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For four weeks in July 1950, the National Broadcasting Company reexamined a subject of national importance that had once dominated the airwaves just a few years before. The issue was atomic energy, which had been heavily debated following Hiroshima. Radio had played a major role in the nuclear discourse of 1945-1947, but shifted its attention elsewhere once national policy seemed set. The Soviet A-bomb of August 1949, President Truman's decision to build a hydrogen bomb, and the Korean War only exacerbated Americans' sense that the country was under siege. This was the environment in which NBC developed *The Quick and the Dead*, which it touted as "one of the finest things that radio has done since World War II."²

"No dull, dreary scientific thesis on atomic energy," *Quick* represented a major network effort, one that "undertook the task of translating the story of the atomic bomb into simple, understandable language that every child or adult can absorb."² To accomplish this, writer Fred Friendly imagined "a veritable detective story" starring Bob Hope and a cavalcade of historic and scientific figures to explain "the history and future of the atom and H-bombs."² The supposed goal was an informed public that participated in national nuclear decisions.

NBC praised its own "courageous decision" in airing the subject, which it saw validated by an "amazing" public reaction that later led to an RCA Victor album release. With hindsight, however, this assessment appears simplistic. Did the program truly ask "searching questions about the use of atomic energy?"² Was the popular response proof of the broadcast's brilliance, a display of star power, or an indication of how starved the public was for serious treatments of atomic affairs? What does *The Quick and the Dead* reveal about postwar radio's state, particularly when covering issues of national security?

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