undetectable threat, the FCDA could claim an unchallenged leadership role in coordinating a response to fallout. Concluding their 1958 pamphlet the FCDA authors wrote: "You should wait until fallout has stopped and authorities have declared your area safe before you go outside."[187]

This projection of authority, which was an integral trope in civil defense discourse, conformed perfectly with Cold War discourses emphasizing governmental leadership in crisis management. But in the era of Bikini such leadership was being called into question by critics of nuclear testing. The FCDA tried to counter this growing criticism by telling an official "story of fallout." But their "story of fallout" was woven into a larger narrative reinforcing support for Cold War policies of containment, sustained nuclear production, and the deterrence doctrine known as "massive retaliation" which became official policy of the Eisenhower administration.[188] If Americans were to accept the logic of "massive retaliation" then civil defense agencies like the FCDA needed to convince civilians that surviving a nuclear attack was possible.

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[185] Ibid., 41-43.

[186] Milwaukee Civil Defense Administration, "Your Civil Defense Manual: A Handbook on Personal Survival," (no date) in Michael Scheibach, ed., "*In Case Atom Bombs Fall": An Anthology of Government Explanations, Instructions and Warnings from the 1940s to the 1960s* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009), 38.

[187] Federal Civil Defense Administration, "What You Should Know About Radioactive Fallout," in *In Case Atom Bombs Fall,"* 44.

[188] Gaddis, *We Now Know,* 234.

But convincing Americans of the favourable prospects for survival was not the only goal. Tracy C. Davis has noted how civil defense exercises took on the characteristics of "rehearsal" rather than "performance." This distinction allows us to see how "moments of resemblance" rehearsed in civil defense drills became part of a Cold War performative culture.[189] Following Davis' insight, David Monteyne has argued in his study of civil defense-inspired architecture that "the performative nature of Cold War civil defense" suggests authorities "strove for more than mere intellectual persuasion; they aspired to instill behaviours as well as beliefs."[190]

This effort to "instill behaviours" and "beliefs" undercut the FCDA's claims of neutrality. Survivors huddled around radio sets—provided, of course, their shelter came equipped with one—were instructed to tune into 640 or 1240 on their AM dials for CONELRAD updates. Presumably such broadcasts would inform survivors when it was safe to return outside. But the reliance on "official instructions" would not end there. In civil defense scenarios the task of rebuilding remained an equally as important goal as surviving the initial blast.

Seen this way, the FCDA's "story of fallout" as told in this 1958 pamphlet remained unfinished. Before an attack Americans were expected to educate themselves on fallout. During an attack they would be expected to perform the roles rehearsed in civil defense drills. After an attack the long, arduous task of rebuilding their country would fall to those who had prepared and followed instructions. Faithfully following each stage would complete a circle whose center was held by civil defense authorities.

But circles are rarely as self-containing as their authors imagine them to be. Satirists in the mid-fifties started pointing out kinks in this civil defense chain. One of these satirists was Jules Feiffer, an emerging voice in American cultural critique who parodied civil defense through a "counter-attack on mindless authority"[191] that encouraged readers to imagine an alternative way of surviving in the thermonuclear age.

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As Ethan Thompson has argued, parody and satire in the 1950s often "went beyond a text" to critique "the broader culture that produced it."[192] Jules Feiffer encouraged his readers to

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[189] Davis, *Stages of Emergency: Cold War Nuclear Civil Defense* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 72.
[190] Monteyne, *Fallout Shelter,* introduction, xvi.
[191] "An Interview with Jules Feiffer," *Bookslut* April, 2009,http://www.bookslut.com/features/2009_04_014319.php
[192] Thompson, *Parody and Taste in Postwar American Television Culture*, 9.

go "beyond a text" and critique civil defense discursive practices like the one exhibited in the 1958 FCDA pamphlet.

First as an independent cartoonist experimenting with long-form comics, then later as an editorial cartoonist for the *Village Voice* after 1956, Feiffer became one of the era's most effective and influential satirists in part because his work "went beyond the text" to ask probing questions of Cold War culture. His talent for drawing anxiety-riddled characters perplexed by modernity also presented an ideal venue to explore the feelings of existential dread inspired by the bomb's uneasy presence. His penchant for using an adolescent voice to narrate his stories also lent his work an innocence that was belied by the stinging critiques he offered of the postwar economy's reliance on militarization and his country's passive acceptance of it.

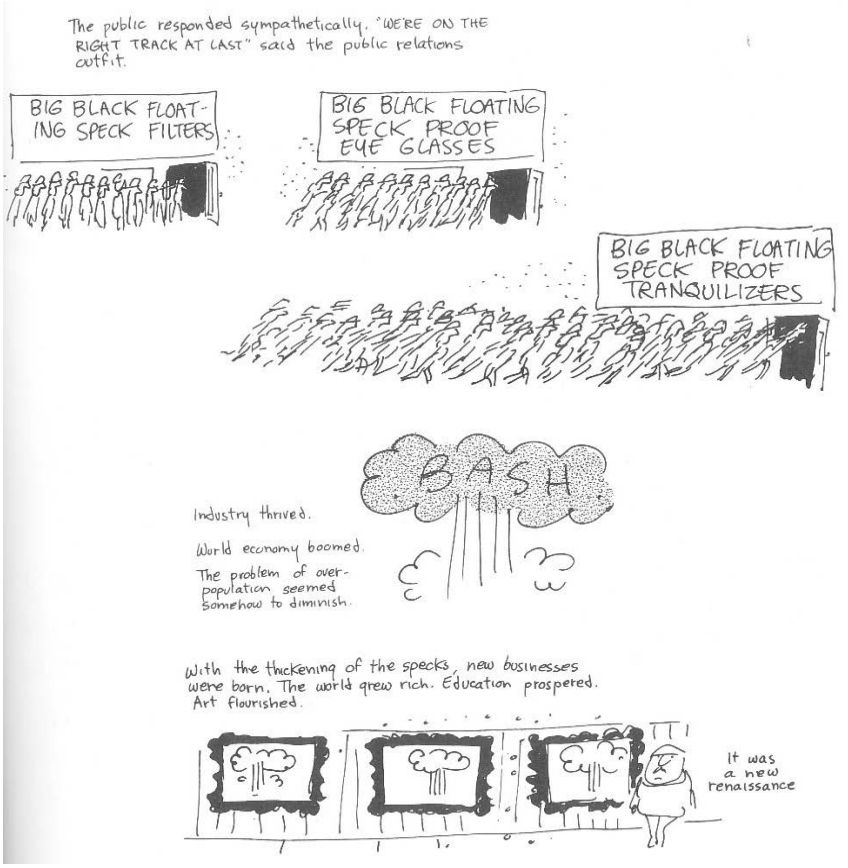

FIGURE 12: Jules Feiffer, excerpt from *Boom,* 1959.

His long-form comic *Boom* demonstrates how Feiffer "refunctioned" existing discourses in order to lay bare the "Strangelovian"[193] logic underpinning the arm's race. In *Boom* atomic testing produces "BLACK FLOATING SPECKS" that cause alarm in the populace but no

[193] Gaddis, *We Now Know,* 231.

meaningful protest. An industry devoted to selling "SPECK PROOF FILTERS" thrives in this climate of fear subordinating the economies of bomb-producing countries to the sustained existence of fallout. When testing slows so does the world economy as the "BLACK FLOATING SPECKS" begin to disappear. The solution, readily supported in a propagandistic soaked referendum, becomes the construction of a bomb "THAT WILL BLOW UP THE WHOLE WORKS" and be "THE ULTIMATE DETERRRENT FOR PEACE!"[194]

Biting commentary like this does not jibe with popular notions of conformity being the ordering principle of 1950s culture. But as Feiffer's work demonstrated, and as will be discussed further in this chapter, satire remained one of the few avenues available to dissenters challenging official views endorsed by the era's dominant Cold War consensus. A changing political climate following McCarthyism's ebbing midway through the decade provided more favourable conditions for satire as anticommunism began to lose some of its intensity. But the Cold War consensus remained a powerful force in postwar culture. With the international movement to control the atom dead following the Soviet's successful test in 1949, and civil defense programs in full bloom by the mid-fifties, the bomb had become an expression of this power. Feiffer's work, however, suggested this power needed to be confronted rather than passively accepted.

This chapter will explore how Jules Feiffer's anti-nuke satire shaped and was shaped by the subtle shifts in Cold War culture in the mid-fifties. It will also discuss Feiffer's work in relation to Herblock's Mr. Atom cartoons in order to show how the former furnished much harsher critiques of postwar American society than the latter's "traditional civic idealism" was able to muster. Describing himself as having a "more left perspective" that was "based on a radical analysis of US history," Feiffer positioned himself outside the mainstream of American ideology and satirized conservatives and liberals with equal aplomb.[195] This "radical" perspective also informed his "refunctioning" of civil defense discourses and allowed Feiffer to touch on a host of attendant issues related to what Gary Wills termed "bomb power."[196]

In order to see how Feiffer's satire encouraged readers to go "beyond the text" and "refunction" civil defense discourses in order to critique them, this chapter will analyze four of Feiffer most iconic anti-nuke cartoons that appeared in the *Village Voice* between 1956 and

[194] Jules Feiffer, "Boom," *Feiffer: The Collected Works, Volume Three* (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 1992).
[195] "An Interview with Jules Feiffer," *Bookslut* April, 2009, http://www.bookslut.com/features/2009_04_014319.php
[196] Wills, *Bomb Power*, 33.

1958. In addition to his work with the *Voice*, this chapter will also subject Feiffer's long-form comic *Boom* to a close reading. Two other long-form comics—*Munro,* published with *Boom* in *Passionela and Other Stories* (1959), and an unpublished work, *Rollie*—will also be briefly discussed. In *Munro* the military, a celebrated institution in Cold War culture, is mercilessly mocked for its rigid thinking. In *Rollie* Feiffer satirizes civil defense and domestic Cold War notions of acceptable behaviour. And in *Boom* the emerging military-industrial complex, consumer culture, and economic dependence on bomb production are all brought to the fore.

2.2: Boom!

Before Jules Feiffer became an acerbic wit lamenting the anxieties of postwar America, he was a lonely kid in the Bronx replicating drawings of his favourite comic book heroes. Born to a Jewish household in 1929, the future Pulitzer Prize winning cartoonist spent his youth devouring *Terry and the Pirates*, *Li'I Abner* and *Abbie an' Slats.* Feiffer "studied the way they cropped the panels down, the dialogue, [and] how many panels they would use on a Sunday page" in addition to mimicking their drawing techniques.[197] This early devotion to mimicry would serve Feiffer well when one of his childhood heroes, the legendary cartoonist Will Eisner, creator of the popular *The Spirit* comic which ran in many Sunday newspapers as an seven-page insert, hired Feiffer as an assistant in 1946.[198] According to Feiffer, Eisner told his young apprentice he had "no drawing talent"[199] and assigned him the gritty task of working on "ruling panel borders, filling in blacks, signing Eisner's signature" and whatever "dirty work" that needed to be done.[200]

Like Herblock, Feiffer supplemented his apprenticeship with formal schooling, studying at the Art Students League then later the Pratt Institute. But it was under Eisner's tutelage, working alongside other aspiring cartoonists in Eisner's "five-man shop"[201] where later admirers believed Feiffer developed his "graphic style" of cartooning that seemed "as natural as

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[197] Gary Groth, "The Jules Feiffer Interview," *The Comics Journal,* February 20, 2011, <http://www.tcj.com/the-jules-feiffer-interview/2/>

[198] At its peak *Spirit*'s circulation peaked at five million and was syndicated in twenty Sunday newspapers. See M. Thomas Inge, ed, *Will Eisner: Conversations* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2011), 41.

[199]"Interview with Jules Feiffer: Chance to tell own stories is draw for writing memoir," *True Jersey,* March 21, 2010 <http://www.nj.com/entertainment/arts/index.ssf/2010/03/for_cartoonist_jules_feiffer_c.html>

[200] Pete Hamill, "Forward," *Feiffer: The Collected Works, Volume One* (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 1988), v-iv.

[201] Inge, *Will Eisner*, 4.

handwriting."[202] However, Feiffer recalls spending most of his Eisner years developing his story-telling skills by writing the dialogue and stories for *Spirit.*[203]

In 1949, after Feiffer threatened to quit following a contractual dispute, Eisner allotted one of his few remaining assistants a space of his own in *Spirit*, which Feiffer turned into *Clifford.* Making use of the "childhood theme" then becoming in vogue—Charles Schultz's *Peanuts* strip first appeared in 1950, and Hank Ketcham's *Dennis The Menace* began a year later—*Clifford* ran as part of *Spirit* until 1951. Although *Clifford* was "calculated to be commercially acceptable" it never matched the commercial success of Schultz' or Ketcham's strips despite predating both. Feiffer managed to imprint a "distinctively personal element" on *Clifford*'s stories by placing his lead character in an urban setting resembling his native Bronx. But as a "kid strip" the opportunities for political comment remained limited.[204]

Clifford's run was cut short by the US-led "police action" on the Korean Peninsula. Drafted in 1951, Feiffer, like Herblock, accrued his military service during wartime. But in contrast to the moral certainty of WWII, the aims of the Korean conflict seemed foggy except when seen through the ideological lens of the Cold War. This "loosened a rage" in Feiffer that led him to view his military service as an exercise in "mindless authority."[205]

During his army stint Feiffer was assigned to what he described as "an office job in something called the Civilian Corps publication center, which was a civilian-run operation that employed GIs, run in Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, during the heyday of McCarthyism." According to Feiffer the McCarthy committee would visit Fort Monmouth on occasion but failed to see they had a "nest of vipers in their midst" because the draftees' "boyish" appearance made Feiffer and his comrades seem "harmless."[206] Using this "harmless" appearance to his advantage Feiffer went to work on a series he dubbed "Army Types" that Robert Boyd described as "gentle satire." Indeed "Army Types" seems innocuous stuff by Feiffer's standards but as Boyd writes "in the McCarthyite Cold War atmosphere of the early '50s even gentle satire was too much."

