

vatives.) This year, Rick Perlstein added to the shelf with *Before the Storm*, his wonderful history of the Goldwater campaign. Schoenwald's rather academic book doesn't ascend near these heights and even repeats the information in some of these other books. But in this crowded field, he has accomplished a remarkable feat: rooting around the boxes in the conservative attic and recovering some of the more forgotten moments and figures from the movement's past. He's especially strong when describing the far right. There's Raymond Moley, a staunch New Dealer who lost his faith and went on to travel the conservative speaking circuit; and there's General Edwin Walker, a demagogic anti-communist who provided the inspiration for the Burt Lancaster character in the film, *Seven Days in May*.

Along with the Judis and Perlstein books, *A Time for Choosing* shares an interesting characteristic: it's written by a man of the left. You can understand the subject's appeal to liberals: it's exotic. Unlike liberalism, conservatism is both a political theory and a political movement. So, conservatives behave like members of other political movements. They purge their ranks and discipline obstreperous dissenters and always feel embattled. But Schoenwald reveals a more troubling fact about the movement—and a reason why the subject would attract so much liberal attention: When conservatives dissociate from their extremist hangers-on and refrain from grand ideological pronouncements, they have an awfully solid record of squashing Democrats.

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The Original Missile Shield

By Michael Schaffer

Americans never actually had to live in fallout shelters, but shelters wound up living in us: Forty years after nuke-fearing suburbanites set about digging up their backyards, the underground sanctuary survives as a supreme example of mid-

century kitsch, the civil-defense version of the malt shop. These days, the once-secret Greenbrier shelter, built to protect Congress from the Soviets, offers tours for curious nuclear buffs. A single-family shelter, meanwhile, stars in the 1999 romantic comedy *Blast From the Past*, playing the inadvertent time capsule in which hunky Brendan Fraser—along with his tight pants, Perry Como records, and love of Jackie Gleason—travels to contemporary America.

According to California State University's Kenneth Rose, the actual story of the fallout shelter turns out to be a little more complicated than the histories of Chevrolet tail-fins and martini-glass design. Americans may have been convinced that Khrushchev was going to drop the big one, but only a few of them proved willing to build radiation-proof hideaways under their petunias. In explaining why, Rose has crafted a broad-ranging narrative that covers the politics, culture, religion, and even engineering of the Cold War era.

And as a new political generation, facing less of a global threat, weighs its own antimissile program, Rose crafts a story about the disparate interests that work to make these sorts of pipe dreams happen—or manage to get in their way. As it turns out, the high profile and massive scale of the perceived nuclear threat may have actually helped doom efforts to build an organized shelter system. The debate over the moral, financial, and geopolitical consequences of the fallout shelter was hard to escape. In the face of that debate, most Americans came to a conclusion that was at once practical and essentially decent: They said no. This time around, though, it may well turn out to be tactical concerns—war is unleashed on Americans via hijacked planes, not ICBMs—rather than moral dilemmas that turn us against the scheme.

One Nation Underground opens with a look at the global and domestic

politics of the early Cold War. Long isolated from the home-front carnage of war, Americans were understandably frightened by the threat of domestic tragedy. As the perception of Moscow's strength increased, and with President Eisenhower resolute that any Soviet attack required a massive response, the sense was that the potential tragedy would be huge.

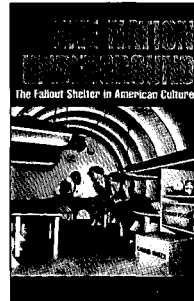
The most vivid sections of the book deal with the culture of atomic

paranoia, a genre of film and literature Rose dubs "the nuclear apocalyptic." Between 1957 and 1964 alone, 169 short stories and novels dealt with the threat of nuclear war. In journalism, the nuclear what-if piece became a newspaper cliché: Municipal dailies from coast to coast wrote up descriptions of what would happen were their city to get A-bombed. Other papers participated in preparedness drills by printing up fictional covers with headlines like the *Buffalo*

Evening News's "125,000 KNOWN DEAD, DOWNTOWN IN RUINS." Even *Good Housekeeping* weighed in with a look at what would happen if St. Louis were nuked. As the era's horror-movie producers were also learning, scaring the bobbysocks off people is good business.

Rose nicely mixes his accounts of geopolitical strategists and petrified citizens with his descriptions of the lesser-known cast of characters who took up the task of protecting ordinary people from the mean new world. The effort to move beyond ducking and covering didn't get off to a strong start. "Until the mid-1950s," notes Rose, "civil defense planners spent a great deal of time preparing for a type of war that was closer to World War II." A government pamphlet informed people that splitting the atom was just another way to cause an explosion.

