

The Pseudo and Actual Communities of Cold War Paranoia

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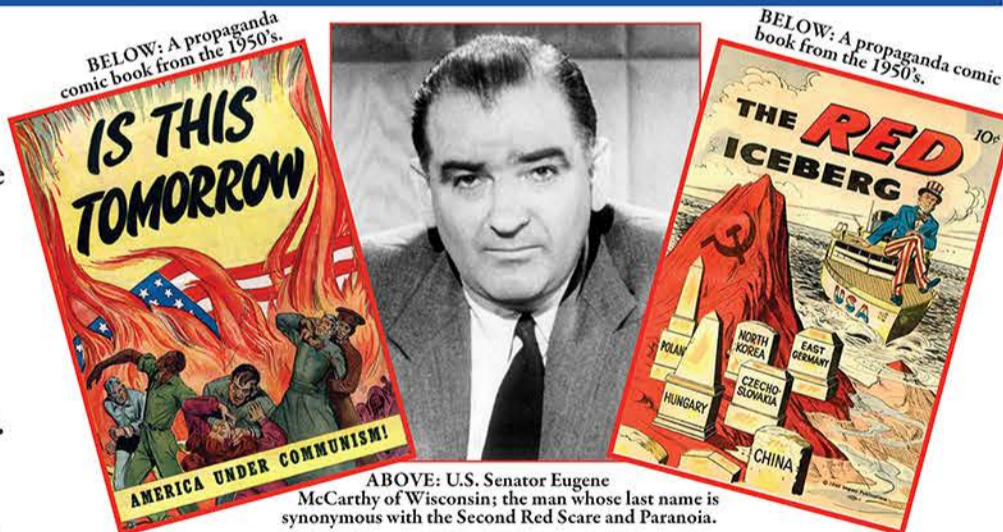
The Atomic Bomb, 1945/1946



After the first two atomic bombs ever created were dropped on Japan, the Empirical Forces surrender on August 15th, 1945; the public mentality in the U.S. was one of celebration, and the modest Soviet nuclear program pushed into overdrive. The U.S. had its first major tests of atomic bombs, twice as large in power as those dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in Bikini Atoll in July, 1946 as part of Operation Crossroads. By August 1949 the Soviets possessed their first working nuclear weapon, thus ended the few short halcyon years of post-war America. The arms race, and the Cold War, had formally begun. Pictured above is the Baker explosion during Operation Crossroads.

The Second Red Scare 1947-1950s-Paranoia

The paranoia generated during the Cold War brought Americans together in concern and encouraged conformity to the ideals of democracy and good citizenship—Core American values. These were supposedly the very concepts that separated Americans from the assumed enemy—the Soviets. Paranoia created in the minds of Americans a pseudo-community of enemies that sought the destruction of these American values. But the average Russian likely wanted nothing more than to go about their business unhindered. The real threat lay in the possibility of nuclear destruction, not a Russian invasion.



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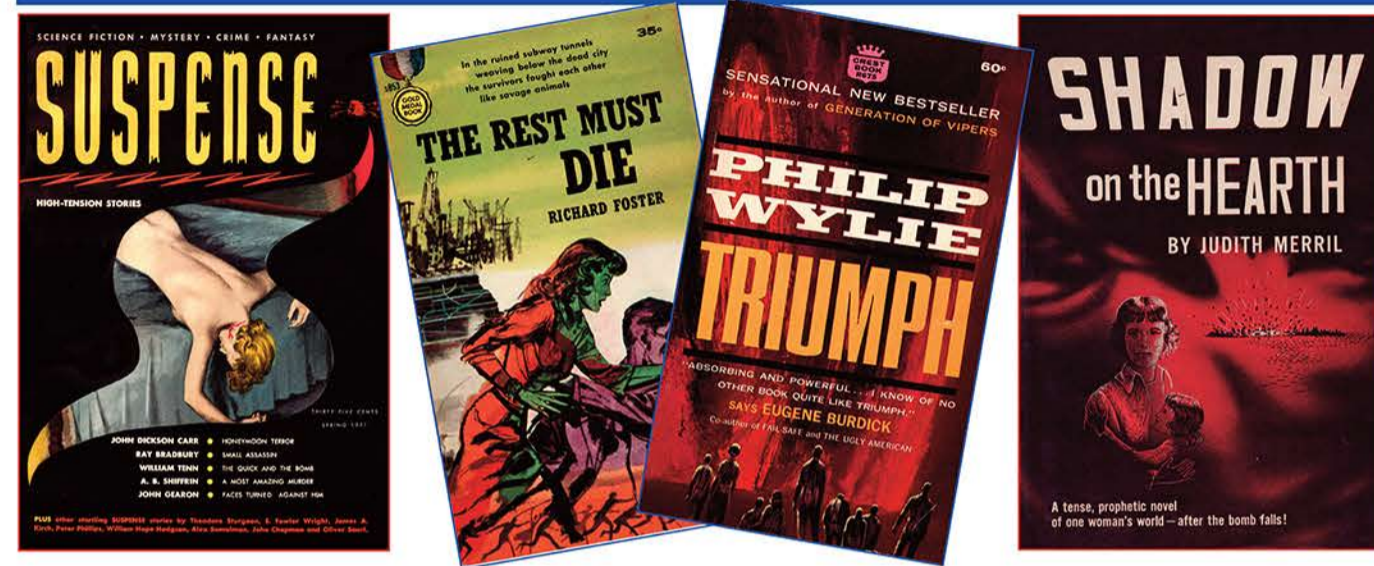
ABOVE: U.S. Senator Eugene McCarthy of Wisconsin; the man whose last name is synonymous with the Second Red Scare and Paranoia.

