

The Birth of Marvel Comics



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Threat of Nuclear War

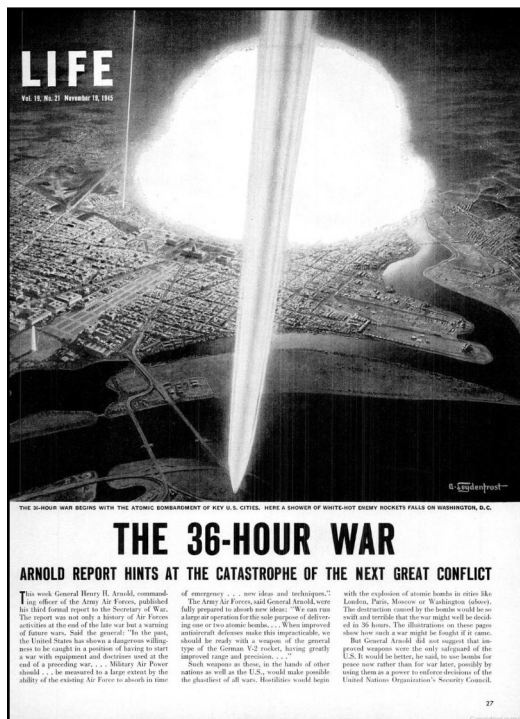
- U.S. exploded first atomic bomb on July 16, 1945 at Alamogordo, New Mexico
 - code name: Trinity
 - was kept secret
- in August 1945, U.S. dropped two bombs on Japan
- Cold War begins.... US vs. Soviet Union
- U.S. holds monopoly on bomb for....
 - 4 years
- Soviet Union exploded A-bomb in 1949
- Escalation of arms race, more deadly weapons
- Development of H-bomb (1952-53), capable of destroying cities
- Tsar Bomba in 1961

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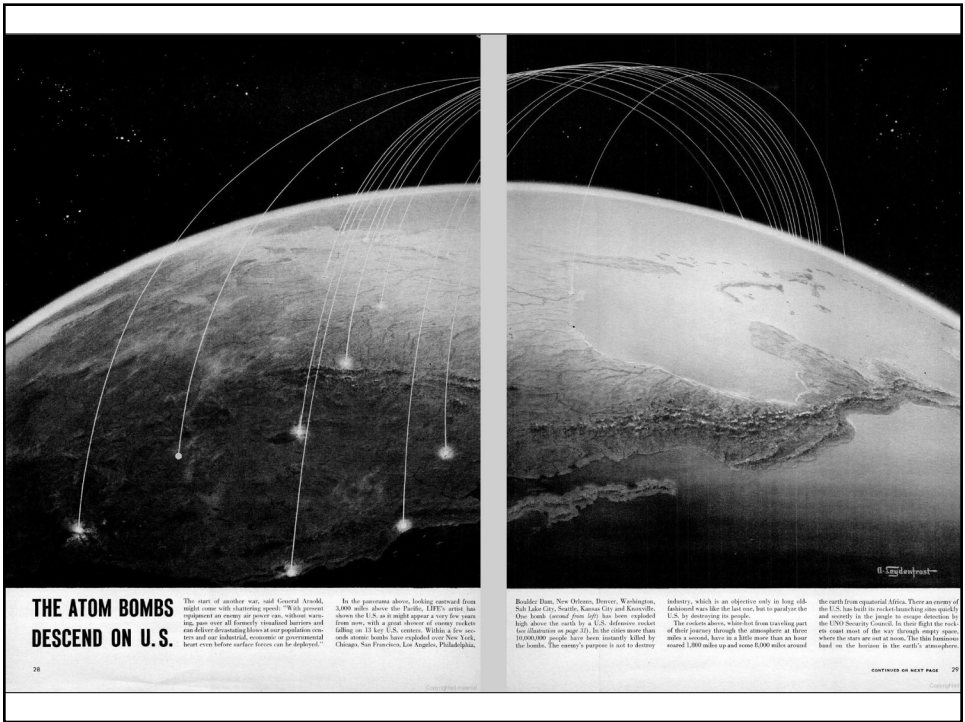
Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD)

