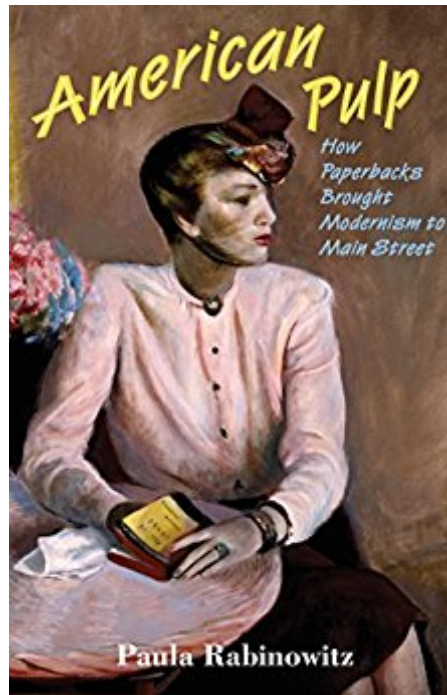


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# American Pulp: How Paperbacks Brought Modernism To Main Street



## Synopsis

"There is real hope for a culture that makes it as easy to buy a book as it does a pack of cigarettes." —a civic leader quoted in a New American Library ad (1951) *American Pulp* tells the story of the midcentury golden age of pulp paperbacks and how they brought modernism to Main Street, democratized literature and ideas, spurred social mobility, and helped readers fashion new identities. Drawing on extensive original research, Paula Rabinowitz unearths the far-reaching political, social, and aesthetic impact of the pulps between the late 1930s and early 1960s. Published in vast numbers of titles, available everywhere, and sometimes selling in the millions, pulps were throwaway objects accessible to anyone with a quarter. Conventionally associated with romance, crime, and science fiction, the pulps in fact came in every genre and subject. *American Pulp* tells how these books ingeniously repackaged highbrow fiction and nonfiction for a mass audience, drawing in readers of every kind with promises of entertainment, enlightenment, and titillation. Focusing on important episodes in pulp history, Rabinowitz looks at the wide-ranging effects of free paperbacks distributed to World War II servicemen and women; how pulps prompted important censorship and First Amendment cases; how some gay women read pulp lesbian novels as how-to-dress manuals; the unlikely appearance in pulp science fiction of early representations of the Holocaust; how writers and artists appropriated pulp as a literary and visual style; and much more. Examining their often-lurid packaging as well as their content, *American Pulp* is richly illustrated with reproductions of dozens of pulp paperback covers, many in color. A fascinating cultural history, *American Pulp* will change the way we look at these ephemeral yet enduringly intriguing books. Some images inside the book are unavailable due to digital copyright restrictions.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ah, the lowly paperback. It has had a powerful impact on American culture. Author Paul Rabinowitz delineates the role it has played since first appearing for sale on American newsstands, drugstores, and coffee shops in the 1930s. Her book, *American Pulp: How Paperbacks Brought Modernism to Main Street*, examines the often overlooked influence that the cheap, pocket-sized books had on every phase of American culture. The word pulp usually often connotes prurient, escapist literature featuring unsavory characters who live outside the moral norms ostensibly espoused by the rest of society. Rabinowitz broadens the definition, however. For her, pulp defines the character of the medium; shoddily bound coarse paper volumes that degrade quickly. According to Rabinowitz, pulp has influenced every facet of American culture from civil rights to the feminist revolution. It set the stage for the sexual revolution of the mid-twentieth century. The paperback, more than any other medium, carried Modernist thinking, or Modernism, into cities and villages across the country. As the author writes: "This is a story of paper, or rather of paperback books, produced in massive numbers between the late 1930s and the early 1950s. These throwaway items hold within their covers a rich history of literary tastes; the point to, even reflect, a democratizing literacy and the new forms of identity and community that emerged in mid-twentieth-century America. Curiously, the above passage is very good example of the author's rambling, verbose writing style. If, for example, the story is about paperbacks, it follows that it would also be about paper. If the period of time for the study is from 1930 to 1950, readers know it is the mid-twentieth-century.

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