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# Cold War fictions : gender, anticommunism, and the reconfiguration of the post-war United States

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**COLD WAR FICTIONS:  
GENDER, ANTICOMMUNISM, AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF  
THE POST-WAR UNITED STATES**

By

Aaron George

Accepted in Partial Completion

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Kathleen L. Kitto, Dean of the Graduate School

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## **MASTER'S THESIS**

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Aaron George  
May 21, 2012

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## **ABSTRACT**

At the height of the Cold War, films and books that focused on anticommunist themes used depictions of communism as a way to promote a certain understanding of the roles of men and women in the post-war United States. The end of World War Two caused a reconfiguration of American society, providing a context in which cultural productions, such as these anticommunist Cold War narratives, could provide competing interpretations for what this transformation of society meant for men and women's roles in the United States. These films and books collectively construct an ideology that idolized the family as the most important unit of American life. At the same time, they condemned men who focused on work life instead of the family, in particular expressing the view that modern society turns men in conformists and effeminizes them. In the case of women, these narratives praised strong women who were wives, but stigmatized unmarried women who showed independence. This response to the changes in post-war America was one of a range of responses, but an important one. By exploring the relationship between anticommunism and a critique of gender, we better understand the nature of the Cold War, and how it was focused not only on political battles but also cultural ones concerning gender roles.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### *I Invasion USA!*

In 1952, Columbia Pictures released a low budget film entitled *Invasion USA!*. This film depicted the a fictional invasion of the United States by the Soviet Union. Using extensive stock footage of planes and paratroopers to depict the actual invasion, the film shows Russian airplanes flying over the West Coast. Dialogue references the atom bombs exploding across the nation, obliterating cities, destroying dams, and flooding cities. The president of the United States warns every American to fight the Soviet invasion, but when contrasted to the news reports of Soviet victories, his words seem ineffectual. It seems that nothing can stop the Soviets from winning the war and destroying the American way of life.<sup>1</sup>

Interspersed with the stock footage of the invasion, the film presents depictions of how the Soviet invasion personally affects Americans. The film focuses on showing the impact of the invasion not by showing the destruction created, but by showing the reactions of five Americans sitting in a New York bar when the invasion begins. One of those Americans is a Congressman named Harroway, whose story links the Soviet invasion to an attack on the American government. When the invasion starts, Harroway rushes back to Washington, DC, in order to do whatever he can there to repel the invasion. However, despite giving a rousing speech urging Congress to resist the Russians, in the end Harroway, like the

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<sup>1</sup> *Invasion USA*, DVD, Directed by Alfred E. Green, 1952; Synapse Films, 2002



rest of Congress, is killed by the invading Soviet troops.<sup>2</sup>

On the one hand, the entire plot line revolving around Congressman Harroway should not be particularly surprising. In a film about a Soviet invasion, showing the Soviet Union taking over Congress might be expected, at least for its symbolic connotation of the United States falling to an enemy power. But there is another, equally important, side to the depictions of communism in this film. Prevalent throughout *Invasion USA!* are suggestions that alongside the threat of invasion was also the danger that communists might affect the ability of men and women to perform properly masculine and feminine roles.

For instance, one of the other four people who respond to the invasion, a farmer named Ed, sees the Soviet invasion in terms of its danger to his family. Upon hearing about the invasion, he rushes home to find his wife and children so he can drive them to safety. Despite his valiant efforts, however, he cannot protect his family from the impact of the Soviet invasion. He, his wife, and his children are overtaken by a flood resulting from a burst dam and are washed away by the torrent of water. Though he does everything he should have done, his ability to protect his family, and thus be a husband and father, is put in danger by the Soviet threat. Another story, of a man named George, shows how the communist invasion means he loses control of his tractor factory. His refusal to work for someone else, and thus to become subservient to someone else, leads to his death at the hands of the invaders. And the last story is no less suggestive. In this plot, the film focuses on the lovers Vince and Carla, who meet in the bar before the invasion and try to start a relationship. However, this romance ends abruptly when Soviet troops shoot Vince in the back and attempt to rape Carla,