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[202] Hamill, "Forward," *Feiffer: The Collected Works,* v-iv.
[203] Gary Groth, "The Jules Feiffer Interview," *The Comics Journal,* February 20, 2011. <http://www.tcj.com/the-jules-feiffer-interview/2/>
[204] Robert Firoe, "Preface," *Feiffer: The Collected Works, Volume One* (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 1988), vii-viii.
[205] "An Interview with Jules Feiffer," *Bookslut,* April, 2009. <http://www.bookslut.com/features/2009_04_014319.php>
[206] Ibid.

These caption-less cartoons of anthropomorphized animals in military garb never made it into the Army's popular *Stars N' Stripes* magazine; but nor did they land Feiffer in trouble. Instead the episode was Feiffer's first encounter with what he later termed, "benign censorship," which Boyd interprets as a "tacit agreement" not to publish "disagreeable" ideas, even if just "gentle satire."[207]

Feiffer continued to stir in his "nest," however, and began work on a long-form comic that transcended the "gentle satire" of "Army Types." *Munro*, the story of a four-year-old boy drafted into the army and forced to participate in basic training, became in Feiffer's words, a "subversive attack on the military" and a "counter-attack on mindless authority."[208]

The "rage" and the "loss of identity"[209] Feiffer experienced while enlisted found an outlet in *Munro*'s ludicrous plot. Reporting to basic training the prepubescent Munro looks comically unprepared for the difficulties awaiting him. Pleading his case to a cadre of military professionals—his drill Sergeant, a psychiatrist, a chaplain, and a Draft Board consisting of former social workers—Munro, however, is unable to convince the army's brain-trust of his youth. Each professional dismisses Munro's pleas of being a mere four-year-old before accusing him of skirting his patriotic duty. The psychiatrist accuses him of "BUCKING FOR A PSYCHO DISCHARGE" while the chaplain gently suggests he must "FACE REALITIES." Only when Munro breaks down into an uncontrollable fit of sobbing does the Army revisit their initial assessment of the boy. A general screams at Munro that "SOLDIERS DON'T CRY…ONLY LITTLE BOYS CRY." Since Munro continues to cry by the general's own logic Munro must not be a soldier. The Army reverses its position and declares Munro a "LITTLE BABY BOY." The Army then grants Munro his discharge but not before they try to spin their mishap. A hastily-called parade is arranged which sees Munro receive a medal for bravery, some military brushes, and "a whole box of toy nuclear weapons." A special message from the president is read, praising the young lad's putative patriotism and alleged willingness to "ENLIST HIMSELF IN THE SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY." The story ends with Munro learning the consequences of behaving badly as his mother reminds him of his time in the Army whenever he refuses to eat or

[207] Robert Boyd, "Preface," *Feiffer: The Collected Works, Volume Two* (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 1989), v.
[208] "An Interview with Jules Feiffer," *Bookslut,* April, 2009.
<http://www.bookslut.com/features/2009_04_014319.php>
[209] Ibid.

acts "cranky." Thus in an ironic twist Munro internalizes the virtue of obedience instilled by the Army even after he is released from its dogmatic clutch.[210]

FIGURE 13: Jules Feiffer, excerpt from *Munro*, 1959.

Munro's narrative contained themes that would preoccupy Feiffer throughout his career: the struggle against authority; the corruption of innocence; and the quest for individuality in a culture whose ideological certainty does not allow for second-guessing. *Munro* also mocks the military's rigid thinking and inability, or unwillingness, to re-evaluate positions despite evidence to the contrary. When they do acknowledge their mistake they quickly spin it to make it appear as if Munro voluntarily enlisted in the Army. He becomes a propaganda coup for the "CAUSE" and is celebrated as a "HERO."

While *Munro*'s content is striking, its form is also notable. Spanning seventy pages, *Munro* far exceeded the length of the *Spirit* cartoons that Feiffer had been developing in Eisner's shop before the war. However, its length, along with its content, made *Munro* a tough sell in the mid-fifties. Feiffer shopped his long-form comic to Simon and Schuster, which was beginning to publish "sophisticated cartoon books" mid-decade, but the publishers shied away from Feiffer's

[210] Jules Feiffer, "Munro," *Feiffer: The Collected Works, Volume Two* (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 1989),

overt satirizing of army life.[211] In his memoirs Feiffer describes repeating this exercise with other publishers who admired his work but failed to imagine a market for it.[212] In a 2009 interview Feiffer elaborated on the meaning of his early failure:

> "There was no way of doing what I was doing in the mainstream. The mainstream was not interested in anyone with my opinions and certainly anyone working in the form I did. No one was working in the form was working in at that except me. I made up that form to fit the direction I was moving in…I knew I needed an outlet for my political rage and I knew that…in this particular time of suppression, I had to be entertaining. I had to be funny. It couldn't be a polemic…It had to in a sense be disguised as something else in order to make the point I wanted to make…[so] I started fooling with a form which was essentially narrative and long, and such things generally weren't published. And it told what were considered subversive stories at the time if someone really got the point."[213]

Feiffer fans would have to wait until 1959 to see if they got "the point" of *Munro*. This lack of publishing success, however, did not stop Feiffer from continuing his experimentations in genre. In the unpublished *Rollie,* which dated from this period, a hip bass player creates unusually hypnotic jazz that interferes with unnamed satellites, which prompts a visit from "Civil Defense." Mistaking his music for incoming missiles the civil defense officials tell Rollie, "WE CAN'T IDENTIFY THE MISSILES YOU SEND UP!" Rollie remains true to his muse, however, and continues plucking his upright bass to his own beat. This lands him on a blacklist of sorts after "Civil Defense" classifies him as a "THREAT." The Army goes a step further, claiming Rollie's unidentifiable music is a "NATIONAL EMERGENCY!" Eventually Rollie is placed in solitary confinement where he continues playing. But no one but the birds can hear him as he and his muse have been deemed "CLASSIFIED."[214]

Rollie, later published in 1992, was not an overt anti-nuke satire. However, like Feiffer's other long-form comics from this period *Rollie* does touch on issues related to the bomb and Cold War culture. By targeting Rollie's music as subversive "Civil Defense" extends its authority to matters that far exceed its jurisdiction. As an agency ostensibly created to protect Americans this extension of authority is significant for several reasons. For one, Feiffer's comic suggests the real-life agencies like the FCDA and the AEC were becoming unruly bureaucratic giants overstepping their bounds by probing the domestic domain in a way not covered by their

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[211] Boyd, "Preface," *Feiffer: The Collected Works,* v.
[212] Feiffer, *Backing Into Forward,* 243.
[213] "An Interview with Jules Feiffer," *Bookslut.*
[214] Jules Feiffer, "Rollie," *Feiffer: The Collected Works, Volume Three.* (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 1992),

original mandate. Secondly, the plot in *Rollie* speaks to issues of anonymity and individualism. The authorities are so alarmed by Rollie's playing that they label him a "THREAT" and declare a "NATIONAL EMERGENCY!" For them Rollie's music steps outside roles prescribed by Cold War discourses and promoted within civil defense propaganda that stressed a subservient attitude towards authority. By continuing to play his bass Rollie exerts his individuality in a way that shows contempt for the power structure trying to circumscribe his self-expression.

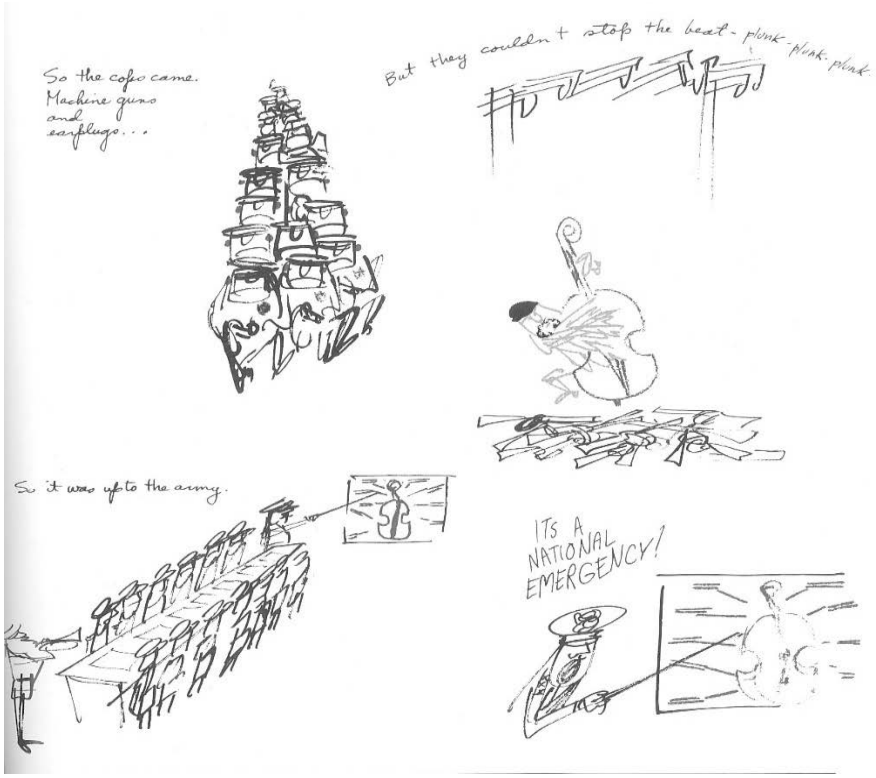

FIGURE 14: Jules Feiffer, excerpt from *Rollie,* 1959.

Lastly, in *Rollie* Feiffer satirizes Cold War notions of taste, picking up on a recurring conservative cultural critique that marked jazz as subversive both because of its roots in African-American culture, and its associations with beat poetry and counterculture. "Civil Defense" alleges Rollie's music is interfering with satellites but Feiffer does not elaborate on how this happens. Perhaps Feiffer left it purposefully vague to stress the absurdity of authorities policing and enforcing standards of taste in the first place. As was the case in many areas of Cold War culture foreign concerns comingle and interact with domestic ones, which *Rollie*'s plot satirizes in savage glee.

This blending of the public and private spheres was a common theme in Feiffer's work. In a 2013 interview for the *Village Voice* Feiffer described his approach to cartooning as an effort "to decode the public conversation and the private conversation."[215] In *Munro* Feiffer does not "decode" a "public conversation" so much as he tries to create one by instigating a discussion about the draft. In addition to replenishing its ranks, the draft remained an important symbol for the army's authority. But Feiffer's *Munro* mocks the Army's leadership and as such creates an opportunity to question the basis of "mindless authority." In *Rollie* Feiffer parodies Cold Warriors' infiltration into private domains and by doing so decodes the "constellation of attitudes" that comprised and propelled the Cold War consensus. In both Feiffer satirizes the growing militarization of postwar America by subjecting military and civil defense authorities to absurd situations their inflexible thinking strains to solve. The bomb, as an expression of their authority, looms in the background.

In *Boom* the bomb comes to the fore. This long-form comic represents Feiffer's attempt to "decode" the bomb's cultural presence and serves as an ideal example of what Thompson argues that satire in the 1950s was striving to achieve: encouraging readers to go "beyond the text" and refashion existing discourses in order to offer a "broader critique" of the culture nurturing them.

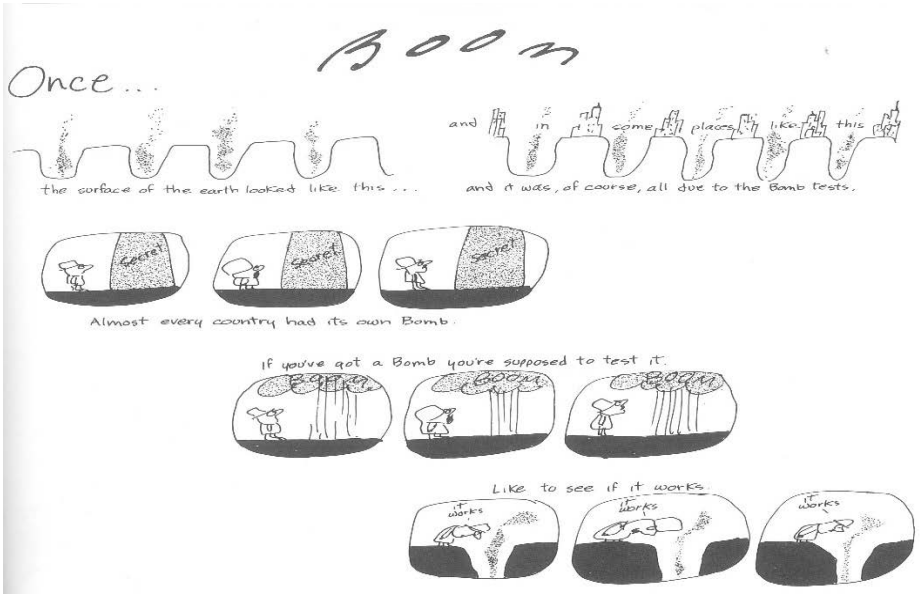

FIGURE 15: Jules Feiffer, excerpt from *Boom*, 1959.