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Life, November 19, 1945

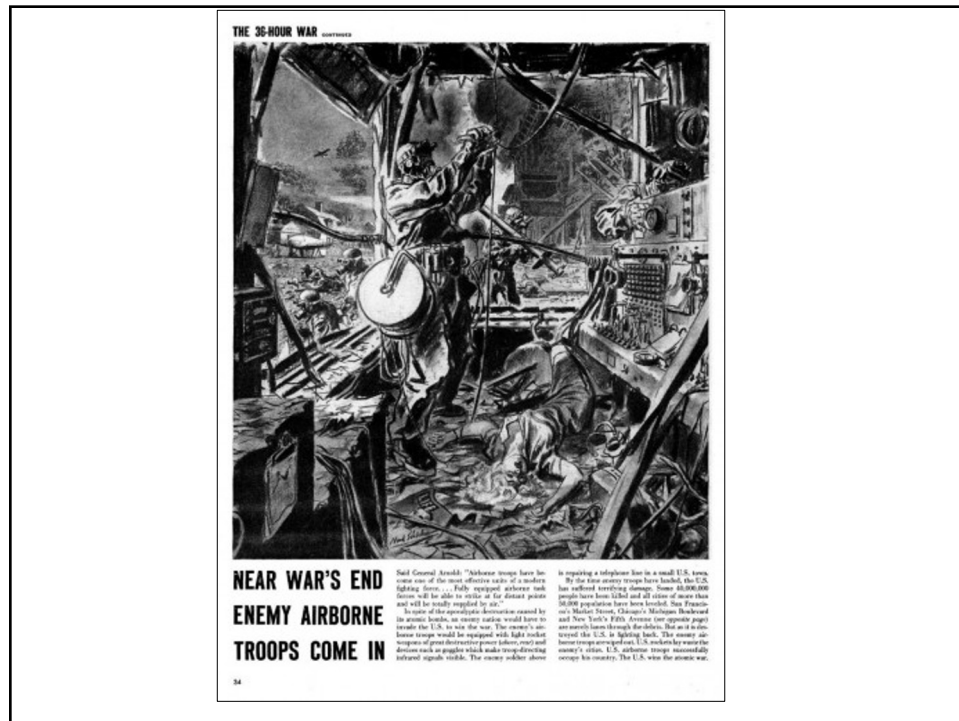
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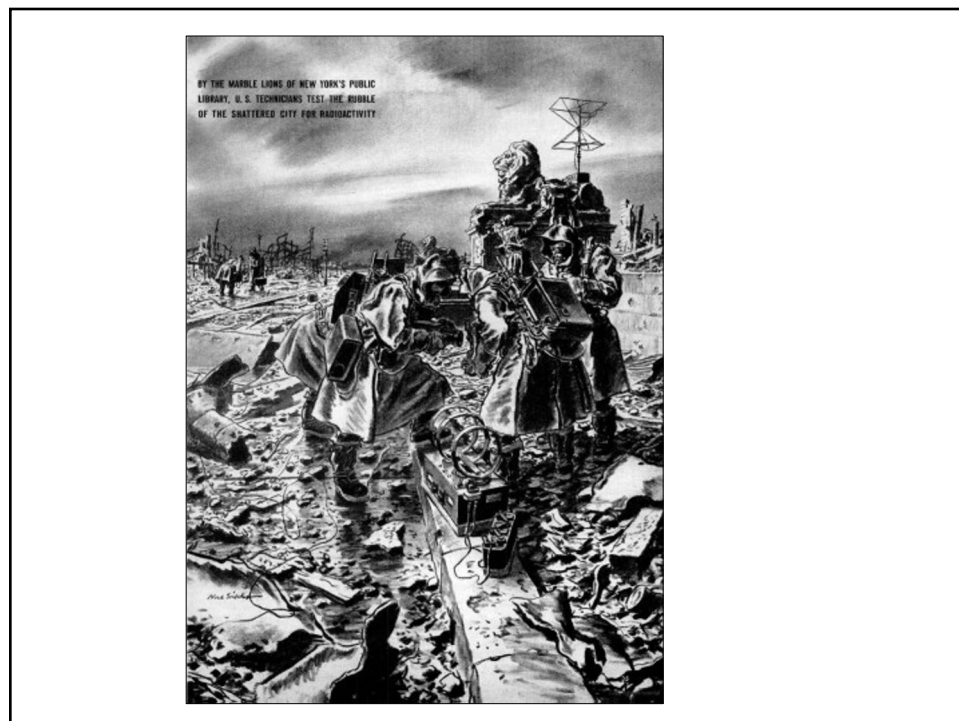
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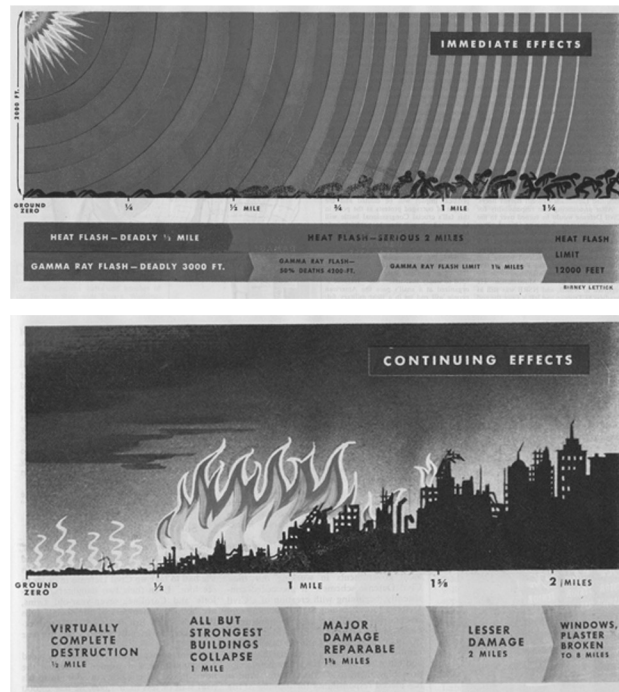
- *Collier's* magazine, August 5, 1950
- Written by John Lear, illustrations by Chesley Bonestell and Birney Lettick
- *"For five years now the world has lived with the dreadful knowledge that atomic warfare is possible. Since last September [1949], when the President announced publicly that the Russians too had produced an atomic explosion, this nation has lived face to face with the terrifying realization that an attack with atomic weapons could be made against us.*
- *But, until now, no responsible voice has evaluated the problem constructively, in words everybody can understand. This article performs that service. Collier's gives it more than customary space in the conviction that, when the danger is delineated and the means to combat it effectively is made clear, democracy will have an infinitely stronger chance to survive."*