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<sup>2</sup> *Invasion USA*

forcing to her to jump out of a window to her death.<sup>3</sup>

What these scenes suggest is that understanding how Americans thought about the Cold War, and the dangers that it represented to them, requires understanding more than what was politically at stake in the war. *Invasion USA!*, for instance, interlinks the Cold War with anxieties over performing gender: it shows a man unable to protect his family, a man unable to independently run his own business, and a man unable to protect his lover. In all three cases, masculine gender roles are at stake, and *Invasion USA!* seems to be warning its male viewers of how communism will assault their masculinity. But this film is by no means the only example of gender taking center stage in depictions of the Cold War. Other Cold War books and films that explored anticommunist themes also connected anxieties over masculine and feminine roles with the Cold War. In doing so, these films and books took part in a societal discussion of gender; together with other cultural productions of the 1950s, these films and books presented different interpretations of how Americans should act as men and women in the post-war United States. Cold War narratives like *Invasion USA!*, in particular, used the stigmatization of communism to limit available expressions of masculinity and femininity. Thus, many early Cold War narratives linked the fight against communists in the Cold War to a fight over gender roles in two ways: first, by depicting particular gendered behaviors as particularly “American,” and secondly, by linking communism to incorrect gender roles. By doing this, these narratives depicted anyone who fit certain gender roles as un-American.

At the same time, however, the message presented by early Cold War books and films as they linked gender to communism became just one strand of the discourse about gender in

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3 *Invasion USA*

the post-war United States. Americans, given many different modes of understanding the changes in society following World War II, had these narratives available as one way to make sense of women's and men's roles in navigating these changes. Though the discourse these Cold War narratives created was not the only one available in society, this discourse presented one possible way that for Americans to interpret the events around them.

## II The Cold War and Gender

The aim of this study is to analyze the discourse that permeated popular representations of communism in early Cold War narratives and show how these representations of the Cold War intertwined fears of communism with fears of changing roles for men and women in American society. By focusing on early Cold War books and films concerned with communism, this study attempts to help us better understand the ways Americans responded to changes in the post-war United States, and how their responses to those changes offered a model for reinventing the meanings of masculinity and femininity.

Other historians have convincingly shown that the Cold War and concerns about gender were interrelated. Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, for examples, focuses mainly around the way women's roles in the post-war United States were affected by the looming threat of nuclear annihilation. She organizes her analysis around a concept she terms "domestic containment," a term that suggests that the political strategy of containing communism on the international stage was mirrored on the domestic stage as a way of containing female sexuality. Her argument is that as politics

focused more and more on containing the Soviet menace, some, mainly middle class, Americans sought to contain female sexuality in their domestic lives. As a result, people sought to create a stable world inside the house to combat the uncertain world outside.<sup>4</sup> The effect of this was a focus on women taking on housemaker roles, and on the single-earner nuclear family becoming the locus of both American men and women's lives.

While May shows how the roles of women and the centrality of family were both influenced by the emergence of the Cold War, David K. Johnson, in *The Lavender Scare*, argues that the Cold War was influenced by ideas of gender and sexuality. In particular, he shows how the Red Scare and the related government firings of suspected communists were interrelated with fears about homosexuality, showing how the Cold War itself was intertwined with anxieties over gender and sexuality. Johnson documents how, parallel to these firings was a state purge of people suspected to be homosexual. In fact, the two groups, communists and homosexuals, were consistently lumped together in the rhetoric of anticommunists with phrases like “communists and queers.” Johnson's argument, that the persecution of suspected communists in the federal government was connected to the establishment, and policing, of “normal” gender roles, is one example of how the during the Cold War, domestic concerns, in this case anxieties about sexual deviancy, became interrelated to the Soviet threat.<sup>5</sup>

One aim of this study is to continue on from this scholarship and argue not only that the Cold War and gender were connected, but that one of the primary ways anticommunism was expressed was as anxieties about gender. May spends only limited space on analyzing

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4 Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. (New York: Basic Books, 2008). Pg 9-16

5 David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 31

popular culture, and this look at popular culture is itself limited to mainstream cultural productions of the 50s. *The Lavender Scare*, on the other hand, shows this link between the Cold War and gender by mainly examining government records along with personal testimonials.