[215] Anna Merlan, "Legendary Phantom Tollbooth Illustrator Jules Feiffer On Wanting To Overthrow The Government," *The Village Voice Blogs*, <http://blogs.villagevoice.com/runninscared/2013/09/legendary_phant.php>

The plot in *Boom* begins with a simple but anxiety-inducing premise: "Almost every country had its own bomb." From this starting point Feiffer recounts an alternative history of nuclear testing. In a parallel to real-world events, he describes a fictionalized scenario whereby every country armed with a bomb began an endless barrage of nuclear tests in the hopes of building "better" bombs. Following each test black clouds consisting of fallout begin dotting the skies prompting scientists to test for "APPRECIABLE" amounts of radioactive material in the atmosphere. Unsurprisingly, government scientists find nothing which leads to the story's first refrain: "THIS TEST HAS ADDED NO APPRECIABLE AMOUNT OF RADIO ACTIVE FALLOUT TO THE ATMOSPHERE." Subsequent tests elicit the same response even as "the skies began to grow darker." People become concerned because of noticeable changes in the atmosphere but fail to voice their anxieties in any meaningful way. Instead they mutter in quiet resignation, "I GUESS THE GOVERNMENT MUST HAVE ITS SOUND REASONS," before going "about their business."

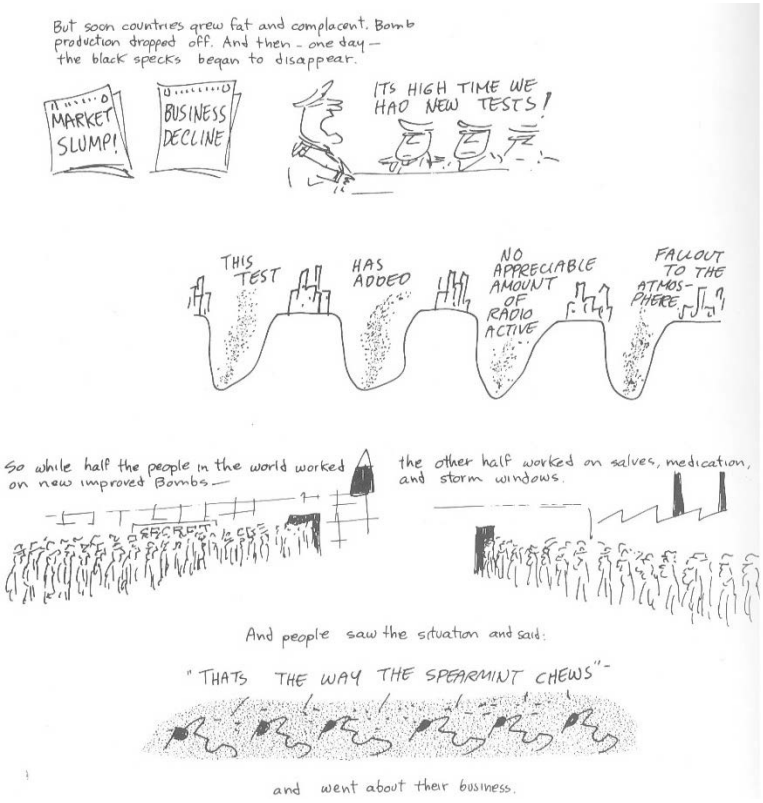

FIGURE 16: Jules Feiffer, excerpt from *Boom*, 1959.

The lack of public opposition emboldens other countries to build their own bombs, creating in the process an asymmetrical arm's race of sorts. Naturally, this leads to a hastily-called "disarmament conference" which fails to create any consensus. Countries lagging behind

refuse to halt their bomb production until they catch up with those leading in this fictionalized arm's race. When news of the failed conference reaches the public no outcry is heard. Instead people passively lament, "THAT'S THE WAY THE BALL BOUNCES" and "THATS (sic) THE WAY THE COOKIE CRUMBLES" by way of explanation before going "about their business" again.

With no solution in sight, and a potentially explosive international environment, some towns even begin building nuclear programs, which leads to more testing. Scientists remain adamant "THIS TEST HAS ADDED NO APPRECIABLE AMOUNT OF RADIO ACTIVE FALLOUT TO THE ATMOSPHERE" even as the skies darken. Worried "PEOPLE MAY GET TO THINK THOSE BIG BLACK FLOATING SPECKS ARE HARMFUL" the government hires "a public relations outfit" to spin the environment hazards as harmless. But the campaign fails to quell fear of the "BIG BLACK FLOATING SPECKS" so the firm changes tactics and launches an ad campaign promoting "SPECK PROOF FILTERS!" This creates a cottage industry devoted to selling "SPECK PROOF EYEGLASSES" and "SPECK PROOF TRANQUILIZERS." Industry thrives, the economy booms, and a "new renaissance" is declared.

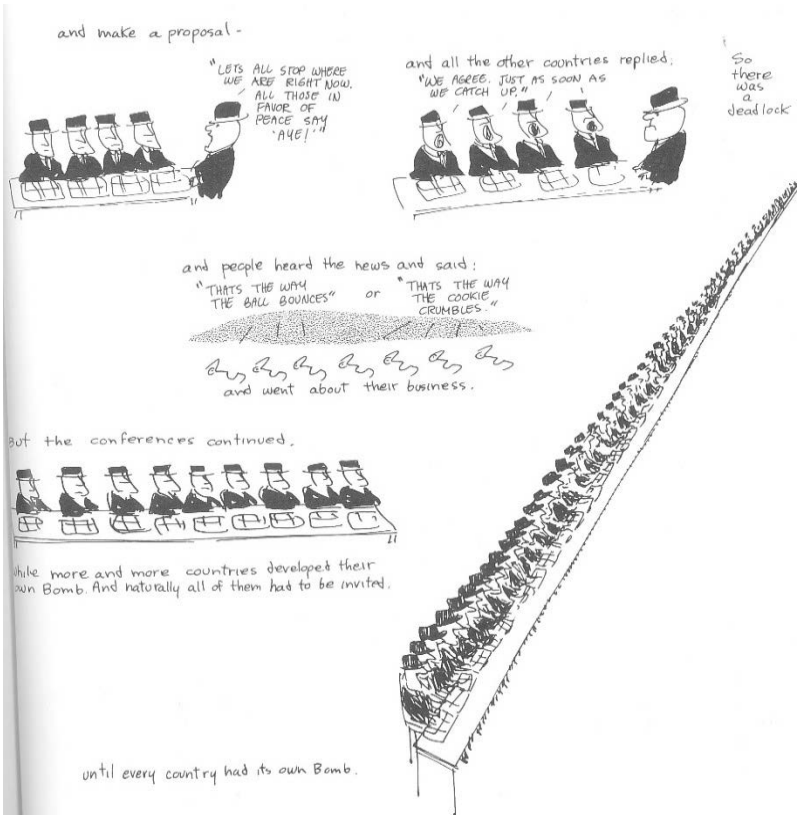

FIGURE 17: Jules Feiffer, excerpt from *Boom*, 1959.

This "new renaissance," however, coincides with a drop-off in bomb production. With a lack of testing the "BIG BLACK FLOATING SPECKS" begin to disappear creating a slump in the market. With their economies now tied to bomb production countries are forced to recommence testing in order to summon the "BIG BLACK FLOATING SPECKS." On queue the skies begin darkening. Each country becomes a participant in the "BIG BLACK FLOATING SPECKS" economy as half of humanity devotes itself to making bombs while the other half produces "salves, medication, and storm windows" designed to protect against fallout.

The uneasy peace is short-lived. Emboldened by the lack of public resistance one unspecified country decides to raise the stakes by proposing the construction of a "super bomb" which military leaders believe would be the ultimate "DETERRENT FOR PEACE." But "propagandists" from rival countries believe the project is a "BLUFF!" which prompts "men on the inside" to test their new "super bomb" as proof of their nuclear superiority. The question is posed in a referendum and another propaganda campaign commences trumping the benefits of testing their new Frankenstein creation. In a show of national unity the referendum passes leading to one last test. The "super bomb" is exploded and the world goes "BOOM!"[216]

While all ten pages of *Boom* consist of multiple frames the final page has only one drawing: the era's ubiquitous mushroom cloud. Only Feiffer's black shading and cartoon lettering of the word *Boom* plastered in the middle of this picturesque destruction gives the drawing a feeling of innocence that the testing of the "super bomb" destroys.

In an ending foreshadowing *Dr. Strangelove*'s cinematic coda, *Boom* concludes with an explosion with unknown consequences. Only instead of nuclear Armageddon being triggered by a doomsday device, the apocalypse in *Boom* is the result of one final test agreed upon by a referendum. Human folly prevails in both but the lack of any hints suggesting continual human existence in *Boom* paints an even bleaker portrait despite its "Strangelovian" undertones. Unlike the underground bunker filled with military and political elites (with a female to male ratio of ten to one) in Kubrick's classic, the question of who survives in *Boom* is left unanswered.

Reflecting on *Boom* in 2011 Feiffer described himself writing and illustrating his anti-nuke satire "in a fury."[217] And indeed, Feiffer's comic reads as a call to action of sorts, even if

[216] Feiffer, "Boom," 49-58.
[217] Gary Groth, "The Jules Feiffer Interview," *The Comics Journal.* <http://www.tcj.com/the-jules-feiffer-interview/2/>

readers would not encounter it until 1959, one year after The Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy (SANE) was created. Before SANE few avenues existed for protesting against US nuclear policy. In the context of mid-fifties Cold War America, Feiffer's portrayal of a passive population acquiescing to their leaders' plans for nuclear bomb production was not far off the mark. As Paul Boyer discovered in his survey of opinion polls from the 1950s, Truman's decision to greenlight Edward Teller's hydrogen bomb project in 1950 garnered broad support amongst the electorate.[218] Truman's successor also remained a remarkably popular president even as the Eisenhower administration formulated the US's policy of nuclear deterrence under the banner of "massive retaliation." As Feiffer was writing and illustrating *Boom* he could point to ample evidence in the wider culture that suggested Americans had not only reconciled themselves to the bomb but also supported the construction of "bigger and better bombs" as a means of comfort in the nuclear age.[219]

In *Boom* Feiffer speaks to this reality by sprinkling such idiomatic phrases as "THATS (sic) THE WAY THE SPEARMINT CHEWS" throughout his story every time news breaks of another test. The use of idioms not only infuses everyday language with political significance; it also creates the impression that the population granting their government tacit approval for more testing is too apathetic to do otherwise. In this way *Boom* fulfills Feiffer's aim to tell a story "about the conditioning of public attitudes to accept radioactive fallout as a positive rather than a negative."[220]

Feiffer's comic also touches on the "conditioning of public attitudes" towards early efforts to control the atom through the UNAEC. Instead of the real-life symmetrical stand-off between two superpowers which characterized the Cold War, Feiffer substitutes a fictionalized asymmetrical arm's race. In this Hobbesian world the international community must contend with multiple atomic powers jockeying for nuclear superiority rather than just two. This

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[218] One such poll from *Fortune* magazine recorded an astounding 85% support for Truman's decision to drop two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. One woman who wrote to the *Milwaukee Journal* expressed what Boyer called "genocidal impulses." The unnamed woman wrote: "When one sets out to destroy vermin, does one try to leave a few alive in the nest? Certainly not." See Boyer, *Fallout,* 10.

[219] A Gallup poll from February reported that 69% of Americans favoured building the hydrogen bomb. Another 9% expressed "reluctant approval" while only 14% expressed disapproval. See Boyer, *By The Bomb's Early Light,* 338-340 for a larger discussion of public support for the hydrogen bomb project and possible use of atomic weapons in the Korean War.

[220] Gary Groth, "The Jules Feiffer Interview," *The Comics Journal.* <http://www.tcj.com/the-jules-feiffer-interview/2/>

nightmare scenario in *Boom*, and the failure to resolve it through the usual channels of international accord, mock the UN's ineffectiveness to contain the arm's race. By satirizing international regulatory bodies who exert no authority over sovereign countries, *Boom* highlights the problem of pursuing control of the atom through existing power structures. In this way Feiffer parts with the early emphasis on negotiation as advocated in Herblock's Mr. Atom cartoons and suggests a radical rethinking of how better to approach the bomb.

