

## What were the **red** scares?



*"Communism in reality is not a political party. It is a way of life, an evil and malignant way of life. It reveals a condition akin to a disease, that spreads like an epidemic, and like an epidemic, a quarantine is necessary to keep it from infecting this nation."*

**J. Edgar Hoover, former FBI director**

The United States underwent several "red scares during the last century," times of intense anti-communism which resulted in the questioning, jailing and even execution of those believed to have provided support or information to communist countries. The most notable of these followed closely after each of the world wars. During each of these times, fear of communism in the United States reached a crescendo of hysteria that echoed through every level of society.



One of many civil defense posters issued during the 1960's

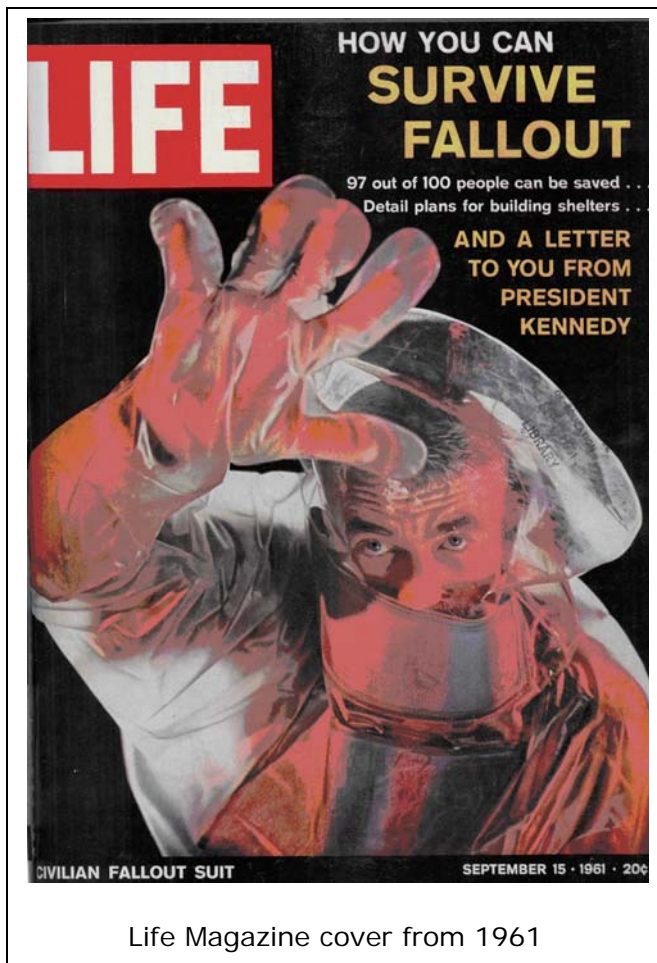
### **Post World War I**

In 1917, the Bolsheviks had just taken control of formerly Tsarist Russia. At the same time, the United States was experiencing concerns about the role and power of labor unions (who, at that time, had strong Socialist and Communist leanings). In 1919, a series of bombings in the United States, directed at political and

capitalist figures, sparked a surge of patriotism, which often materialized in the form of violent hatred of "communists, radicals and foreigners." Thousands were arrested and hundreds deported as communists during this red scare.

### **Post World War II and the Soviet Threat**

Perhaps the most notable red scare occurred shortly after the end of World War II, when relations between the United States and Soviet Union, allies during the War, disintegrated into conflict between capitalism and communism. When the Soviet Union detonated an atomic bomb in 1949, the euphoria in the United States over the end of World War Two



Life Magazine cover from 1961

quickly faded. Until this time, the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans provided security from hostile countries; the threat of long-range bombers and Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) threatened to bring massive devastation to the United States, a country unaccustomed to foreign attack.