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Fear of
“Fallout”



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Cold War in Popular Culture

- two major themes reflected in culture
 - fear of communism
 - atomic energy
 - anxiety, fear, terror
 - also enthusiasm
- Reflected in movies, literature, high & low art, music, comics, design, architecture, fashion, etc.

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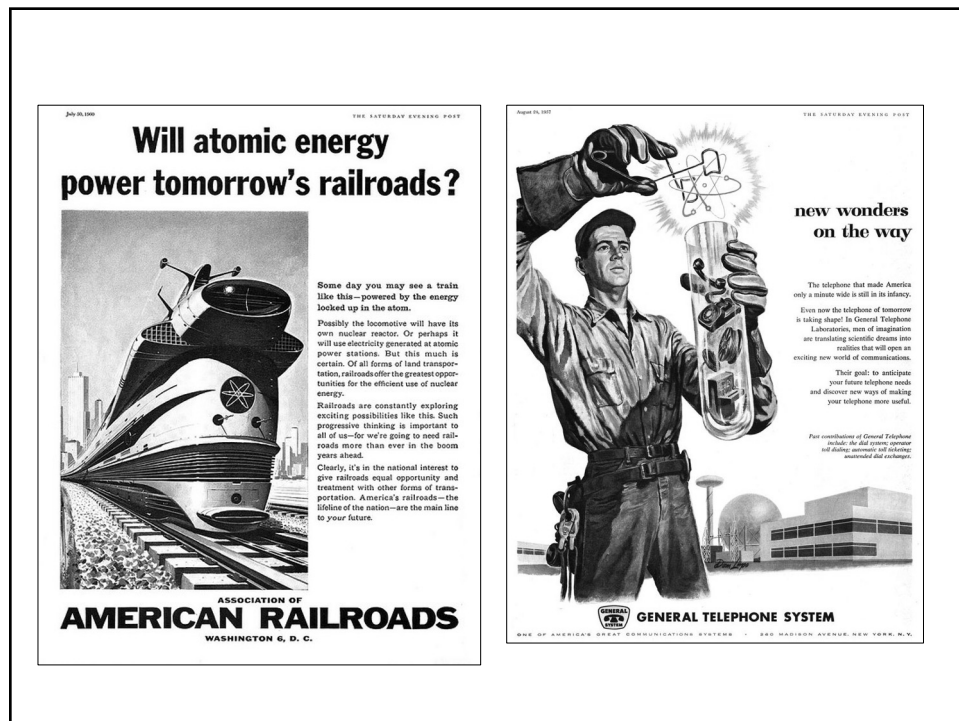


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- Both 'nuclear anxiety' (nuclear holocaust & radiation poisoning) and paranoia about communism channeled into popular culture
- Movies, comic books, etc.



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- Enter Marvel.....
- In late 1950s, Timely Comics—headed by Martin Goodman—in decline
 - renamed Atlas Comics
 - titles distributed by DC Comics
 - mostly published sci-fi stories
 - editor, art director, chief writer:
 - Stan Lee
 - hired by Goodman in 1940 when Lee was 17
- Through 1950s, Atlas lacked direction
 - DC dominated market
 - until Lee hired two new artists
 - Jack Kirby
 - Steve Ditko
- initially they worked with Lee on sci-fi stories
- how were these stories different?
 - ended with moral ambiguity (Wright, p. 203)