But the questions remains: Was humor the best way to approach a vexing issue such as the arm's race? Or perhaps more bluntly, could fallout be funny? One way to approach Feiffer's text is to compare it to the structures in speech underpinning joke-telling. Humor scholars have noted how a successful punchline must bear some relation to the structure which produces it in order for the joke to work. This happens when a joke script—the various plot points, the context, and the characters—concludes with a punchline that logically follows the script. The joke script may have an endless amount of combinations but the punchline to a specific joke script is by definition limited to addressing the points foreshadowed by the script. In other words, the form and content of a joke are intimately connected.[221]

Feiffer's comic follows a similar logic. In *Boom* the failure to resolve a pending nuclear crisis through established channels mirrors the real-life failure of the Baruch Plan and the UNAEC's efforts to regulate the atom in the late forties. But in Feiffer's comic the failure of the disarmament conference is only one plot point in the joke script. The fictionalized asymmetrical arm's race that sprouts up in the wake of the disarmament conference's failure is another. The obsessive need to test each bomb's destructive capabilities only exacerbates the situation which also helps set up the joke's punchline. But the real turning point in *Boom* that sets up its punchline is the final plot point before the "super bomb" is built and tested: the economic downturn followed by the referendum.

The economies of bomb-producing countries in *Boom* all become reliant on the manufacture of goods promising protection from the "BLACK FLOATING SPECKS." Seen this way, politics in *Boom* is a mere sideshow distracting from the larger struggle against economic dependence on bomb production and the industries it engenders. The real target in Feiffer's satire is an economic system whose health relies on steady levels of fear to drive demand for safety and

[221] Wladyslaw Chlopicki, "Book Review," *HUMOR: International Journal of Humor Research* 16, no.4 (2003): 415.

protection from the bomb. But without the bomb, and the fear of "BLACK FLOATING SPECKS" produced by unregulated testing, the laws of supply and demand are disrupted. This is what leads to the referendum and the subsequent test of the new bomb, and thus, the story's punchline. The punchline is not the end of the world, per se, but rather that the participation in a bomb economy and tacit approval for atomic testing means the joke is on us.

Heady stuff, and hardly the typical subject matter for a comic. In order for this punchline to work Feiffer needed to set up Madison Avenue, big business and American industrialists as unseen villains taking advantage of a climate of fear. Their collective response to "BIG BLACK FLOATING SPECKS" is predicated on self-interest, the driving principle of the market. The economy experiences a boon until a lull in testing causes the market for "SPECK PROOF FILTERS" and other bomb protective materials to sag. In this way Feiffer's comic suggests a radical re-thinking of the postwar economy must be undertaken if disaster is to be averted.

The connection between the market economy and the referendum also sets up Feiffer's other main critique. In *Boom* the people grant the ultimate authority to build and test the bomb that will destroy the world. Feiffer savagely satirizes the masses for their meek and feeble reasons for doing so. Guessing that the "GOVERNMENT MUST HAVE ITS SOUND REASONS" to support its actions is hardly the expression of a politically-engaged electorate. That the referendum follows yet another propaganda campaign meant to sway the public over to the government's position emphasizes how passive Feiffer believed people had become to the bomb's power.

Boom suggests that grassroots opposition, and not passive people chewing "SPEARMINT" while relying on the judgement of their leaders, is what will end the arm's race. What such opposition might look like is never illustrated in "Boom." But presumably the dissenters would be armed with placards expressing more urgent slogans than "THATS (sic) THE WAY THE COOKIE CRUMBLES." In Herblock's Mr. Atom cartoons cowering and befuddled political leaders resembling the likes of Baruch and Lilienthal were ridiculed for not exerting their leadership on the nuclear issue. In Feiffer's *Boom* it is the people chewing "SPEARMINT" who are made to look like dupes.

Feiffer's conclusion seems inevitable. But just as in history, narratives contain alternative choices always available to their authors. Feiffer chose to make the failure of the market the trigger for the referendum which sets up the final nuclear test. *Boom*'s plot hinges on the

outcome of this referendum, not the fate of a disarmament conference because unlike Herblock Feiffer was working from a "radical" perspective that was informed by a critical reading of American history. For Feiffer the Baruchs and Lilienthals of the world should not be counted on to solving the nuclear crisis since it was their tepid positions, and staunch liberalism, which created the arm's race. Rather, it would be the masses chewing "SPEARMINT" who would have to change the course of history. The problem was that for the majority of Americans in the late fifties that wasn't a real option.

2.2 *Sick, Sick, Sick.*

In a 2013 interview for the *Village Voice* Feiffer described his approach to cartooning: "The nature of my *Voice* cartoon was essentially…To show, in six or eight panels, what men and women were saying to each other when they said something else. What the government was saying when it said one thing or another. To get at the truth of the subtext, as opposed to the bullshit that was the cover for the subtext."[222]

In 1986 Jules Feiffer was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for three decades of getting "at the truth of the subtext" and unearthing the "bullshit" which covered it. By this point in his career Feiffer's work had appeared in publications as diverse as *Playboy*, *The Nation, Esquire* and *The New Yorker*. He had been nominated for an Oscar for his original screenplay of *Carnal Knowledge* in 1971. An animated short of *Munro* had also won the Oscar for best animated short a few years previously. Throughout the seventies he continued branching out, writing plays such as the critically-acclaimed *Little Murders* before turning his attention to children's literature. He served a brief stint as the *New York Times'* first editorial cartoonist in the early 2000s. But it was through his work for the *Voice* that Feiffer achieved national fame which allowed him to branch out into other media forms in the 1960s.

Appearing for the first time in the *Village Voice* in 1956, two years after the Senate censured Senator McCarthy in 1954, Feiffer's cartoons found the ideal vehicle to reach a sophisticated audience who could appreciate his dark ruminations on modern life. Featuring writers like Norman Mailer, the *Voice* represented the hipness of mid-fifties *avant-garde* New

[222] Anna Merlan, "Legendary Phantom Tollbooth Illustrator Jules Feiffer On Wanting To Overthrow The Government," *The Village Voice Blogs*, <http://blogs.villagevoice.com/runninscared/2013/09/legendary_phant.php>

York. Catering to a niche intellectual milieu allowed the *Voice* editors to feature contributors who delved into topical terrains often left unexplored by mainstream publications like the *New Yorker*.

Feiffer made use of this intellectual freedom while also perfecting what Sam Adams described as "a deceptively simple style" of cartooning.[223] Feiffer's "loose, sketchy drawings" first started appearing in the *Voice* in October, 1956. Originally titled *Sick, Sick, Sick,* the strip was changed to *Feiffer* in 1959 after the Hall Syndicate, the same company syndicating Herblock, started nationally syndicating Feiffer's *Voice* cartoons.[224] Eschewing the traditional borders that separated multiple panels in comic books, Feiffer opted for a borderless approach, similar to *Munro* and "Boom." Instead of frames packed with detail, Feiffer placed his characters against a simple backdrop which gave the impression of his characters "floating in a sea of white space with no background cover…to hide behind."[225] With "no background cover" the reader's attention was drawn to the characters' facial expressions and the accompanying dialogue. But instead of traditional speech bubbles confining the dialogue Feiffer used "free-floating word clusters" which hovered "in the vicinity of the character speaking or…thinking."[226] These "free-floating word clusters" gave the appearance of an internal monologue that accentuated his characters' loneliness and isolation.

Feiffer's use of narrative further distinguished his approach from traditional cartooning. Feiffer usually "stacked" the frames "in two horizontal rows"[227] which allowed him to advance a narrative, however brief, in a limited space. By doing so the long story-arcs used in *Munro* and *Boom* were transposed to his *Voice* cartoons in condensed form. Originally Feiffer had imagined his *Voice* space to run serialized snippets taken from his long-form comics but the idea was scrapped once Feiffer discovered his penchant for topical commentary. Still, his love of narrative persisted and his *Voice* cartoons featured the story-telling skills he first developed while apprenticing in Eisner's shop. Introducing this comic book aesthetic into political cartooning allowed Feiffer to adopt a story-telling approach similar to joke-telling.

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[223] Sam Adams, "Jules Feiffer," http://www.avclub.com/article/jules-feiffer-14283
[224] Boyd, *Feiffer: The Collected Works, Volume 3*.vii.
[225] Adams, "Jules Feiffer," http://www.avclub.com/article/jules-feiffer-14283
[226] Boyd, *Feiffer: The Collected Works, Volume 3*, vii.
[227] Ibid.

As far as content, Feiffer's *Voice* strip also featured characters not traditionally associated with comic books or political cartoons. Feiffer introduced a self-conscious subjectivity in his work that allowed him to explore gender politics, psychoanalysis, and sex. His characters often appeared alone in a cartoon, further deepening the sense of existential dread permeating his best work. Perhaps this is the reason why scholars have mostly viewed his early work for the *Voice* and *Playboy* as personal explorations. Debra Claire Schwartz has noted that not until Feiffer turned to playwriting and screenwriting did his work take on explicit political themes.[228] But this neat demarcation fails to capture how the personal was political for Feiffer long before New Left radicalism and feminism made such connections fashionable.

FIGURE 18: Jules Feiffer, "Sick, Sick, Sick!" ***Village Voice*****, November 28, 1956.**

Given the era's fascination with psychoanalysis it is hardly surprising Feiffer explored the intersections between the personal and the political through a Freudian lens. But as a self-described radical Feiffer was never content with confining himself to the private domain.

In October, 1956, in just his third cartoon for the *Voice,* Feiffer explored another intersection: mass consumer culture and marketing. In contrast to the masses in *Boom* eagerly buying "SPECK PROOF FILTERS," the ad man's blunt assessment suggests no such market exists since the American public had become "NEGATIVE FALLOUT CONSCIOUS." But in the spirit of 1950s marketing this Madison Avenue caricature believes he can replicate the

[228] Debra Claire Schwartz, *The Satire of Jules Feiffer: Changing Form and Ideology*, Masters Thesis, (McGill University, March, 1975).

success of "BIG BLACK FLOATING SPECKS" economy by launching a "SATURATION CAMPAIGN" that will make people "POSTIVE FALLOUT CONSCIOUS." So how can the public become "POSITIVE FALLOUT CONSCIOUS"? In Feiffer's hands the question turns the apocalyptic into farce. Selling the public "POSITIVE FALLOUT CONSCIOUS" seems no different than selling soap. "I LIKE FALLOUT" buttons and decals featuring the slogan "YOUR GOVERNMENT KNOWS BEST" are proposed. A "MR AND MRS MUTATION" contest meant to alter contemporary notions of beauty by normalizing genetic mutations is floated as another possible idea. When an unseen audience member asks about the role scientists will play in this "SATURATION CAMPAIGN" the ad man proposes isolating them by painting them as an "ORGANIZED" group of enemies, not unlike alleged communists made to recant in front of HUAAC, or McCarthy's Senate committee. The ad man, quite pleased with this suggestion, ends his presentation with: "IT'S ONE OF OUR MOST SUCCESSFUL SALES DEVICES.[229]

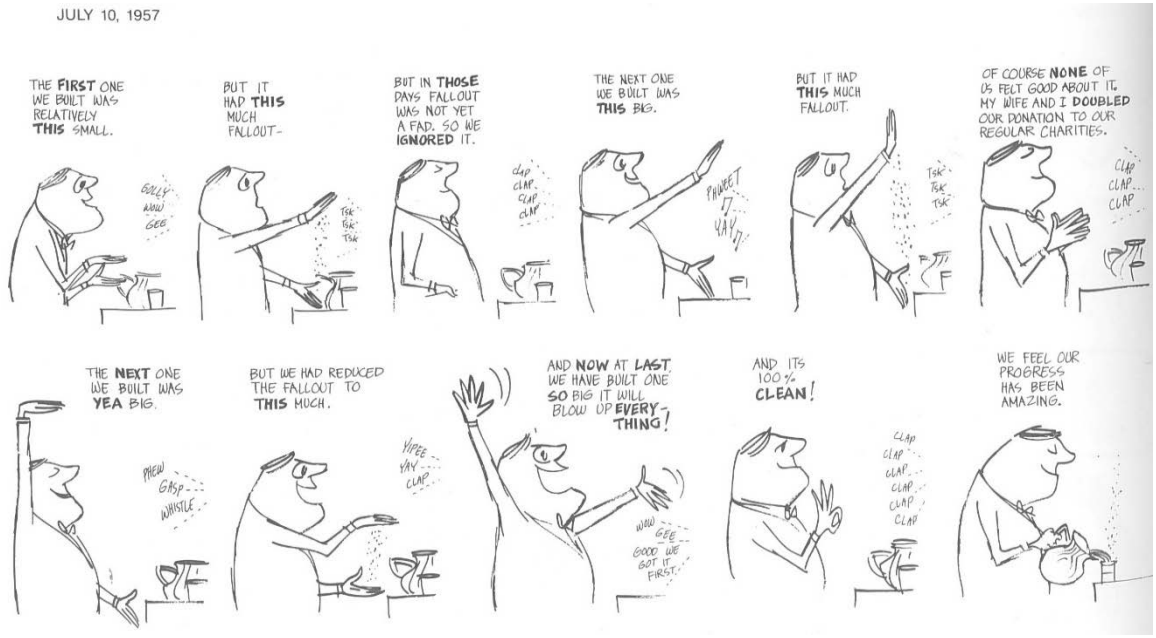

FIGURE 19: Jules Feiffer, "Sick, Sick, Sick!" *Village Voice*, July 10, 1957.