But as awareness of fallout increased, California Rep. Chet Holifield stepped into the breach, taking up the cause that would largely define his career. In a series of high-



ONE NATION
UNDERGROUND:
The Fallout Shelter in
American Culture
by Kenneth D. Rose
New York University Press, \$28.95

profile hearings, Holifield called for a massive shelter system, “the acid test of a national will to build an effective civil defense.” Unfortunately for Holifield, that will wasn’t there. In the 1955 run of Operation Alert, an annual exercise simulating nuclear attack on American cities, waving schoolchildren lined Eisenhower’s route to one of the “secret sites” to which the president and 15,000 other federal employees were to repair. Plans for rapid evacuations of cities were blasted as “so much moonshine” by no less a figure than New York planning boss Robert Moses—a true believer in even the most farfetched postwar commuting schemes.

Of course, it wasn’t just a case of practical failings. Philosophically, the notion of a mass shelter scheme had an enemy in Eisenhower, who thought it would signal that America had become a “garrison state”—unreliable to its allies in Europe and elsewhere. Ike shelved a report calling for expanded shelter construction.

With government uninterested, the private sector was left to build structures to sustain life through a nuclear winter. Pushed by the standard array of experts, ad men, and hucksters, the family shelter business took off in the early ‘60s, as tensions over Berlin rattled the world and as Defense Secretary Robert McNamara affirmed that the main responsibility for civil defense lay with heads of households themselves.

In the most domestic of eras, the backyard shelter—the hermetically sealed preserve of domesticity that breadwinner Dad built and homemaker Mom ran—remains a stirring metaphor. But the reasons few Americans took any steps whatsoever to build or find a fallout shelter ultimately say much more about cultural life under the threat of the bomb. Americans’ inaction was Eisenhower’s geopolitical question about the message sent by shelters, writ small.

From debates about whether a nation of shelter-owners would be more or less likely to stumble into war; to questions about whether a post-nuclear world would be worth surviving in; to all manner of moral dilemmas about whether to lock the shelter

door on family, friends, and strangers, a country newly cognizant of imminent death grappled with questions about the meaning of life. Their answer—aided, no doubt, by the high costs and dubious practicality of many shelters—was, more or less, “let’s just forget it,” a perfectly logical reaction to the situation.

In examining the complex reactions of theologians, legislators, and ordinary people to the lure of the fallout shelter, Rose shows how the stolid citizens of pre-Vietnam America don’t quite measure up to their security-at-all-costs modern stereotype. If the shelter of contemporary pop culture makes them and their subterranean cans look goofy, the fact that so few of them built the things makes them look a lot more interesting.

These days, of course, the stakes in our new debate over civil defense are much lower. And, precisely because the missile defense system George W. Bush hopes to build would be up above the country—and not just up above a specific family—the moral dilemmas are much less complicated. And yet one can’t help but wish that the debate over Bush’s own scheme, as a matter of policy, culture, or even technology, had just a little bit of the depth that’s evident in the history Rose has unearthed.

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Dr. Strangelove’s Diary

By Andrew Cockburn

IN THE DECADES AFTER Hiroshima, most of the physicists who had conceived and built the first fission weapons and their thermonuclear successors had the grace to admit that there might be some drawbacks to their achievement. Many of these physicists lent their weight to lobbying for arms control, while the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, the house organ for such

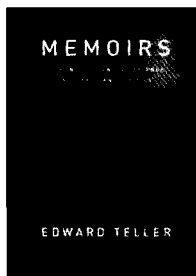
types, used as its banner the clever device of a clock set close to midnight to warn how close we were to extinction.

Edward Teller was always the exception among the original elite Los Alamos team. He really liked nuclear weapons, said so repeatedly, and resented prevailing prejudices against their further development and use. In an understandable paradox, he promoted the cause of his beloved monsters by arguing that they weren’t really all that dangerous, deriding descriptions of their apocalyptic consequences as “dangerous myth” and citing the “fact” that streetcars were running in Hiroshima within three days of the first

bomb—an utter canard (it actually took three months for mass transit to begin moving amid the nuclear ruins).

True to his beliefs, Teller argued forcefully for nonmilitary use of nuclear explosives in digging canals or gouging out harbors while energetically lobbying for ballistic missile defense (using nuclear weapons, of course) decades before he found a ready audience in Ronald Reagan. Some of his non-nuclear activities were hardly more appealing, most infamously his betrayal, through damning testimony, of his colleague and friend Robert Oppenheimer when the witch-hunters went after him in 1954—an act for which many old friends and colleagues never forgave him.

Now, at the age of 93, Teller has produced his memoirs. Not surprisingly, they present a kinder, gentler Teller, an engaging self-portrait of a brilliant gadfly who spent much of his life in the company of other geni, many of whom he had known since childhood. It is astonishing how the world was changed by a small group of Hungarians. During his last two years at school, for example, Teller met three young men who were, like him, from the Jewish community in Budapest: Eugene Wigner, John von



MEMOIRS:
A Twentieth Century
Journey in Science and
Politics
by Edward Teller
Perseus Books, \$35.00