On December 1st, 1950, President Harry Truman established the Federal Civil Defense Administration, charged with preparing and protecting the American public in the event of a nuclear catastrophe. Civil Defense was, in many ways, highly influential in American culture throughout the early Cold War period. Civil Defense played a critical role in creating the culture of paranoia that existed in the United States during the first half of the Cold War. One way this was achieved was to redirect Americans' fears of nuclear weapons to a fear of The Soviet Union and Communists. Both were portrayed as the enemies of freedom, democracy, and the Core American Values. Civil Defense allowed the United States government to create a pseudo-community (Communists and Communist Nations) to deflect the fact that Americans should have been paranoid about the very existence of nuclear weapons, regardless of who possessed them. This idea is seen in the literature and film of the 1950s and early 1960s.



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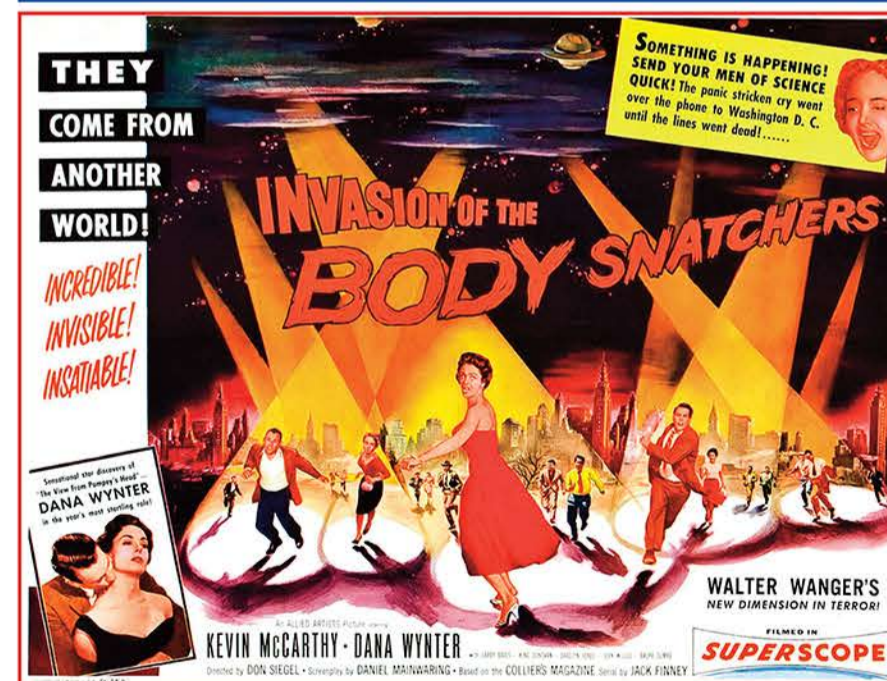
Atomic Fiction—Pulp Novels and Magazines



Much of the pulp fiction and popular magazines of the 1950s and 1960s with stories about atomic bombs focused on the heroism of individuals who could save their families and/or members of the community because of their efforts through Civil Defense. In Philip Wylie's *Triumph*, the tale of two typical midwestern cities surviving an atomic bomb is at the center of the novel's theme. One city has spend money and man-hours on Civil Defense—the other town sees it as folly. After the bomb drops, the city with Civil Defense survives the blast—the other city is destroyed and has far more casualties. Judith Merrill's *Shadow on the Hearth* gives a woman's perspective of Civil Defense, albeit with the sexist overtone that a woman's job is to keep her family together while the men of Civil Defense ensure the town's safety after an atomic attack. In "The Quick and The Dead" by William Tenn, a father loses his cool when his son drags his feet during an atomic blast drill, and in *The Rest Must Die* by Richard Foster, the tunnels of the New York City subway protect thousands from atomic annihilation.



Atomic Movies—Invasion Of The Body Snatchers



In many movies during the Cold War, the bomb itself was not addressed as much as the threat of communist infiltration of American society. One example is the 1956 film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. In the film, the small town of Santa Mira, California, falls victim to a mysterious delusion. Upon closer examination, it is discovered that an alien life-form is invading earth and copying peoples' bodies while removing all human emotion to create a passionless conformity. The aliens are stand-ins for communists who are infiltrating American society. Slowly but surely, they take over by bringing other people

over to their side. This is exactly the fear that Joseph McCarthy spread during the 1950's. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is a perfect reflection of paranoia in the Cold War.



Paranoia became so pervasive in American culture that it can be seen in an astounding number of popular films and works of literature not only in the 1950s and 60s, but until the 1980s. These cultural artifacts were not only reactions to the paranoia already present in the minds of every American, but also helped perpetuate fear of the Soviets, when in reality the mere existence of the bomb alone was, and is, what all the world's people should've been (should be) worrying about. This Cold War paranoia is still influential in American culture today, whether it's focused on terrorists or extremists; Pseudo-communities will always cover the actual communities that cause an existential fear and panic inside every human being because it creates the safe falacy that we can fight and win.