In 1957 Feiffer returned to the fallout theme with a cartoon featuring a conniving government bureaucrat. Using wild gesticulations to express his delight, the bureaucrat explains to his effusive audience how a "100% CLEAN" bomb came to be built. In eleven borderless panels—three or four more than the typical Feiffer cartoon—the history of fallout is sketched. The first bomb, presumably in reference to the one dropped on Hiroshima, was "RELATIVELY"

[229] Jules Feiffer, "Sick, Sick, Sick!" *The Village Voice,* November 28, 1956.

small by today's standards. It produced a lot of radioactive material but because "FALLOUT WAS NOT YET A FAD" no one paid attention. A bigger bomb was built, producing even more fallout, which the bureaucrat admits, troubled officials enough that they rethought their strategy. So troubled in fact, that the man and his wife "DOUBLED" their donations to charities. An even bigger bomb was built and produced even less fallout. In an echo of *Boom* one final bomb was built that had the potential to "BLOW UP EVERYTHING!" Even more impressive, it produced no fallout which prompts the bureaucrat to conclude his presentation on a self-congratulatory note: "WE FEEL OUR PROGRESS HAS BEEN AMAZING."[230]

Later that same year Feiffer set his sights on the era's obsession with new electronic gadgets by illustrating a character who would not have seemed out of place chewing "SPEARMINT" in "Boom." Only instead of buying "SPECK PROOF FILTERS" this Feiffer creation uses his electronic devices to record the sounds of the thermonuclear age.

FIGURE 20: Jules Feiffer, "Sick, Sick, Sick!" ***Village Voice*****, December 4, 1957.**

A well-contented man in a smoking jacket, replete with a smug smile, explains to his unseen friend Charlie how "FULL" his life has become thanks to the life-altering consumer goods he has purchased. First up in his list of fulfilling consumer goods is a car with "PERFUMED EXHAUST" that "RIDES LIKE A DREAM—FANTASTIC!" Next up, a camera that "TAKES PICTURES LIKE A DREAM" followed by a "50 INCH-FULL COLOR-MULTI-IMAGE PICTURE TUBE." Also playing like a "DREAM" is his "6 ELECTRO-HYDRO-

[230] Jules Feiffer, "Sick, Sick, Sick!" *The Village Voice,* July 10, 1957.

TWEETERS-8 WALL TO WALL WOOFERS-WITH A 1200 WATT PRE-AMP STEREO OUTPUT" which he uses to record an "H-BOMB BLAST RECORDED RIGHT ON THE SPOT." The final permutation of the man shows him telling his friend, "IT'S A FULL LIFE, CHARLIE."[231]

In a 1958 cartoon Feiffer revisited the theme of an alternative history of nuclear weapons much like he did in "Boom." In it a boy recounts for his friend how the "ACCIDENTAL BOMB DROPPING PROGRAM" came into existence. According to the boy, one day a "BIG BOMB" had been accidently dropped creating a "GIANT BIG HOLE" that gnashed a scar into the earth. Naturally, no one liked the hole so the government hired unemployed workers to fill it. Luckily, this solved another problem: "UNEMPLOYMENT." Solving two problems at once, the government decided to drop more bombs in order to create more holes which required more workers to fill them. When the boy's friend asks if anyone objected to this "ACCIDENTAL BOMB DROPPING PROGRAM" becoming an intentional program, the young narrator replies: "NOBODY COMPLAINS ABOUT NATIONAL DEFENSE, DOPEY."[232]

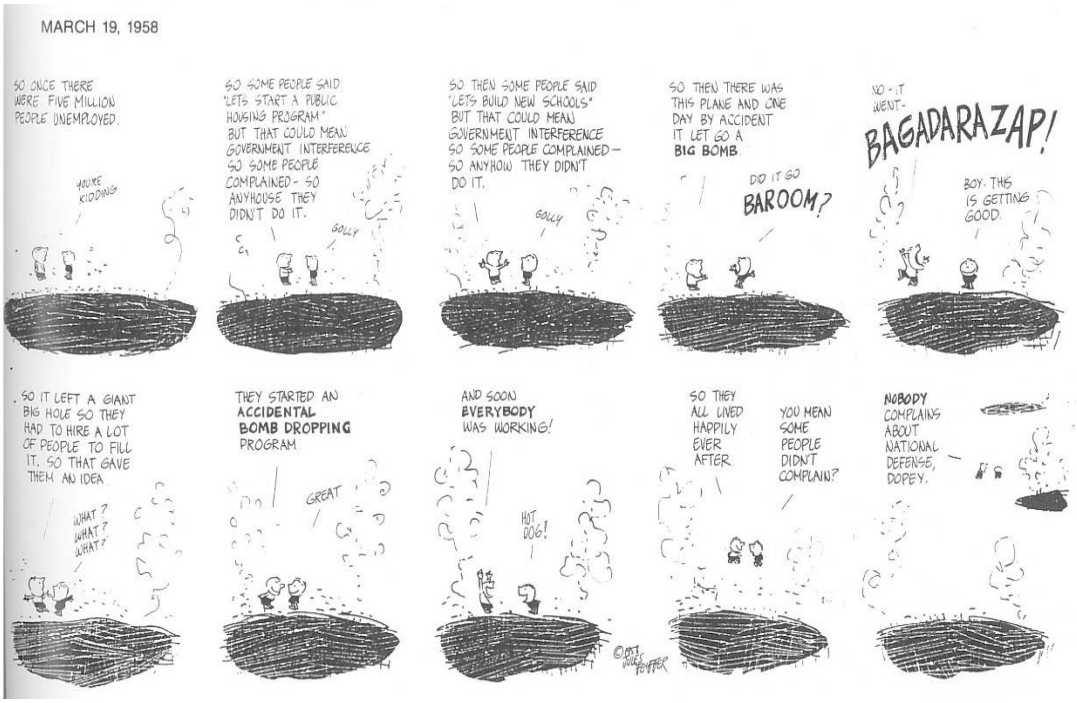

FIGURE 21: Jules Feiffer, "Sick, Sick, Sick!" ***Village Voice*****, March 19, 1958.**

[231] Jules Feiffer, "Sick, Sick, Sick!" *The Village Voice,* December 4, 1957.
[232] Jules Feiffer, "Sick, Sick, Sick," *The Village Voice*, March 19, 1958.

One final cartoon, also from 1958, and which would later be reprinted in the underground humor magazine *The Realist*, satirizes the apathy that Feiffer believed characterized the Eisenhower years.[233] In it two men lie next to each other discussing their difficulty getting "AROUSED" which leads to a word association game meant to provoke some excitement. The second man yells "MISSILE MADNESS!" in the hopes of arousing his friend but to no avail. They repeat the exercise with different phrases: "ATOMIC HOLOCAUST," "BRINKSMANSHIP," and "GUNBOAT DIPLOMACY!" are all yelled in succession. Because of these phrases' currency the trick nearly works and the first man feels "ALMOST" aroused but remains unmoved. The second man asks the first, "DO YOU THINK WE'VE TURNED APATHETIC?" The first man replies," APATHY IS SUCH A BAD WORD. I'D HATE TO THINK ITS APATHY WE SUFFER FROM." In the final frame the first man suggests "FAITH" is the real culprit.[234]

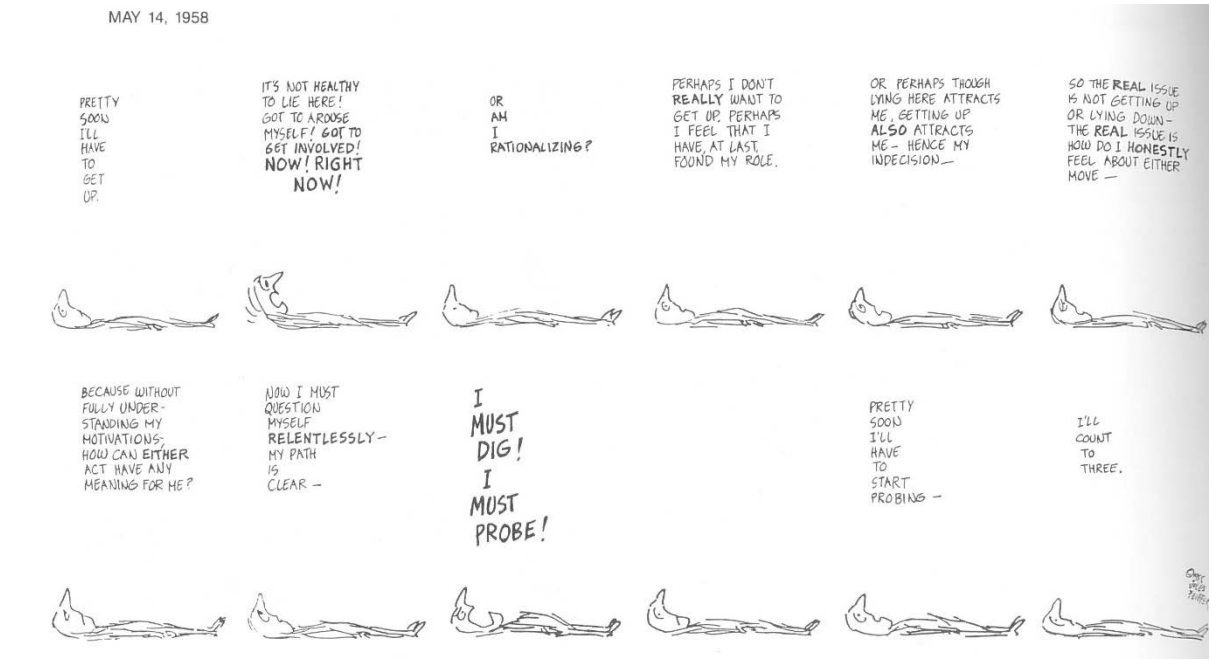

FIGURE 22: Jules Feiffer, "Sick, Sick, Sick!" ***Village Voice*****, May 14, 1958.**

[233] Feiffer believed his characters did not "live independently" of Eisenhower, who he called "the president of their existence." Boyd, *Feiffer: The Collected Works, Volume 3*.vii.
[234] Jules Feiffer, "Sick, Sick, Sick," *The Village Voice*, September, 17, 1958.

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What kind of "FAITH" was compelling Feiffer's two characters to lie down in defeat? Was it "FAITH" in the ability of civil defense to promise survival in the event of an attack? Or was it "FAITH" in nuclear deterrence to prevent such an attack from occurring? And if so would not this "FAITH" engender feelings of comfort instead of feelings of dread?

Feiffer's association of "FAITH" with "APATHY" spoke to the same concerns explored in "Boom." In subsequent years Feiffer addressed the political nature of his work and how his self-described "radical" interpretation of US history helped informed his "progressive-left" perspective. But what did his readers think when thumbing through the pages of *Munro* or *Boom* after both were published in 1959? And how did their own subject-positions influence how they read Feiffer's strip in that week's *Village Voice*? Asking such questions calls to mind Michel de Certeau's insight into the lack of "reading traces" left behind by readers for historians to analyze.[235]

A digression into how fans of parody read a satiric magazine from earlier in the decade may provide clues into what these "reading traces" looked like. In his study of postwar television culture Ethan Thompson devotes a chapter of his study to how the popular *MAD* influenced readers' "decoding practices." Thompson argues that scholars approaching *MAD* should not focus on whether its creators had radical political sympathies or whether their texts had "direct political effects." Rather, the focus should be on "how such texts work in the formation of individual identities." Only through such a methodological perspective can scholars see "how the structure of parodic texts encourages a critical relationship to mediated culture." In the case of *MAD*, Thompson argues the magazine's parodies of television culture "armed its readers with protocols for the reading of television texts based on strategies of recycling, reappropriation, and recombination." These reading strategies encouraged *MAD* readers "to go outside the immediate text" and make connections "from text to cultural context" in order to "uncover its meaning."[236]

Applying this same insight to Feiffer's work can help shed light on how readers may have used "strategies of recycling, reappropriation, and recombination" when encountering the "POSITIVE FALLOUT CONSCIOUS" or the campaign for "SPECK PROOF FILTERS" in

[235] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* translated by Steven Rendell (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984) as quoted in Thompson, *Parody and Taste*, 72-73.
[236] Thompson, *Parody and Taste*, 49.

"Boom." Like Feiffer, the consumers of this content may have read about fallout in *I.F. Stone's Weekly* detailing the dangers of fallout. At the very least they would have encountered pamphlets promoting the FCDA's "story of fallout." Whatever their source, Feiffer's readership would have had many of the same points of reference as the *Voice* cartoonist. But after reading a Feiffer cartoon readers were "armed" with new "protocols" for approaching this material.