However, neither of these approaches will give a sense of the diverse narratives that the popular culture of the Cold War consisted of. Because of this link between gender and the Cold War, to understand how Americans talked about and understood roles for men and women, it becomes imperative to also see how they understood the Cold War. As a result, this study is an attempt to analyze this connection between these two phenomenon from a different angle: by analyzing the connection that books and films made between communism and prescriptions of appropriate male and female actions, we can better understand the dialogue concerning gender in the post-war United States.

My contention is that certain authors, particularly those of paperback fiction and films that dealt with issues of communist invasion of the United States, together constituted one voice in the cultural discourse over gender in the post-war United States. These books and films, while possibly not popular or well watched in society, regardless reveal some of the insecurities that a section of American society had concerning the ways masculinity and femininity were being reconstituted in the post-war United States. Early Cold War narratives show how those insecurities were expressed using anticommunist language, in particular by stigmatizing what some saw as improper gender roles by labeling them “communist.”

The discourse that these early Cold War narratives together constituted was one of many, and in arguing this I am drawing from James Gilbert's analysis of masculinity in the

1950s. Gilbert, in *Men in the Middle*, argues that there was no single prescription of masculinity in the 1950s, but rather that men of the 1950s were presented with a range of competing conceptions of masculinity as men tried to navigate their role in society.<sup>6</sup> He points to diverse examples to show that while some Americans found the changes in society threatening for masculinity, others adapted to these changes by reinventing masculinity to better suit post-war America. The way the TV show *Ozzie and Harriet's* showed how manhood could revolve around being a cooperative husband was one such example.<sup>7</sup>

I argue that not only was the discourse constituted by early Cold War narratives one of these many competing discourses that Gilbert elaborates, but that this discourse was one of many competing societal discourses concerning not only masculinity, but also femininity and the family. This was because in the process of reconverting from a wartime economy to a peacetime economy, the United States went through a tumultuous economic change that forced a necessary change to men and women's roles, forcing a cultural dialogue about the meaning of these new roles to emerge. Lizabeth Cohen's *A Consumers' Republic* best details the economic changes in American society that forced a cultural reinvention of gender roles. She argues that economically, the United States changed into a society based around

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6 James, Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 8

7 Gilbert, 219, 220. Other historians have uncovered different conceptions of masculinity following World War II besides the ones that Gilbert examines. For instance, Michael Kimmel has argued that men coming back from the war found it difficult to assert their masculinity in the same ways as these did during the war. Men coming back from the war responded to this by reorienting manhood around the concept of fatherhood. Also important note is the study, *The Manly Modern*, by Christopher Dummitt. Dummitt also sees a tension between the manhood soldiers were able to perform in the war and the way they had to reinvent manhood after the war. He argues that, rather than just identifying manhood with fatherhood, there was instead an assertion of a new modernist masculinity that celebrated modern expertise and rational risk management as masculine. Though he is looking primarily at British Columbia, Dummitt's analysis is generalizable to the United States as well in the postwar period, because the issues he examines to learn about perceptions of masculinity, such as a movement away from industrial jobs and the creation of bureaucracy, were issues that faced the United States as well during the same time period. See Michael Kimmel, *Manhood In America: A Cultural History*, (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 226-228, and Christopher. Dummitt, *The Manly Modern*. (UBC Press, 2007), 25

consumption: one where consumer goods became the way that Americans improved their place in society and judged what a successful life was.<sup>8</sup> Most importantly for my concerns, this change into a consumer society reconfigured how men and women related to the society around them. Men found themselves in bureaucratic office jobs, and the GI Bill allowed men to train for white collar careers. Women, on the other hand, were shut out from college by not being equally helped by the bill, and the new tax codes following the war discouraged married women from going to work.<sup>9</sup>

These structural changes happened simultaneously with the emergence of the threat of Soviet attack, and as a result the cultural dialogue concerning the Soviet threat and the cultural dialogue concerning the meanings of masculinity and femininity in some cases became merged. Moreover, in the case of the early Cold War narratives investigated here, anticommunist discourse gave some Americans the tools to talk about what they disagreed with in the ways masculinity and femininity were getting reinvented around them, and to offer up their own conceptions as alternatives.

