trated leak by the Bush administration, quite possibly one planned by the White House Information Group." The *New York Times* has never acknowledged this, not in Gordon's otherwise excellent article, nor in its inadequate May 26, 2004 apology (buried on page 10) regarding its coverage of the administration's prewar claims.

I agree with Prados. It has always seemed to me that the story on aluminum tubes made it to the front page of the September 8, 2003 *New York Times* because the unnamed administration officials quoted in the piece gave the paper much-treasured inside information. Having set up the *Times* story, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and Cheney were primed when they appeared on the Sunday talk shows that same day, pointing to the article as confirmation of their claims. We now know that when Rice said that the tubes "are only really suited for nuclear weapons programs," she knew it was untrue. She had already been briefed on the disagreements in the intelligence community and knew that leading U.S. experts did not think the tubes were at all suitable for centrifuges.

Prados published his book too soon to take advantage of the Senate report, which provides a fascinating exchange of e-mails between a State Department expert and an Energy Department expert fuming about the way higher-ups at the CIA were twisting the intelligence. By exaggerating the evidence on Iraq, one expert warns the other, "the administration will eventually look foolish, i.e., the tubes and Niger."

Foolish, but reelected. Now the president is purging from the CIA the officials who opposed the intelligence manipulation, not the ones who ran the con.

Hoodwinked contains an abundance of valuable information. It is hard to read without becoming infuriated, but it is worth it. This book should be part of your Iraq War collection. ⚛

Joseph Cirincione, director of nonproliferation at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, is coauthor of WMD in Iraq: Evidence and Implications *(2003), which is available at www.ProliferationNews.org.*

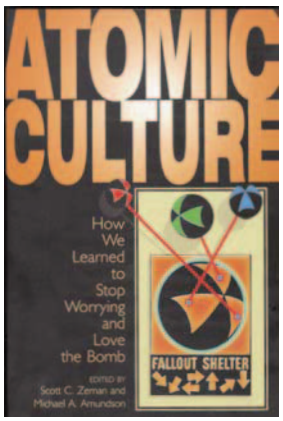
The nostalgia trap

Atomic Culture: How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb
Scott C. Zeman and Michael A. Amundson, editors
University Press of Colorado, 2004
200 pages; $22.95

Reviewed by Paul Boyer

STUDENTS OF THE IMPACT OF NUCLEAR weapons on American culture confront complicated ambiguities. One's impulse to position the subject in the past, even to bathe it in a nostalgic glow, is continually short-circuited by the realization that nuclear dangers, with their attendant cultural and psychological ramifications, threaten today's world as menacingly as ever.

The Bush administration's allegations of an Iraqi nuclear weapons program proved incorrect, but other nuclear fears persist, fueled by reports of nuclear weapons programs in North Korea and Iran. Relations between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan remain tense. The United States prepares to deploy an anti-ballistic missile defense system, pursues research on tactical nuclear "bunker-busting" weapons, and debates how to dispose of mountains of radioactive waste. And the specter of nuclear terrorism looms as large after 9/11 as ever before.



In short, the near-euphoria that accompanied the end of the Cold War and its apparent reduction of nuclear danger is long gone. Today's nuclear dangers may lack the stark clarity of the Cold War threat of global thermonuclear holocaust, but they are at least as unsettling in their amorphous multiplicity.

Despite this, we continue to relegate the atomic age to the past, viewing it from a reassuring distance. Each obituary of a Manhattan Project scientist reinforces this impulse. Civil defense and atomic age memorabilia show up in antique malls—practically as dated as 1920s Victrola records. As early as 1982, the movie *Atomic Café* presented a pastiche of 1950s-era atomic ephemera. The web site conelrad.com offers a

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cornucopia of atomic age songs, films, and other materials. A mail-order company hawks an *Enola Gay* photo autographed by pilot Paul Tibbets for $110. Recent years have brought an outpouring of scholarly books and essays exploring the civil defense movement, nuclear fiction and films, and other aspects of an increasingly remote cultural era.

We thus confront a fundamental contradiction in thinking about "the Bomb" and its impact—a historical subject on one hand, an urgent contemporary reality on the other. The eight essays in *Atomic Culture*, written by historians and scholars, reflect this uneasy relationship. While some of the authors reinforce the idea that the atomic age is past, and is even nostalgia-inducing, others realize that we are still living it.

