

Improper Divulgence: How Distrust and Poor Reporting Influenced Civilians Views of the Three Mile Island Incident

By: Dylan Cumbo



Experience Prior

- Atomic experiences earlier stages of the Cold War
- Connections between nuclear reactors and bombs
- Discussion of the invisible danger of radiation
- Talks on casualties caused by nuclear meltdowns

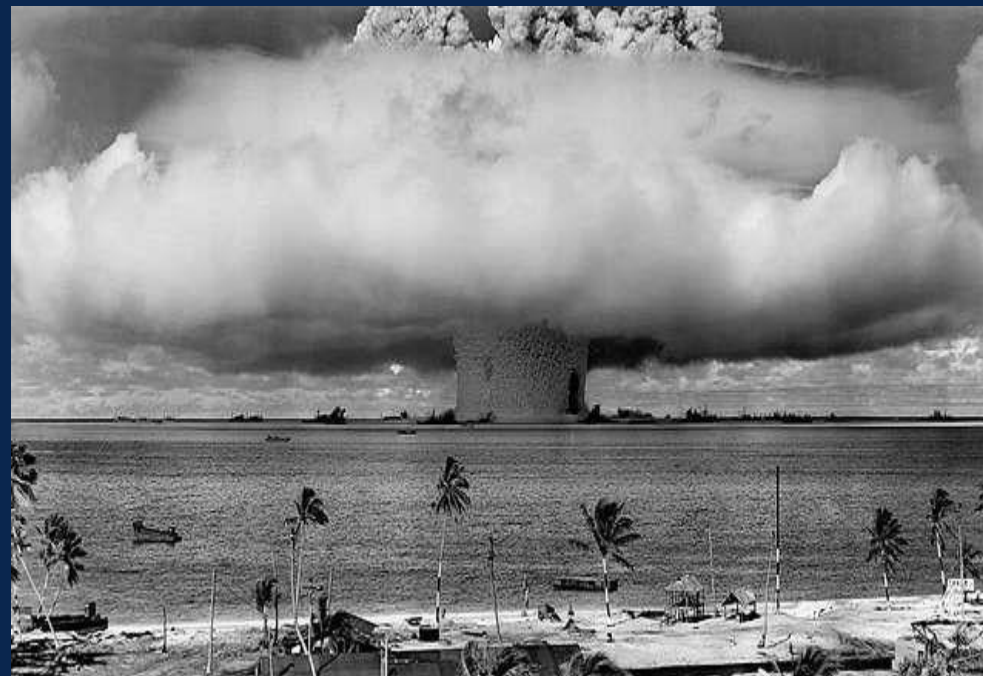


Figure 1: "Gray Scale of Explosion on the Beach." <https://www.pexels.com/photo/grayscale-photo-of-explosion-on-the-beach-73909/>.



March 28th, 1979

- Not initially intended for its Pennsylvanian location
- Result of both technical and human error
 - Faulty closing of key valve
 - Inability to distinguish true problem
- Thousands of civilians evacuated the immediate and surrounding region



Figure 2: "Three Mile Island." https://www.flickr.com/photos/todd_macdonald/2254065684.



Official/Media Presentation

- Various officials reported on incident
 - Joseph Hendrie
 - Dick Thornburgh
 - Harold Denton
- Seeming lack of concern from Met-Ed and Nuclear Regulatory Commission
- News outlets had difficulty describing the incident
- Lofty and grandiose statements made by both groups



Figure 3: "President Carter Visits TMI-2 in 1979."
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/nrcgov/7447159200>.



Figure 4: "Mr. Dick Thornburgh."
<https://picryl.com/media/mr-dick-thornburgh-governor-of-pennsylvania-speaks-during-the-commissioning-f6ceeb>.



“How Many Watts is this Kid Worth”

- Bystanders lacked understanding of what truly was happening
- Worried about being used as experiments
 - Reports of various symptoms relating to contamination
- Disapproval expressed via newspapers and public demonstrations
- Repercussions for children were a central concern



Figure 5: “Crowd at Rally. Anti-Nuke Rally in Harrisburg (Pennsylvania) at the Capitol.” <https://jenikirbyhistory.getarchive.net/media/crowd-at-rally-anti-nuke-rally-in-harrisburg-pennsylvania-at-the-capitol-nara-674d77>.



Legacy

- Stipulations implemented by President Carter and the United States Government
- Nuclear Regulator Committee recognized changes were needed
- Significant decrease in the number of approved reactor licenses and facilities

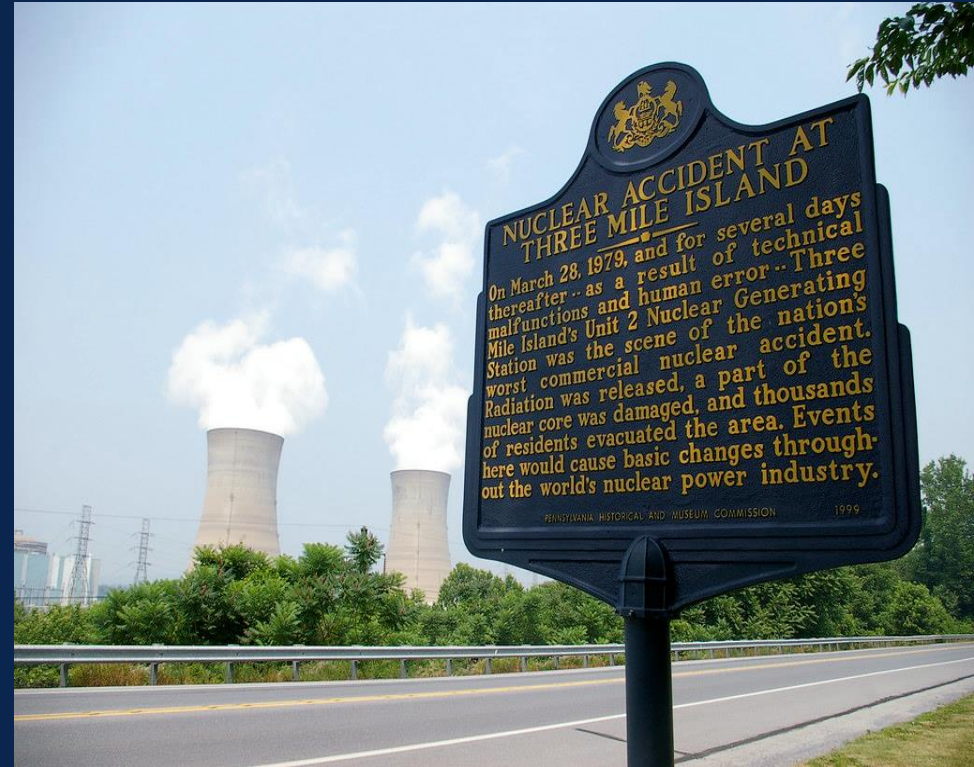


Figure 6: "Three Mile Island." <https://www.flickr.com/photos/subindie/955633308>.



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