K. A. Cuordileone, in *Manhood and American Political Culture*, has well documented how experts who discussed the emasculating effects of the modern world linked their critique of modern society to the dangers of totalitarian communism. People that Cuordileone calls post-war social critics- which ranged from historians like Arthur Schlesinger, philosophers like Horkheimer and Adorno, and writers like William Whyte, decried the emergence of what David Riesman coined the “other-directed” personality (which was based around cooperation and passivity) in modern society by arguing that other-directed men could be manipulated by

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8 Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, (New York: Alfred A Knoff, 2003), 112-116, 127

9 Cohen, 137, 141

totalitarianism. If the economic changes in society meant that men spent their time in jobs that rewarded other-direction rather than individual drive, then to these critics it was possible that these men could be controlled by communism.<sup>10</sup>

One benefit of examining early Cold War fiction is that it gives us an opportunity to see how these ideas, elaborated by intellectuals like Schelsinger and Riesman, actually permeated through more low-brow (that is, mass produced and cheaply produced) representations of the Cold War. By examining fictional narratives, we are able to analyze how Americans came across these ideas, and how these ideas changed when they were reproduced through low-brow literature. Gilbert and Cuordileone's studies, while important, both focus on materials created by intellectuals of the 1950s, or focus on representations of masculinity that would resonate only with the middle class. This study, by examining sources not made by intellectuals but rather ones that were consumed by a broad range of Americans, including lower class Americans, completes the picture that those studies suggest by showing how those ideas about the Cold War were understood by Americans other than those intellectuals, and helps us see how the ideas, elaborated by experts, might also have been reproduced or transformed in fictional narratives.<sup>11</sup> Most importantly, the films and books this study examines may have been one way Americans experienced and understood the Cold War, and so investigating how the Cold War and communism were presented through these narratives informs how many Americans came face to face with these ideas.

Thus, this examination of early Cold War fiction serves to elaborate the connection

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10 K.A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 99-100, 105-109, 114-119, 124-125

11 Erin A. Smith argues that the precursor to paperback fiction, pulp magazines, were primarily directed towards lower class men, and there is little reason to suppose that this was any different in the case of the paperback fiction of the 1950s. See Erin A. Smith, *Hard Boiled: Working Class Readers and Pulp Magazines*. (Temple University Press, 2000), 10



between the Cold War and dialogues over gender primarily by examining how these two ideas were linked not just through politics, but also through how they were linked even in the cultural productions of the early 1950s. Moreover, by examining the way fictional narratives wove these two threads together, it reveals the messages Americans were exposed to that framed one way of thinking about the ideal roles for men and women, and helps us understand the larger dialogue over gender in post-war American society.

### III Anticommunism

There have been a handful of other studies of early Cold War narratives, in particular the works of Stephen J. Whitfield, Nora Sayre, and Cyndi Hendershot. In *The Culture of the Cold War*, Whitfield focuses some of his analysis on fictional productions of the early Cold War, in particular the work of Mickey Spillane.<sup>12</sup> He finds that Cold War narratives that focused on anticommunist themes depict communists as “rude,” “humorless,” or in the case of women, either unattractive or obsessed with sex.<sup>13</sup> In this analysis, Whitfield draws heavily from an earlier study by the film critic Nora Sayre, *Running Time: Films of the Cold War*.<sup>14</sup> Sayre finds similar trends in anticommunist films, arguing that communists were portrayed as un-American villains with little depth of characterization.<sup>15</sup> Lastly, a more recent study of

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12 Whitfield argues that Mike Hammer, Spillane's protagonist, is a rejection of liberalism, or any solutions liberalism might offer for the threat of communism. Instead, Mike Hammer shows the only way to deal with communism is to use violent, extralegal means to combat it. To Whitfield, there is a clear similarity between the philosophies of Mike Hammer and the conservatism symbolized by McCarthy. Whitfield, 36-37

13 Whitfield, 133

14 Christopher Leahmann-Haupt, “Nora Sayre, Film Critic And Essayist, Dies at 68”, August 9, 2001. <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/08/09/movies/nora-sayre-film-critic-and-essayist-dies-at-68.html>

15 Her most revealing quote as to this argument is as follows: “Movie communists walk on a forward slant, revealing their dedication to the cause. Now and then they're elegantly dressed, equipped with canes and stick pins-which prove them hypocrites. But most are scruffy. [...] [Communist] bad blondes tend to order triple bourbons or to be hooked on absinthe, and they often seduce 'impressionable' young men into joining the party.