The nostalgic theme is emphasized by the book's graphic design; by its subtitle (*How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*), echoing Stanley Kubrick's 1964 film *Dr. Strangelove*; and by the risible back-cover quote from *Dagwood Splits the Atom* (1948): "The atom is your buddy." It is also reinforced by the editors' introductory periodization of the topic, which concludes with "Post-Atomic Culture." Of this post-1992 period, the editors observe: "To be sure, Americans are still concerned with nuclear weapons, especially in the hands of 'rogue nations' or terrorists, but the atom seems to have lost its cultural centrality." This is plausible, particularly now that nuclear bombs have been subsumed into the larger category of "weapons of mass destruction." But given the developments noted above, the implication that nuclear weapons have drifted permanently to the periphery of cultural awareness may be somewhat premature.

The book's first essay is history professor Ferenc M. Szasz's survey of the atomic theme in American comic books, including some early post-war comics that expressed both horror of atomic war and hopes for peace. After a spate of Cold War comics involving nuclear combat came a phalanx of superheroes, including Spider-Man and the Incredible Hulk, whose powers derived in one way or another from atomic energy. Though the nuclear theme survives in some contemporary comics, the comic book itself, as Szasz notes, has evolved from a mass culture phenomenon to a genre attracting a narrow cult audience.

Jon Hunner's contribution recounts Los Alamos's evolution from a hastily built wartime facility to a post-war suburban community. Hunner, another history professor, tells the familiar story of 1950s civil defense—evacuation plans, duck-and-cover drills at schools, Edward Teller's cheery pronouncements ("We can be back in business within a few hours" after a nuclear attack)—as it unfolded in the bomb's birthplace. One might question Hunner's claim that "Civil defense drills gave residents a sense of security and replaced atomic anxiety with a sense of normalcy." Anecdotal evidence from 1950s schoolchildren suggests that many found the survival drills and "Bert the Turtle" films more terrifying than reassuring.

Coeditor Michael A. Amundson recovers a largely forgotten post-1945 preoccupation with uranium, including get-rich-quick dreams bolstered by the 1949 Atomic Energy Commission booklet P*rospecting for Uranium*. Manifestations of this obsession in pop culture include a Laurel and Hardy comedy poking fun at the uranium boom; the 1950 Roy Rogers film *Bells of Coronado*, involving a foiled plot to sell uranium to a foreign power; *Dig That Uranium*, a 1956 Bowery Boys comedy; a board game called "Uranium Rush"; and a 1960 Popeye cartoon, "Uranium on the Cranium." To what extent, one wonders, did all this jokiness and trivialization help domesticate threatening new knowledge by funneling it into familiar pop culture modes?

The cultural response in the late 1970s and the 1980s to the neutron bomb, which kills living creatures but leaves physical structures intact, is the focus of Scott C. Zeman's chapter "Confronting the 'Capitalist Bomb.'" Rock bands, a 1979 episode of *Battlestar Galactica*, Kurt Vonnegut's 1982 novel *Deadeye Dick*, and David Rabe's 1984 play *Hurlyburly* all commented on the neutron bomb, typically portraying it as "the offspring of a callous society that cared more for property than for people," Zeman writes.

Atomic Culture's fascinating photo essay "The Nuclear Past in the Landscape Present" by art professor Peter Goin presents then-and-now photographs from the New Mexico and Nevada nuclear test sites and the plutonium production site at Hanford, Washington. Especially haunting are two photos of Hanford High School, rebuilt in 1938, condemned by the Manhattan Project in 1943, and today a windowless derelict. Goin's accompanying narrative describes the scary radiological risks, even today, of visiting these locales.

A. Costandina Titus traces "the evolution of the mushroom cloud from its origins as an instrument of political kitsch to its current reincarnation as a bit of Cold War nostalgic kitsch" that is even "viewed somewhat wistfully as [an] . . . icon reminiscent of simpler, safer times." Titus chronicles the governmental, journalistic, and polemical uses of the image of the mushroom cloud from 1945 to 1963 (the year of the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty) and its revival in the 1980s as an instantly recognizable nostalgic marker drained of its original cautionary power. (Has the familiar Doomsday Clock undergone a similar evolution?)