To understand what made the "MUTATION CONTEST" subversive we need to go outside the text just as readers at the time may have done. For a readership used to seeing their favourite television programs sponsored by corporations, the proposed "MR AND MRS MUTATION CONTEST" in Feiffer's November 28, 1956 cartoon could have been read as an effort to decode discourses promoting television's crass commercialism. In 1950s mass consumer culture the nuclear theme became a gimmick to hawk wares. Children rifled through KIX cereal boxes in search of "atomic rings" while families played boardgames devoted to the search for uranium.[237] After encountering a Feiffer cartoon readers may have used "decoding strategies" which would allow them to adopt a critical stance towards mass consumer culture, assuming they had not already staked out such a position. The "MUTATION CONTEST" parodying a culture which allowed the atom to be commoditized can be read as an attack on mass consumer culture just as the parody of the bomb economy in *Boom* can be read as an attack on the military-industrial complex's reach into America's hinterlands.

Feiffer also satirizes this commodification in his December 4, 1957 cartoon while parodying Americans' growing obsession with electronic goods. The contented man regaling his friend Charlie with tales of how "FULL" his life has become is actually confessing to how empty his life has become. Content with capturing the roar of an "H-BOMB" explosion with his new-fangled camera, the man is unable to see how obsessive gadget use can blind one to social ills. Nuclear testing is conflated with the man's own electronic testing—both have trivialized a pressing social concern by subordinating it to technological obsessions. In this Feiffer cartoon, the pursuit of "bigger and better" gadgets parallels the pursuit of "bigger and better" bombs that characterized postwar bomb production.

[237] Uranium Rush was an "award-winning game" from the 1950s. It featured "a battery-run 'Geiger counter'" and awarded the "prospector with the most money" first place. For a larger discussion of how the uranium rush infiltrated other facets of consumer culture see Robert R. Johnson, *Romancing the Atom: Nuclear Infatuation from the Radium Girls to Fukushima* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012), 21-25.

In Feiffer's March 19, 1958 cartoon, the passive interlocutor "DOPEY" can be forgiven for wondering why no one objected to the circuitous logic inherent to the "ACCIDENTAL BOMB DROPPING PROGRAM." Introduced nearly three years before President Eisenhower warned of an emerging "military-industrial complex" in his farewell address to the nation, this Feiffer cartoon anticipated the president's warnings while also raising concerns over the nation's nuclear weapons infrastructure designed to prevent such imagined accidents from occurring. This theme would be echoed in *Boom*. Fans of both may have shared the same concerns over the rise of the national security state that Feiffer did. If they did not, however, they would have been encouraged to consider its implications after reading the "ACCIDENTAL BOMB PROGRAM" as this Feiffer cartoon promoted a "critical relationship to mediated culture" which shrouded the bomb's cultural power.

How readers may have read the two characters discussing "MISSILE MADNESS" in Feiffer's September 17, 1958 cartoon may have also depended on their familiarity with psychoanalysis. Like thousands of Americans in the 1950s, Feiffer visited a psychoanalyst on a regular basis. Like them, he too bought into the benefits of plunging into the depths of the subconscious. But in "MISSILE MADNESS" Feiffer uses it as a backdrop to explore America's "psychic numbing."[238]

This "psychic numbing" could have been used to describe the tacit support for civil defense. The two were intertwined and Feiffer's cartoon can be read as an attempt to disentangle the messy knots weaving both together. If readers "went outside the text" into the political realm to make connections, perhaps they would have found "MISSILE MADNESS" was commenting on what Oakes argues was an "institutional strategy" on the part of civil defense authorities trying to forge a "Cold War ethic."[239] This "Cold War ethic" suppressed dissent and interacted with familiar American tropes emphasizing rugged individualism. Oakes argues that civil defense authorities tapped into a mythologized American tradition of two seemingly opposed strands of thinking—self-reliance and community-building—in order to tie civil defense with a longstanding American tradition of frontier defense. Truman endorsed this view when he told the nation that survival of the Soviet nuclear threat hinged on the "revival of the old American

[238] Shapiro, *Atomic Bomb Cinema,* 14.
[239] Oakes, *The Imaginary War*, 8.

tradition of community self-defense."[240] Likening Soviet invaders to marauding Indians, Truman helped create a template for the Eisenhower administration to later exploit in its pursuit of a policy of nuclear crisis management—a policy which Feiffer's "MISSILE MADNESS" suggested bred apathy. In Feiffer's world the logic of "massive retaliation" could not be confronted by lying down in passive defeat.

Cinema-going members of Feiffer's readership would have found many opportunities to "recycle" the plots from the era's sci-fi films when reading his anti-nuke satires. On trips to their local cinema they would have encountered films featuring the latest mutated creation that had escaped from the confines of the laboratory. The era's ubiquity of monster films has been labelled by Jerome F. Shapiro as "atomic bomb cinema." For Shapiro "atomic bomb cinema" represented filmmakers' engagement with an "apocalyptic imagination" whose roots can be found in apocalyptic literature and oral traditions that extend beyond the heritage of exclusive American narratives. In particular, Shapiro believes this "apocalyptic imagination" that moved filmmakers to frame the nuclear threat in this narrative structure was influenced by a distinct Jewish apocalyptic tradition rather than the more well-known Christian apocalyptic tradition articulated in the Book of Revelation. According to Shapiro this Jewish tradition of apocalyptic literature often concludes with a stage of rebirth, or rebuilding process, which bridges the gap between the initial episode of destruction and a utopian future.[241]

As a Jewish cartoonist Feiffer may have been familiar with this apocalyptic tradition. But whereas this tradition featured stories which concluded with a stage of "rebirth" following a cataclysmic event, the stories in *Boom* and his "ACCIDENTAL BOMB DROPPING PROGRAM" suggest no one would be left to do the rebuilding. After Hiroshima storytellers did not have to evoke the awesome powers of deities or reference environmental cataclysms in order to imagine the end of the world; humanity could achieve the same result, and arguably much more efficiently, all by itself. In Feiffer's cartoons the bomb's technological novelty is captured. It is precisely this novelty which moved Truman to say the US had harnessed "the basic power of the universe" in his first statement released after the bombing of Hiroshima.

Perhaps Feiffer fans would have recognized his flirtation with the "apocalyptic imagination" as an opportunity to employ "decoding strategies" in their next viewing of films

[240] Ibid., 130.
[241] Shaprio, *Atomic Bomb Cinema*, introduction, PDF e-book.

culled from Shapiro's "atomic bomb cinema." From such a starting point Feiffer fans could restructure a radiation-saturated monster such as Godzilla as a stand-in for the nuclear menace.

These same "decoding strategies" that Feiffer's satire promoted also endorsed a critical reading of Hollywood's obsession with "The Good War." Just as it had in *Munro* and *Boom* the military remained a favourite target in Feiffer's *Voice* cartoons. Ample opportunities existed to make connections with films expressing "Cold War obsessions" that both raised "the specter of communism" and glorified "strong military leadership."[242]

Scholars have noted how the Army in particular, venerated for its role in liberating Europe from fascist rule in WWII, remained a celebrated institution in Cold War culture. In his discussion of WWII films from the 1950s Christian G. Appy has identified how "sentimental militarism" coloured Hollywood's representation of "history's bloodiest war." While explicit anti-communist films tended to become "box office flops," plots using WWII as a setting were popular in the fifties. According to Appy filmmakers in the fifties used WWII as a "frame" for "many Cold War fictions." "The Good War" provided filmmakers "a blanket of moral certitude and nostalgia under which Cold War militarization is hidden, justified, or comforted."[243] The unyielding patriotism seen in *White Christmas* (1954) included "a constellation of attitudes and values that were central to the way dominant American culture denied, evaded, and justified the actualities of its increasingly militarized society." By denying "the reality of militarization" and promoting "deference to military authority" such "historical sentimentality" accommodated the acceptance of "a permanent national security state."[244]

The "historical sentimentality" Appy identified coursing through a number of "Cold War fictions" is absent in Feiffer's work. In *Boom* Feiffer uses a fictionalized history to elucidate how nuclear weapons came to dominate military strategy which has the effect of presenting a counter-narrative to civil defense discourses. This same narrative strategy found expression in the "ACCIDENTAL BOMB DROPPING PROGRAM." Both texts encouraged a critical reading of American history that clashed with the "historical sentimentality" that coloured Hollywood's celluloid projections of the "Cold War ethic."

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[242] Paterson, *Grand Expectations*, 346.
[243] Christian G. Appy, "'We'll Follow the Old Man': The Strains of Sentimental Militarism in Popular Films of the Fifties," in *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, ch. 4., 74-75.
[244] Ibid.

As a self-described "radical" working from a revisionist position of US history, it is hardly surprising Feiffer's work shows contempt for any form of "historical sentimentality." The ways in which Feiffer used "decoding strategies" that encouraged readers to recycle, reappropriate, and restructure signs and symbols from Cold War culture made his "radical" perspective and flirtations with an "apocalyptic imagination" a potent tool for critique. His readers may have followed Feiffer by undertaking their own critique by going "outside the text" and making similar connections. Just as foreign and domestic concerns interacted and influenced each other in postwar discourses, Feiffer's work demonstrated Cold War cultural texts and discourses interacted with and influenced his satirical long-form comics and *Voice* cartoons. Only instead of upholding the status quo, his satire subverted it.

* * * *

FIGURE 23: Jules Feiffer, "Untitled," from *My Mind Went All To Pieces,* Dial Press, 1958.

In *My Mind Went All to Pieces* a befuddled man in military uniform stares vacantly into the distance. Airplanes buzz around him, a cartoon cannon fires as a floating tower breaks into two. The caption reads: "I'm certain the way I feel is different from anyone in history."[245]

[245] Jules Feiffer, "My Mind Went All To Pieces," in *Feiffer: The Collected Works, Volume 3,* 86.

These were not Feiffer's words but they could have easily been expressed by one of his anxiety-riddled creations. Instead they were recorded by a therapist treating a real-life patient. These recorded exchanges were then used as captions for Feiffer's illustrations.[246] Whatever the source of this anonymous person's fears and anxiety, the patient, like the cartoonist who rendered the cartoon visage, was not alone in feeling this way.

If Feiffer had cast a gaze at other cultural creators in the twilight years of the "long fifties" he would have seen others following his lead. By the early sixties humor was becoming a fashionable way to capture the bomb's capacity to inspire existential dread. As the last chapter in this study will illustrate, satirists across the cultural spectrum engaged the bomb through satire, and in doing so, shone a light on the US's policy of nuclear deterrence, the ubiquity of civil defense, and the country's deepening entrenchment in an unwinnable arm's race.

In print a slew of authors penning satirical prose in the pages of underground humor magazines such as Paul Krassner's *The Realist* and Victor Navasky's *Monocle* mocked civil defense discourses. In literature Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* spoofed "Cold War obsessions" with its fantastical plot and unflattering portrayal of the military. In song Tom Lehrer sardonically sung his "Survival Hymn" for an audience grown wary of the atomic age. And in film, the era's most influential medium, Kubrick released his "Strangelovian" masterpiece, *Dr. Strangelove.* The collective effect these works had on Cold War mentalities is hard to measure. But by the early sixties the presence of so many satirical works in the cultural marketplace helped forge a counter "Cold War ethic" that adopted a critical stance before all facets of postwar American culture.

[246] Boyd, *Feiffer: The Collected Works, Volume 3,* viii.

Epilogue

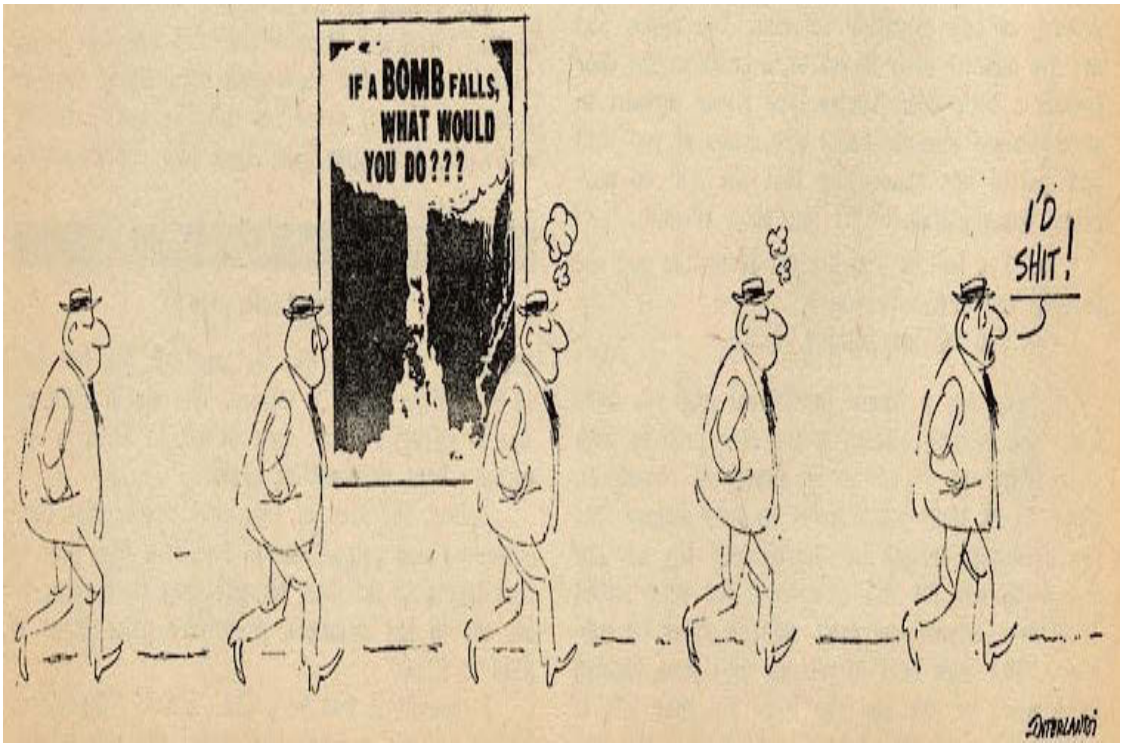

FIGURE 24: Frank Interlandi. Published in the *Realist*, issue 23, February, 1961.