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- **Stan Lee** (1922-2018)
 - born Stanley Lieber in New York City
 - son of Romanian-born Jewish parents
 - became assistant at Timely Comics in 1939 (owned by Martin Goodman)
 - Lee's cousin Jean was Goodman's wife
 - Lee began writing almost immediately, in 1940
 - Captain America, etc.
 - stint in US Army during WWII
 - but continued to write comics
 - after WWII
 - worked as writer of many genres
 - Westerns, humor, science fiction, horror, etc.
 - inspired by success of Flash & Justice League in late 1950s, began to rethink superhero genre
 - Goodman asked him to develop a **family** of superheroes
 - Kirby was on board



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Fantastic Four # 1 (November 1961)
Stan Lee and Jack Kirby

considered the beginning of the
Marvel Universe

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- After *Fantastic Four*, others soon came out:

- *The Incredible Hulk* (May 1962)
- Spider-man introduced in *Amazing Fantasy* # 15 (August 1962)
- *The Avengers* (September 1963)
- *X-Men* (September 1963)



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- PBS: *Superheroes* (3:15-11:00)
- Article by Genter
- What was Stan Lee's main goal? How was it different from DC comics (*Superman*, *Batman*, etc.)?
 - talk and react like real people
 - insecurities, conflicts, shortcomings
 - ambiguous moral dilemmas
 - read Wright, pp. 215-216
- Other implicit themes
 - all origin stories nuclear-related
 - technology as bad/good
 - Cold War as backdrop

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- The Fantastic Four
 - Mr. Fantastic -> Reed Richards
 - Invisible Girl -> Sue Storm
 - The Human Torch -> Johnny Storm
 - The Thing -> Ben Grimm
- Powers?
- Origin story directly related to Cold War event
- Concept of “nuclear family”
 - family as a notion of stability in the face of Cold War uncertainty
 - each character represents a particular role (p. 957)
 - psychoanalysis
 - Fantastic Four as four parts of a single mind itself?
 - pp. 958-959



Yuri Gagarin
1st man in space
April 12, 1961



Fantastic Four # 45 (1965)

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- The Incredible Hulk
 - Bruce Banner → The Hulk
 - Origin?
- What kind of tropes in the Hulk?
 - dangers of nuclear power
 - dangers of unknown science / don't mess with nature
 - literary roots
 - Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (1818)
 - Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886)
 - Lee/Kirby took style of the Hulk from movie version of *Frankenstein* (1931)
 - Genter, p. 961
 - crisis of masculinity in American culture
 - postwar economy moved from industrial labor to service economy
 - search for a 'harder' masculinity
 - The Beat Poets
 - read Genter, p. 964: "Invocations of the archaic..."
 - "As 'half-man, half-monster,' the Hulk represents the repressed side of man that had vanished with the appearance of organization men like Banner" (p. 964)
 - also elevate image of scientist
 - "rehabilitating the image of the nation's scientists" (p. 960)
 - revenge of the nerds?
- Lee added pathos in character of Hulk
 - what were some of these themes?
 - read Genter, p. 965

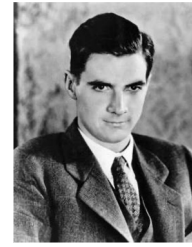


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- Iron Man
 - Tony Stark
 - Origin?
- What original tropes?
 - playboy
 - Hugh Hefner / Howard Hughes
 - read p. 969
 - basically, also a comment on crisis of masculinity
 - tech industrialist
 - at at time when such things were disappearing under guise of "Big Science"
 - struggle against the military-industrial complex
 - what was his burden?
 - wounded heart
 - *"existential condition of having to 'spend the rest of [his] life in this iron prison'" (p. 966)*
 - anti-Communist
 - Asian 'yellow' menace
 - Iron Man
- How has it been updated?



Tales of Suspense # 55 (1964)



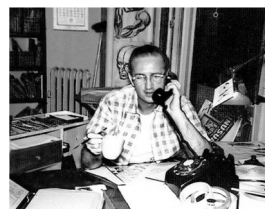
Howard Hughes (1905-1976)



Hugh Hefner (1926-2017)

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- Spider-Man
- 1st appeared in *Amazing Fantasy* # 15 (1962)
- Created by Stan Lee & Steve Ditko
- went against the grain of all previous superheroes
 - teenager
 - origin story was rooted in failure
 - death of father figure
 - broken family
 - central figure is one of self-doubt
 - made fun of by peers
 - has no money
 - feels responsible for aunt
 - rejected by women
 - tormented by boss
 - *"with great power comes great responsibility"*
- contribution of Ditko
 - was essentially co-author
 - influenced by Ayn Rand
 - *The Fountainhead* (1943)
 - highly individualistic / capitalistic philosophy influenced many young men in 1960s
 - over the course of 1960s, Spider-Man/Peter Parker became highly individualistic
 - somewhat anti-women
 - against leftist politics
 - against government
 - tormented by higher calling



Steve Ditko (1927-2018)



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