Fallout Shelter: Designing for Civil Defense in the Cold War, by David Monteyne.
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Fallout Shelter is a very specialized book dealing with a unique building type. However, David Monteyne does a wonderful job of placing the fallout shelter and its design in the perspective of the Cold War. In chapter one, Monteyne reminds readers of the aftermath of the Hiroshima bombings and how civilians and government officials reacted. Discussing civil defense programs in the Cold War era, the author provides context with his discussion of "containment" as defined by then President Harry Truman. Monteyne suggests a link in the minds of planners between urban renewal campaigns and civil defense strategies.

Turning to specifics, Monteyne presents an overview of the National Fallout Shelter Program. An essential part of the program was the National Fallout Shelter Survey, which identified potential fallout shelter spaces in existing U.S. buildings. The involvement of the American Institute of Architects with the new Office of Civil Defense made architects key stakeholders in both civil defense planning and Cold War politics.

Monteyne places the fallout shelter in historic context. He notes liberal opposition to matters like signage and points out the stereotypical images of family life most often depicted in film stills about fallout shelters.

The role of the architectural profession is also presented in a similar context. While some architects like Ralph Walker, AIA President in 1949-51, felt the architect to only have a responsibility to their specific (paying) clients, others like Harvard professor, Serge Chermayeff felt differently. Chermayeff stressed that architecture was more than a business, and that the architect’s social responsibility was to improve the basic shelter, not to engage in domestic politics.

The next section of the book describes how civil defense planning led to changes in building codes and improvements in technical expertise. A series of competitions tested civil defense requirements and architectural design values. Architects moved from competitions to real buildings like Boston City Hall, which is thoroughly discussed in relation to its bunker-like design and its brawny presence as well as fallout shelter coverage.

Monteyne believes that U.S. civil defense planning ultimately was a failure. However, he stresses lessons were learned. The book shows how the engagement of architects in such planning moved the profession forward and helped to shape views on both urban and suburban space.

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