3.1: Survival Hymns

Did readers who encountered anti-nuke satire in the 1940s and 1950s change the way they viewed the arms race, civil defense, or atmospheric tests? After finding a Herblock Mr. Atom cartoon in that day's *Washington Post*, did they read the featured editorial a little more critically? Did Herblock's personification of the bomb encourage them to seek out the harrowing accounts detailed in John Hersey's *Hiroshima* or the horrors imagined in David Bradley's *No Place To Hide*? When they came across images of destruction and mass death in these portrayals, or saw the era's ubiquitous mushroom cloud in footage taken from Operation Crossroads and Bravo, did they still laugh at Herblock's Mr. Atom? If so, was this a "politics of laughter"? When readers encountered a Feiffer *Village Voice* cartoon or one of his long-form comics in the late fifties, did they make similar connections with cultural works critical of US nuclear policy? After reading *Boom*, did readers scoff the next time they saw a civil defense poster promoting "awareness" and "alertness"? Did Feiffer's "refunctioning" of civil defense discourses encourage critical reading practices?

This study has tried to engage these questions by asking how readers in the 1940s and 1950s encountered anti-nuke cartoons on their own terms. By linking Herblock's and Feiffer's cartoons with other discourses critiquing Cold War culture, this study tried to look at the connections readers would have made when perusing a copy of the *Post* or *Voice* during the early decades of the Cold War.

Returning to the question that opened this study—was anti-nuke satire a "surrogate for action" or a "coalescing agent"?—recalls some of the methodological and interpretive difficulties inherent to studying humor texts within a socio-historical context.

Nathanial Hong found that in his study of humorous Danish scrapbooks compiled during Nazi occupation in WWII, the act of scrapbooking became an "equivocal tool."[247] Hong argues scrapbooking replaced modes of resistance rather than encourage them. Hong's work challenges us to reconsider previous approaches to studying humor that stressed its ability to bind social groups together.[248] Hong's insight also asks us to rethink applying binary categories of "resistance" and "social control" to humor texts by considering how humor can often be mere entertainment with little social or political effects.

This study has reframed the question of humor's political and social effects to ask a different question: if anti-nuke satire reflected and reinforced discourses that were critical of the arms race and civil defense, did fans of this satire fashion counter-narratives to make sense of their own experiences within the "age of anxiety"? And if so, did these counter-narratives link up with other critical discourses?

Herblock and Feiffer did not illustrate their cartoons in a social vacuum. In the late forties a number of former Manhattan Project scientists who comprised the "scientists movement" became "a seminal force in American life."[249] Scientists added to the public discourse on nuclear weapons by authoring a number of articles for popular magazines such as *Life* and *Time* that stressed the urgency needed to secure meaningful commitments. A duty-bound sense of obligation—not to mention a sense of lingering guilt—compelled many scientists to adopt an activist approach to solving the crisis of world atomic energy. In 1946 a chemist wrote in the professional magazine *Chemical and Engineering News*:

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[247] Hong, "Mow 'em all down grandma," 61.
[248] Boskin, *Rebellious Laughter,* 2.
[249] Boyer, *By The Bomb's Early Light*, 49.

> "Because chemists had a major share in bringing the bomb into being, chemists have a special responsibility . . . to educate the public and especially our politicians of the necessity for intelligent action before it is too late."[250]

Boyer argues that the "near-veneration of atomic scientists" for a "brief but crucial interval" in the 1940s helped mold "the public's earliest nuclear perceptions and attitudes."[251] In addition to atomic scientists' contributions to the public discourse on nuclear weapons, a number of influential magazines in the late forties featured in-depth articles detailing the dangers associated with the bomb. In November 1945, *Life* published the "The 36-Hour War" which detailed "scenarios of atomic destruction" that were accompanied by illustrations depicting a devastated Washington and New York. One illustration included an early rendering of a mushroom cloud, an image that political cartoonists and other cultural creators quickly latched onto and incorporated into their own work.[252]

In March 1946 the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) published *One World or None*, an eighty-page compilation of writings from atomic scientists that became a bestseller. The book's principle aim was to warn Americans about the dangers of nuclear warfare while stressing the need for meaningful international agreements. Only through such an effort, the FAS authors urged, would a future nuclear arms race be avoided.[253]

Five months after *One World or None* was published Herblock created Mr. Atom. His subsequent Mr. Atom cartoons from 1946-1949 echoed the sentiments expressed by the atomic scientists during this period, along with the dire warnings reproduced in works like *One World or None*. After news broke of the Soviets' successful atomic test in the autumn of 1949, "a fault line through the culture" could be detected and public attitudes towards the goals expressed by the "scientists movement" shifted considerably.[254] But before the movement for world atomic energy collapsed, Herblock's Mr. Atom cartoons echoed the sentiments expressed in *One World or None* and other discourses stressing the need for urgency in solving the nuclear dilemma.

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[250] As quoted in Boyer, *By The Bomb's Early Light*, 51.
[251] Boyer, *By The Bomb's Early Light*, 59-60.
[252] Ibid., 67.
[253] Boyer writes that the divisions within the scientific community between pursuing "world-government," or more practical solutions such as the Baruch Plan, culminated into *One World or None's* "compromise formula." Despite the divisions most scientists agreed that world atomic energy could become a springboard for universal peace. Boyer, *By The Bomb's Early Light*, 80.
[254] Ibid., 341.

Feiffer's anti-nuke satire mirrored similar discourses that resurfaced in the mid-fifties. As Feiffer began his career with the *Voice* fallout fears sparked by Operation Bravo in 1954 recommenced another round of anti-nuke activism. Just as the "scientists movement" in the 1940s was comprised of many famous former Manhattan scientists, activist groups in the late fifties also had their celebrity spokespeople. Dr. Benjamin Spock, whose child-rearing advice was hugely popular with parents in the 1940s and the 1950s, joined SANE's board of directors and became a vocal advocate for enacting a ban on atmospheric tests. The shift in public attitudes to nuclear testing put pressure on the Eisenhower administration to place a temporary ban on atmospheric testing in 1958.

It was within this discursive climate that Herblock and Feiffer fastened their critiques. Each cartoonist spoke to a specific set of concerns related to a specific moment in the postwar development of nuclear weapons. In the case of Herblock, his critique stemmed from the failure of the world atomic control movement in the late 1940s to establish international controls and regulations for atomic energy. Feiffer's criticism focused on US nuclear policy in the 1950s, specifically the themes of civilian preparedness projected in civil defense propaganda, and opposition to the nuclear arms race.

While Feiffer's anti-nuke cartoons were more probing from a policy perspective, insofar as they explored the relationship between nuclear weapons and the emerging military-industrial complex, Herblock's cartoons in the 1940s laid out baseline fears that the US had become a society where the ideal of peace was predicated on the nation's monopoly of the bomb. While each cartoonist was aiming at a distinctive readership, and was drawing anti-nuke cartoons at different points in the bomb's cultural history, the similar ways they framed and articulated their critiques of postwar US nuclear policy demonstrated their shared concerns. Taken together, their efforts also signalled that satire was an effective means for voicing dissent within Cold War culture.

The impact of their approaches is suggested by a cartoon drawn in figure 27 by Frank Interlandi. Done for the underground humor magazine the *Realist*, Figure 27 demonstrates how Herblock's and Feiffer's approach to satirizing "atomic culture" was echoed by later cartoonists in the early sixties. Interlandi wanted to draw a cartoon that captured his own "feeling of being helpless and returning to infantilism" that civil defense propaganda had engendered.[255] In doing

[255] Frank Interlandi, "Letters to the Editor," *Realist*, no. 23, (February, 1961): 23.

so Interlandi refunctioned civil defense discourses that stressed the importance of preparation for a nuclear attack. His cartoon also spoke to the ubiquity of civil defense propaganda in these years. At first the man in the cartoon does not seemed startled with the poster's question asking, "IF A BOMB FALLS, WHAT WOULD YOU DO???" Only in the cartoon's final iteration of the man does his pallid face become animated as he forms his answer.

In conveying this feeling of helplessness, Interlandi spoke to fears held by many Americans in the late fifties and early sixties. When confronted with the question of how they should respond to a nuclear attack, many Americans might have given an answer similar to Interlandi's character. In the absence of any comprehensive civil defense plan ensuring survival—not to mention protection from radioactive fallout—fear and futility seemed like an appropriate response.

Interlandi's cartoon fits alongside the other anti-nuke cartoons analyzed in this study because it subverted notions of preparedness that civil defense propaganda tried to instill. Like Herblock's Mr. Atom cartoons, Interlandi's cartoon made use of an existing "visual vocabulary" that readers could recognize. In this way his cartoon framed the issue of civil defense in order to express the absurdity of preparing for a nuclear war that most Americans would not survive.

Similar to Feiffer's *Village Voice* work, Interlandi's use of vulgar language reflected the insurgence of "sick" humor that began in the early-fifties with *MAD* and which Feiffer contributed to in the mid-fifties. Paul Krassner, who founded the *Realist* in 1958, was not the only editor publishing cartoons like Interlandi's in the early sixties. Victor Navasky's *Monocle*, founded in 1956, featured similar satirical cartoons and essays satirizing the bomb's enduring presence in postwar America. Navasky was an early fan of Herblock when the former took a job as a tour guide at the *Post* in 1953. For Navasky, Herblock's images were "indelible" and his impact "incalculable."[256] When he began his own humor publication Navasky hired cartoonists who took a similar critical approach to cartooning as Herblock did. What is more, the themes and style of the *Monocle*'s cartoonists also bore some resemblance to Feiffer's aesthetic approach to cartooning.

As much as Krassner and Navasky were responding to a wider trend of "sick" humor which subverted 1950s notions of taste, the anti-nuke satires published in their magazines also

[256] Victor S. Navasky, *The Art of Controversy: Political Cartoons and their Enduring Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 128-131.

reflected a growing market for smart, incisive commentary that explored questions of postwar militarization through a humorous lens. By the time Krassner and Navasky launched their publications, a thriving sub-culture of satire focused on criticizing the role nuclear weapons played in postwar militarization of America had emerged.

Fans of this brand of satire could sing along to Tom Lehrer's 1959 hit, "We Will All Go Together When We Go": "And we will all go together when we go/What a comforting fact the is to know/Universal bereavement/An inspiring achievement/Yes, we all will go together when we go."[257] Set to a jaunty piano line Lehrer's topical song, with rhyming couplets referencing Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), was a musical counterpart to Herblock's and Feiffer's dark satire. Lehrer's catchy number recast the specter of nuclear war as a vaudevillian musical which invited listeners to sing along to his anti-anthem for the upcoming nuclear apocalypse.

In literature Joseph Heller's best-selling satiric 1961 novel *Catch-22* cast its lead character Yossarian as an anti-hero. Although set in the Second World War, Stephen Whitfield has argued "the dimensions of Heller's antic and macabre imagination"[258] more closely resembled Cold War realities and thus its subtext can be read as commentary on the passions that ignited postwar patriotism. Readers who identified with Yossarian's pacifism may have read the character's eventual desertion as a rebuke of unquestioning public complicity and enlistment in the Cold War struggle.

In 1963 comedy fans could listen to Bill Dana's José Jiménez character impersonate a hapless and naïve civil defense drill sergeant whose attempts at explanation call into the question the whole premise of civil defense. In a routine recorded for one of Dana's comedy albums, a commentator asks Jiménez what materials he should use for constructing a fallout shelter. Recognizing the futility in building self-made bomb shelters, Jiménez replies, "chicken-wire." Dana spoke for a lot of Americans when his Jiménez character deadpanned, "It doesn't really matter" how one prepares for a nuclear attack since survival had such long odds.[259]

A year later Americans lined up to see Stanley Kubrick's 1964 classic *Dr. Strangelove*: *Or How I Learned To Stop Worrying and Loved the Bomb*. The Nazi-saluting mad scientist

[257] Tom Lehrer, "We Will All Go Together When We Go," *An Evening Wasted with Tom Lehrer* (Lehrer Records, 1959),
[258] Whitfield, "Still the Best Catch There Is," in *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, ch.8, 175-200.
[259] Bill Dana, "The Civil Defense Director," track nine on *Jose Jimenez: Our Secret Weapon*, (1963).