anticommunist books and films, *Anti-Communism and Popular Culture in Mid-Century America* by Cyndy Hendershot comes to similar conclusions, finding that communists in these productions often seduce men, are immature children, or attack the American home.<sup>16</sup>

While these studies constitute important research on the phenomenon of anticommunist books and films found at the height of the red scare, my study departs from these for various reasons. The crucial difference between my own approach and these approaches is that this study is not interested in analyzing anticommunist fiction simply as a way of reporting the trends these books and films had. Instead, my strategy is to use early Cold War narratives not as a way to understand anticommunism, but instead to elaborate how the way these narratives used anticommunism to express anxieties over gender. While these studies are focused on explaining the trends that united anticommunist discourse, my goal is to show how the anticommunist films and books might have been depicting communists in such a way so they could express opinions about masculinity and femininity.

In arguing that it is important to study the fiction of the early Cold War in order to understand how the Cold War was intertwined to discuss anxieties over gender, my approach most resembles the approach taken by Michael Rogin, in *Ronald Reagan: The Movie*. Rogin argues that anticommunism must be understood not as an isolated body of thought, but as part of a larger history of American antiradicalism. The most important piece of Rogin's framework is how he analyzes antiradical movements in terms of what anxieties their attacks

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[...] Moreover, Communists are cruel to animals. (But we don't know how they treat children, since they never have any.) [...] Communists 'never keep their promises', and they're likely to go berserk when they're arrested. But they devote so much time to spying on each other that it's hard to see how they could have any free time for serious espionage.” See Nora Sayre, *Running Time: Films of the Cold War*. (New York: The Dial Press, 1982), 81

<sup>16</sup> Cyndy, Hendershot, *Anti-Communism and Popular Culture in Mid-Century America*, (North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2003), 14-16, 26, 31, 98

reflected. Even though in some cases the threat that antiradicalism attempted to thwart was real, Rogin argues that the antiradical response to these threats “transformed interest conflicts into psychologically based anxieties over national security and American identity.”<sup>17</sup>

According to Rogin, antiradicalism transformed a fear of an outside force into internal fears, making attacks upon a foreign menace reflect fears of something internal. In the case of anticommunism, Rogin argues that anticommunist films betray fears of mass society engendering conformity, a fear of motherhood, and a fear of a national surveillance state.<sup>18</sup>

Like Rogin, this study views anticommunism as an ideology that transformed fears of an outside other into a critique of what some may have seen as internal dangers. However, I depart from Rogin in trying to place the anticommunism in early Cold War narratives as part of a larger tradition of antiradicalism. Though they may have had something in common with earlier antiradical movements, anticommunist Cold War narratives were also unique responses to unique pressures in the post-war United States. Thus, my study analyzes these cultural productions not in terms of the similarities that they share with previous antiradicalist movements, but rather I try to situate them into the growing post-war dialogue over gender.

#### IV Methodology

In framing my study of anticommunist films and literature, I am building upon the framework that others have left me. As Rogin argued, antiradical movements transformed

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<sup>17</sup> Rogin, 68

<sup>18</sup> Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 237-238.

political threats to the United States into personal ones based around anxieties. While Rogin argues that these anxieties were based around “national security and American identity,” along with fears of mass society and motherhood, I suggest instead that the anxieties anticommunism was responding to were more rooted in the changing roles for men and women in society.<sup>19</sup>

As a result, I interpret anticommunist books and films as one strand of the larger cultural discourse on gender that pervaded American society in the 1950s. James Gilbert argues that such a cultural dialogue existed for masculinity, but I further expand this framework and argue that dialogues over femininity took place alongside those over masculinity. Though May shows that the cultural consensus was much more monolithic about women's roles than men's, changes affecting women's place in society were no less profound, creating a space for a dialogue about femininity as well.

Early Cold War narratives entered into these debates about both masculinity and femininity. These fictional narratives joined in on the debate to create meaning around the structural changes in American society by offering one reaction to those changes: one that praised the power of the family as the most important unit of American society, and one that could replace work as men's primary place of fulfillment while also containing the dangerous independence that women might practice. As Gilbert argued, like the visions of masculinity that offered performative scripts for men, early Cold War books and films also offered ways for men and women to make sense of how American society was changing around them.

