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BE PREPARED

DOOMSDAY PREPPING
IN THE UNITED STATES

ROBERT E. KIRSCH AND EMILY RAY

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Doomsday prepping has gone mainstream. Survivalists star in reality TV shows, celebrities hawk emergency gear, and ordinary people stockpile essentials in the hope that they can outlast a slew of threats, real and imagined. The ideology behind prepping, however, is no passing fad but a persistent feature of American life. *Be Prepared* reveals the surprising ways prepping is woven into the fabric of American institutions and shows its significance for understanding the fault lines of liberal democracy.

Robert E. Kirsch and Emily Ray trace the beliefs and practices that underlie survivalism, from the rise of the Boy Scouts of America to Cold War fears of nuclear devastation through present-day Silicon Valley dreams of space colonization. They argue that prepping is rooted in long-standing anxieties over industrialization, urbanization, and immigration and steeped in the histories of colonial expansion and militarization. To grasp its political implications, Kirsch and Ray develop the concept of “bunkerization”: not simply building physical bunkers but building a society symbolized by the bunker. In such a society, individual vigilance and survival become the organizing principles of everyday life. People opt out of collective projects and retreat into personal responsibility for preparedness, expressed through acts of consumption. Shedding new light on the persistence of antidemocratic politics, from white supremacy to neoliberalism, *Be Prepared* also considers how to escape the solitary fate of life in the bunker and instead meet collective problems together.

BOOK PRESENTATION & PANEL DISCUSSION

31 January 2025 | 4.00 PM

Atrium at HCA (Heidelberg Center for American Studies) | Hauptstraße 120 , 69117 Heidelberg

With the authors Robert E. Kirsch (Arizona State University) & Emily Ray (Sonoma State University)

Speakers: Eduardo Altheman C. Santos (CAPAS, Heidelberg University), Florian Mussnug (University College London), Jenny Stümer (CAPAS, Heidelberg University)

Moderation: Florian Böller (HCA, Heidelberg University)

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