### The McCarthy Era

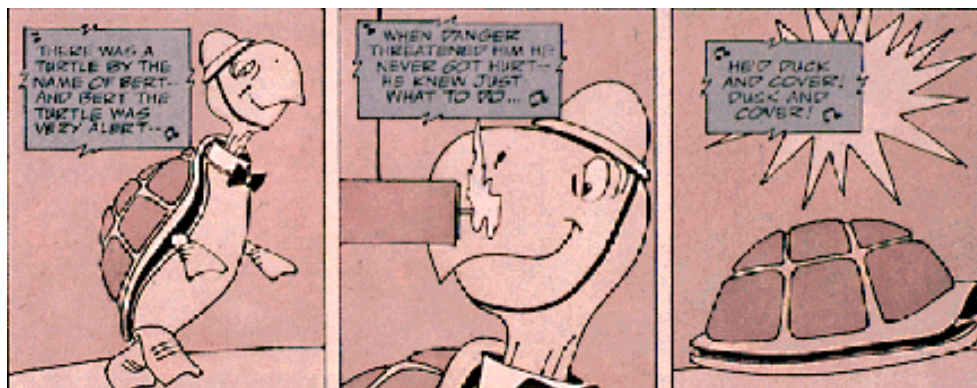
In February 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy declared that communists had infiltrated the State Department and initiated a purging of communist infiltrators from public prominence, including in the government and Hollywood. Many people believed that the United States had fallen behind in the nuclear arms race at this time and communist activities in the government provided a reason for this. The

House Committee on Un-American activities (originally formed to investigate Nazi activities in 1938) was revived and hundreds of people, including some of Hollywood's biggest names, were called to testify.

### The Cold War

The successful Soviet test of a hydrogen bomb in 1953 and the launch of Sputnik in 1957 highlighted the increasing danger of nuclear weapons to the civilians of North America and a series of crises, including the Berlin Crisis, and, later, the Cuban Missile Crisis, pushed the Soviet Union and the United States closer to the brink of war. President John F.

Kennedy, responding to Soviet threats of war over U.S. intervention in Berlin, stated, "Then there will be war.... It's going to be a very cold winter."



As the cold war developed, red scares swept across America. A 1961 Gallup poll found 81% of Americans would choose all-out nuclear war rather than living under a communist occupation. Full-scale nuclear war and the nightmare of a nuclear winter seemed inevitable to many.



Signs were placed on buildings with fallout shelters to make them easily identifiable. Many are still visible on WOU buildings today.

**Fallout Shelters** became a media and cultural craze with magazines like *Time*, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientist*, and even *Sunset* featuring articles on them. A new industry devoted to fallout shelter construction and supplies sprang up almost overnight. Plans for fallout shelters ranging in design from a basement snack bar that converted into shelter space to trenches underneath parked cars were made available to the public.

Despite the publicity and fear generated by nuclear war, few Americans actually invested in a home fallout shelter. Public fallout shelters, however, were created and retrofitted into existing buildings, caves, and tunnels. Federal spending for civil defense and fallout shelters peaked in 1962 with a budget of \$294 million.

### **Oregon and OCE**

Oregon, although located far from high value targets, was not immune to the fallout shelter hysteria. Approximately 1,000 fallout shelters had been built or designated in the state by early 1963. These shelters had enough space and supplies for a two-week stay for half of the state's population at that time. Alternative seats of government were established and evacuation routes created for the major population centers. Oregon College of Education in Monmouth (now Western Oregon University) was designated as an emergency headquarters for some state and federal agencies, as well as a refuge for residents from Portland and Polk County. OCE selected twelve areas as fallout shelters, and stockpiled two-week's worth of rations for up to 1,774 people. Courses in shelter management were offered and plans for education in the advent of nuclear war were formed.

## Fallout Shelters at WOU



Fallout shelters were designated in:

- Basements of:
  - Humanities
  - Social Sciences
  - Administration
  - The University Center
  - The Library (now the Academic Programs and Support Building)
- The lower floor of the Natural Sciences Building
- Windowless areas of New PE
- Mechanical rooms of:
  - Food Services Building (now Valsetz Dining Hall)
  - Education
  - Landers
  - Gentle
  - Barnum
  - Arbuthnot

**All items in these displays are supplies from fallout shelters at WOU.**