Kubrick crafted for his eponymously titled character was a composite of real-life personas associated with the bomb, including nuclear strategist Herman Kahn whose 1959 book, *On Thermonuclear War,* strategized possible nuclear warfare scenarios. Art, in these years, came to borrow from life regularly. Kubrick's film worked because its fantastical plot followed a similar logic. The scenarios that Kahn presented as realistic became fodder for the fantastic surrealism of the film's plot. In 1964 those who read Kahn's cold assessment of nuclear strategy had a real-life counterpart to Kubrick's rogue General ordering his own nuclear attack. Perhaps a "doomsday device" was not so far-fetched after all.

The glowing skyline closing Kubrick's film—with a cacophony of nuclear weapons exploding in disharmonious unison as the logic of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) implodes—provided a brilliant capstone for two decades worth of anti-nuke satire. The cultural marketplace for anti-nuke satire in the late fifties and early sixties was teaming with works that subverted notions of a winnable nuclear war, and Kubrick's cinematic canvas writ those attitudes large.

Collectively, these works also forged a sub-culture of dissent that contrasted sharply with the 1950s' cultivation of conformity. In doing so they set the stage for later sixties activists who disseminated jokes along with their anti-war literature at anti-Vietnam rallies.

The young adults of the sixties were the children of the fifties. The baby boomer generation born after WWII were raised in comparative affluence in contrast to their parents' upbringing. Their childhoods were also informed by the commercial products of atomic culture. They played board-games like Uranium Rush, and rifled through cereal boxes looking for prized atomic rings. These individual encounters with atomic culture represented what Susman calls "everyday unassuming acts." For Susman these "everyday unassuming acts" also reflect "implicit knowledge" and "fundamental assumptions" that constitute the bonds which holds a culture together.[260] In the case of Cold War culture "fundamental assumptions" coalesced around anti-Communist fears.

It is difficult to imagine such an intense and varied cultural engagement with nuclear weapons existing in the Cold War era without the continuing presence of anti-Communist rhetoric. At their cultural peak during the McCarthy era, rabid anti-Communists muzzled their critics by calling into question their patriotism. With chilling obsessiveness Cold Warriors such

[260] Susman, *Culture as History,* 288.

as Nixon and McCarthy combed their opponents' testimonies for inconsistencies in the hopes of exposing their allegiances to Moscow.

What made the Cold War unique from earlier red scares, was the extent to which 1950s anticommunism incorporated domestic symbols into its discourse. The products of consumer and popular culture were enlisted in the fight against communism in Cold War cultural diplomacy. It is telling that Nixon's famous debate with Khrushchev took place in a remodeled kitchen. Such cooption reminded Americans that "everyday unassuming acts" were often politicized. Against this political backdrop atomic culture took root.

Most boomers were too young to read a Herblock cartoon that confronted anti-Communist excesses in the early fifties. Perhaps they encountered Herblock as teenagers in the early sixties. The Cuban missile crisis prompted a fresh batch of Mr. Atom cartoons that lamented the lack of any meaningful commitments between the two nuclear superpowers. Herblock's cartoons from the fall of 1962 criticized the Kennedy administration for its dangerous nuclear brinkmanship.

While most baby boomers were too young to read a Herblock or Feiffer cartoon in the 1950s, many were seeing their adolescence come to a close when Lyndon Johnson ran for president in 1964. Like John F. Kennedy, who during the 1960 campaign played on fears that a "missile gap" existed between the US and the Sputnik-launching Soviet Union, Johnson played the nuclear card to his political advantage. During the 1964 campaign the Democrats released an anti-Goldwater ad that quickly gained infamy. The so-called "daisy spot" featured a little girl plucking pedals from a flower while frolicking in a pristine field. She counts aloud as the pedals fall to the ground. The camera freezes on her face and a muffled voice intones a countdown. Johnson's voice interrupts when the countdown reaches zero: "These are the stakes—to make a world in which all of God's children can live, or go on into the dark. We must either love each other, or we must die."[261]

The White House received a flood of calls protesting the ad's provocative suggestion that a Goldwater presidency would entail nuclear Armageddon. Johnson's team pulled the ad after one airing but the ad continued to be replayed on evening news programs.[262] Many boomers who saw the ad replayed on the evening news would have recognized the irony in a Democratic

[261] Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 560.
[262] Ibid.

president accusing his presidential rival of nuclear sabre-rattling. After all, it was Johnson's party who gave birth to the bomb. Roosevelt commissioned it and Truman used it. As much as Truman boasted publicly that he never wavered in his decision, privately he feared humanity had become "termites" burrowing too deep in the earth.[263] Kennedy, the president who came closest to engaging in nuclear war, would have opted for more soaring rhetoric than Truman's terse prose. Within the glowing vistas of his New Frontier there was no imaginary space for billowing mushroom clouds. But like Truman, Kennedy shared the attitudes of hardline Cold Warriors who throughout the 1950s openly considered using nuclear weapons when their foreign policy backed them into corners.

* * * *

Like the Cold War era's ubiquitous Geiger counters, this study has attempted to detect the traces of humor radiating within atomic culture in order to show how satire coursed through the crevices. In doing so it has engaged the question of whether anti-nuke was seen by contemporaries as a "surrogate for action" or a "coalescing agent." But the question needs to be reconfigured to reflect a more complex relationship between humor and readers of humor texts.

In his 1971 essay on cultural representations of the Sambo stereotype in American culture Joseph Boskin used the Freudian notion that jokes are "tendentious" to explain how "humor is inextricably related to aggression."[264] Relating his work to the wider history of racialized discourses in the US, Boskin concludes that "humor lessened the chance of further violence in a system already determined by violence."[265]

By placing Herblock's and Feiffer's cartoons in a larger discursive framework as Boskin did with his source-base, we can see how anti-nuke satire also operated within a "system" that was "determined by violence." Only this violence was exported to Korea in the early fifties and Vietnam in the mid-sixties and early seventies. Both wars were a consequence of

[263] As quoted in Boyer, *Fallout*, 32.
[264] Boskin would later elaborate on these early reflections on humor's power to exclude in his 1986 publication of *Sambo: The Rise and Demise of An American Jester* in which he argued whites determined acceptable "parameters of the exchanges" in society but within the realm of humor allowed space for blacks too "develop" jokes of their own "to partially offset their situation." For his early reflections on the topic see Joseph Boskin, "The Life and Death of Sambo: An Overview of an Historical Hang-Up," *Journal of Popular Culture* 4, no.3 (1971): 652.
[265] Boskin, *Sambo: The Rise and Demise of An American Jester*, 58.

anticommunism hysteria that encouraged Americans during the Cold War to form a "self-referential perspective" that led many to "believe in an image of a world that did not exist."[266]

Even though they drew cartoon characters, and operated within a field not always associated with serious reflection, Herblock and Feiffer had a better sense of reality than many cold warriors. The bomb became a frequent target of derision for both visual satirists because they recognized contradictions within the AEC's projection of a "soothing image of a peaceful atom" and the FCDA's endless barrage of civil defense drills and exercises. Herblock and Feiffer developed a "visual vocabulary" that refashioned these contradictions as critiques to undercut the AEC's sunny assessment of atomic energy's future and the FCDA's culture of preparedness. Through their efforts, Herblock and Feiffer provided their readers with a visual companion to the fears and anxieties associated with the atomic age.

A culture's humor is rarely innocuous. Embedded within jokes are ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and discourses that need to be scrutinized in order to highlight their subtexts. Analyzing historical humor texts complicates this aim because distance and time creates space between the historical actors who told jokes and the historians who study them. In order to understand what made a humor text funny in a specific time and context, we must ask why a text was created, and what socio-political circumstances shaped its creation.

In the first stage of anti-nuke satire, Herblock's Mr. Atom cartoons framed the goals of the movement for world atomic control. The battle for world atomic control in the late forties represented a struggle between two different visions for postwar America. On one side liberals like Herblock urged restraint and compromise, while on the other side hardliners suspicious of Soviet intentions advocated for more atomic testing and increased nuclear weapons production. After the Soviets' successful atomic test, liberal reserves were somewhat depleted as many abandoned hopes for a negotiated settlement and supported plans to build the "super." Herblock only pivoted back to an international focus in his Mr. Atom cartoons when worries over radioactive fallout galvanized anti-nuke activists to work towards a ban on atmospheric testing in the late fifties.

Feiffer did not share Herblock's faith in institutional solutions but he did express a similar "tendentiousness" in his anti-nuke cartoons, and in doing so gave vent to many of the same fears and frustrations. The self-described radicalization he experienced while serving in the

[266]Brinkley, "The Illusion of Unity in Cold War Culture," in *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, ch.3, 61-72, PDF e-book.

army during the Korean War, infused Feiffer's satire with a range of critiques that swept over the cultural landscape of postwar America. In the process his critique of nuclear weapons touched on a host of related issues, including civil defense, economic dependence on defense spending, and the entrenchment of postwar militarization that was only hinted at in Herblock's earlier anti-nuke cartoons.

The presence of anti-nuke satire in the 1940s and 1950s signalled to readers that critique of Cold War policies could still be levelled even as anticommunism threatened to strangle debate. The culture of dissent that anti-nuke satire helped forge seems on the surface its most lasting legacy. But as this study has demonstrated, another important legacy of anti-nuke satire were the reading practices it encouraged its readers to adopt in their reading of outside discourses. Beyond creating a "visual vocabulary" for later satirists, anti-nuke satire also encouraged the readers who were subjected to the same civil defense propaganda as Herblock and Feiffer to "go outside the text" and make connections with other cultural and social trends in order to critically asses them.

Herblock and Feiffer did not change the trajectory of US nuclear policy. As other scholarship focused on political cartooning in authoritarian cultures has demonstrated, authorities are more inclined to tolerate critical cartoons then suppress them. Despite the censoring tendencies of Cold War culture there remained limits to suppressing putative "subversive" texts. It is doubtful that anti-nuke cartoons made much of an impression on US policymakers in the 1940s and 1950s—many of them remained beholden to the "simplification of Cold War thinking" that continued viewing the Soviet Union as an immutable threat. Most failed to heed the warnings from atomic scientists in the late forties and the calls from activists in the late fifties to ban atmospheric testing.

While Herblock and Feiffer failed to move policymakers to meaningful action, readers could still be influenced by the criticisms embedded in their cartoons. As Thompson reminds us, a culture that pulsates with "critical comedy" carries the potential for that humor to subvert established norms if people are "in on the joke."[267] In the context of the 1940s and 1950s this meant that drawing the bomb could serve as a bridge of sorts to other critical discourses being levelled from more traditional forms of media. Asking if anti-nuke was a "surrogate for action" or a "coalescing agent" for readers dichotomizes contemporary responses to Herblock's and

[267] Thompson, *Postwar Television Culture*, 150.

Feiffer's cartoons, and fails to capture the complex realities of humor's place in contributing to public discourses. In addition to being a "safety-valve," humor is also a mediator that connects readers with debates they might not otherwise engage.

Hong's insight—that laughter can create complacency—challenges us to consider new ways of approaching historical humor texts. Instead of assuming the formal subversive elements of a humor text subverted established norms, a better way to frame the question is to ask how such texts encourage readers to approach targets of derision by arming them with new "decoding strategies." This reframing of the question follows Thomson's approach to studying parody and satire and renders moot the question of what the political and social effects of a humor text were in a historical period. Instead, it invites us to consider how humor texts often link up with other existing discourses and together help to form a discursive climate that encourages a more critical reading public. By reframing the question we can better gauge how humor in history is a "thermometer" that registers the contemporary concerns, worries, and fears of historical actors.[268]

Michel de Certeau wrote that "the text of history . . . must always be taken up over and over again." For Certeau history was also a "fragile witness and necessary critique."[269] This study has followed Certeau's insight by revisiting some non-traditional historical sources in order to add some complexity to our understanding of Cold War culture. Humor had a place in this culture beyond family-orientated sitcoms that reinforced contemporary norms. When humor in the Cold War was laced with satiric critiques it also had the capacity to challenge the "Cold War ethic" by fashioning an alternative ethic based on a more critical reading of the deepening arms race and entrenchment of civil defense.

Even if the majority of Herblock's readers did not share his concerns, or even if Feiffer was only being read by an audience who already shared his views, their satire encouraged readers to make connections with other anti-nuke discourses. In doing so, Herblock and Feiffer contributed important critiques to the ongoing public discourse of nuclear weapons during the 1940s and 1950s.

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[268] Davies, "Humour and Protest: Jokes under Communism," 291-305.

[269] Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, translated by Tom Conley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 48.

Both visual satirists exhibited different aesthetic styles and illustrated for disparate publications. Yet Herblock and Feiffer each grasped how satire could be used as an effective discursive strategy. The bomb's capacity to engender existential reflection, and inspire an elemental sense of fear, did not keep Herblock and Feiffer from trying to incorporate one of the most pressing issues of the postwar period into their satire. Through their efforts they showed how in the Cold War era the bomb was far from the only weapon that had the power to move people; wit, as it has throughout American history, remained an equally powerful motivator.

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