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Forthcoming review by Paul Boyer

**Nuclear Dynamite.** Directed and written by Gary Marcuse. Produced by Face to Face Media in cooperation with the National Film Board of Canada. 72 minutes. Face to Face Media, 1818 Grant St., Vancouver BC, Canada V5L 2Y8.

In the late 1950s, as part of the Atomic Energy Commission's "Atoms for Peace" program, physicist Edward Teller and other scientists at California's Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory set out to identify large-scale engineering projects that could supposedly be facilitated by controlled nuclear explosions. As a trial run for one such scheme, a new canal across Latin America, Teller and company devised a plan to blast out a deep-water harbor in northern Alaska, near the Inupiat village of Point Hope. *Nuclear Dynamite* documents the history of this scheme, dubbed Project Chariot, from initial hype to its collapse amid protests by environmentalists, local residents, and a national campaign focused on the hazards of radioactive fallout from nuclear testing. (An excellent account of Project Chariot is Daniel T. O'Neill's *The Firecracker Boys* [N.Y., St. Martin's Press, 1994]).

This film tells its disturbing story well, with unobtrusive narration; contemporary footage of "Atoms for Peace" promotional films, protest marches, and cheerleading by Teller; and interviews with critics, including Barry Commoner, who publicized Project Chariot's ecological hazards and also devised the "Baby Tooth Project" to document rising levels of strontium-90 in children. Commoner and University of Toronto physicist Ursula Franklin (organizer of the baby-tooth campaign in Canada) eloquently recall the nuclear dangers and official deceptions they battled. Freeman Dyson wryly conveys the excitement of Project Orion, a plan to use nuclear explosions to launch a massive vehicle to explore the galaxy. Keith Lawton, in the 1950s a young Episcopal priest at Point Hope, recalls the campaign to halt Project Chariot. Several Point Hope villagers describe their

initial amazement at the project and their growing skepticism about the propaganda dispensed by visiting officials. John Gofman, former director of the biomedical division at Lawrence Livermore, discusses his gradual disillusionment with the enterprise and its callous disregard for human and environmental considerations. *Nuclear Dynamite* also incorporates film footage and interviews documenting the Soviet "atoms for peace" program--equally grandiose and equally doomed to failure.

Particularly engrossing are the shots of Edward Teller, both as a vigorous scientist in his prime, drumming up support for his schemes, and the aged, half-blind man of the late 1990s, reviewing his career with no shadow of regret, blaming a pervasive "anti-scientific climate" for frustrating his dreams. (In one surreal clip, the Teller of today plays a lovely piano sonata.)

Important and timely, *Nuclear Dynamite* recalls a fast-fading epoch of the world's nuclear history. Together with the documentary *Atomic Cafe*, on the government propaganda and popular culture of the early nuclear age, and such commercial films as *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *On the Beach*, and *Dr. Strangelove*, it would wonderfully enrich courses on postwar America or on the nuclear era. Originally made for Canadian public television, it deserves wide U.S. distribution as well. Highly recommended.

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Professor Paul Boyer teaches American Intellectual and Cultural History at the University of Wisconsin - Madison. He is the author of *Fallout: A Historian Reflects on America's Half Century Encounter with Nuclear Weapons* (Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1998) and *By the Bomb's Early Light, American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (University of North Carolina Press, 1994)