Titus also discusses the current vogue of atomic tourism. For $2,750, one can travel to Bikini Atoll for a week of scuba diving around the ghost ships sunk in 1946 by nuclear tests. This kind of nuclear commercialism, along with such

phenomena as the designation of intercontinental ballistic missile launching pads as "national historic landmarks," reinforces the relegation of the atomic age to a past rendered innocuous by the patina of time.

The nuclear theme persists in filmmaking, often emerging as a comic prop or a trivial plot device, as Mick Broderick documents in his deeply researched essay, "Is This the Sum of Our Fears? Nuclear Imagery in Post-Cold War Cinema," using some 500 recent movies. Broderick contextualizes his discussion with attention to the long afterlife of President Ronald Reagan's Star Wars fantasy, intensified fears of nuclear terrorism, and the recent upsurge of religious apocalypticism, among other issues.

Is it possible to design monuments intended to warn distant, future generations away from subterranean nuclear waste depositories, which remain lethal for 10,000 years? Peter C. Van Wyck's concluding essay reflects on the government's effort to do just that. Drawing on the theories of Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, and other French intellectuals, Van Wyck ruminates on the cultural and moral implications of "monuments" that serve no commemorative or celebratory purpose, only the minatory function of scaring people away from the deadly substances buried beneath them—monuments that bear witness only to an appalling human failure.

Atomic Culture points to one inescapable conclusion: For all the trappings of nostalgia and the distancing mechanisms by which we seek to relegate it to "history," the atomic age is not merely a part of our past. It extends into our present and into the unimaginably remote future, shaping our politics, diplomacy, and culture, stirring uneasily in the depths of our consciousness. ⚛

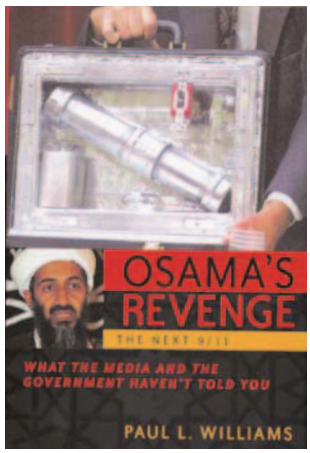
Paul Boyer, Merle Curti Professor of History Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, is author of By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age *(1994, second edition).*

Don't sweat the suitcase

Osama's Revenge: The Next 9/11—What the Media and the Government Haven't Told You
By Paul L. Williams
Prometheus Books, 2004
261 pages; $25

Reviewed by Cristina Chuen

In Osama's Revenge, Paul L. Williams asserts not only that Al Qaeda bought "suitcase bombs"—small nuclear weapons—between 1996 and 2001, but also that terrorists will detonate one of them in the United States. Williams bases his claims largely on secondary sources, relying particularly heavily on questionable sources like the Israeli news site debka.com, which mixes anonymous tips and unsubstantiated rumors with factual stories. Williams's dubious informants for some of his "information about the nuclear suitcases that are meant to destroy the United States of America" are two drug dealers from New York City's Little Odessa neighborhood who don't even know the source of the drugs they peddle. The book ignores counterarguments and any evidence contrary to the author's claims, and readers may find it difficult to discern when he turns to wild speculation.



Williams's frightening scenario is badly flawed. His tale, however, brings up the critical question of how America can protect itself from nuclear terrorism—what Williams calls "the coming nightmare."

The alleged Al Qaeda purchase of so-called Soviet suitcase nukes has been widely reported in the press. Some reports say that Chechen fighters acquired the weapons in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, or Ukraine after the Soviet Union disintegrated. Chechen leader Dzhokhar Dudayev even declared that he had acquired suitcase nukes in 1994 and later sold them to Al Qaeda.

The Soviet Union did build small tactical nuclear devices, called "nuclear backpacks," that were developed for the Ministry of Defense Special Forces (*Spetsnaz*). There were two versions of the weapons—one for the army and an underwater version for the navy. A single operator could reportedly arm one of these devices, which weigh about 66 pounds, in