As part of this strand of discourse, early Cold War narratives included depictions of communism that stigmatized alternatives for men and women that threatened the family-

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 237-238.

centric vision anticommunists believed was correct. Through these depictions, Cold War narratives constructed deviance and communism as related concepts, making particular gendered behaviors not only deviant, but also un-American. In this way, these narratives created a binary: the roles that Americans performed in these narratives were important differences between how Americans acted out gender roles and how communists failed at those same performances.

The way that Cold War narratives depicted alternative gender roles negatively resembles the concept of “containment” as expressed by Donna Penn. In Penn's article “The Sexualized Woman: The Lesbian, the Prostitute, and the Containment of Female Sexuality in Postwar America,” she studied depictions of lesbianism in films of the 1950s. She found that these depictions connected lesbianism to prostitution through depicting the two as in fact the same concept. She explains this concept by writing,

These two examples of deviant female sexual behavior were constructed to define, bind, and contain the so-called norm. Prescriptions for the “normal” were defined in a strict inverse relationship to that which was deviant. [...] This association helped make publicly visible those who formerly went undetected and thereby helped define the parameters of the normal and acceptable.<sup>20</sup>

In essence, the idea Penn is expressing is that cultural productions might be used to link behaviors already understood to be socially unacceptable to new behaviors in a singular concept. As a result, that behavior becomes linked to the already unacceptable one, and thus is itself made unacceptable. Thus, this process identifies the unacceptable behaviors in society and uses them to contain normality by expressing the limits of normality.<sup>21</sup>

20 Donna Penn, “The Sexualized Woman: The Lesbian, the Prostitute, and the Containment of Female Sexuality in Postwar America”, *Not June Cleaver*: Ed. Joanne Meyerowitz, (Temple University Press, 1994), 360

21 George Chauncey, in his article “The Postwar Sex Crime Panic,” also shows how this process worked

Early Cold War narratives that used anticommunism to comment on gender served to construct a similar image of the communist as a deviant from regular gender roles. By binding inappropriate gendered behaviors to communism, early Cold War narratives depicted communism and deviant performances of gender as one unified symbol, reinforcing the stigmatization of both groups. The result was that misperformance of appropriate gender roles became not just a failing of the person, but also a sign of un-Americanness. Americans who were uncomfortable with certain behaviors could use the tools provided by anticommunism to create a definition of Americanness that excluded certain “communist” types of gendered behavior.

One last point does need to be addressed. Though a full discussion of race would fall outside the scope of this project, it is important to acknowledge that any discussion of gender must also implicitly deal with questions of race. While Cold War narratives presented a particular view of appropriate male and female gender roles, this program also was also inherently one that ignored minorities. In direct and indirect ways, these narratives excluded any nonwhite, particularly black, experiences from their version of the ideal post-war United States. In doing so, they constructed a version of masculinity and femininity that was predicated on whiteness. Acknowledging this allows us to see how Cold War narratives failed to present a gendered role for non-white Americans to fulfill, and thus implicitly were

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through his analysis of a sex crime panic. After a suspected case of molestation of young girls, a panic developed around sexual “perverts” that would molest and rape young children. This, however, developed into a concept of pervert to encompass any deviation from heterosexual sex, such that pedophiles, gay men, and rapists were all consolidated into the same category, and anyone who belonged to any of these groups was assumed to be all of the others. This also, most importantly, helped create a definition of “normal” sexuality in relief from “deviant.” Through using the idea of perverted sexuality to construct an conception of what was abnormal, psychologists also created the conception of what it was to be normal. See George Chauncey Jr, “The Post-War Sex Crimes Panic,” *True Stories From the American Past*, Ed. William Graebner, (McGraw Hill, New York, 1993), 167-169

providing a commentary on the post-war United States that acknowledged only one part of that society. This also shows how when anticommunist Cold War narratives tried to answer worries over changes in men and women's roles, their alternatives were implicitly only alternatives for white Americans. Moreover, by tying gender to whiteness and to Americanness, they serve to implicitly degender and divest of citizenship those Americans who were not white.

Most obviously, nearly all characters in narratives that commented on the Cold War were white, including virtually every protagonist. The exceptions were foreign communists, who in some cases were presented as either indeterminately darker skinned, or mentioned to be South American (these will be discussed in more detail in the fourth chapter). In rare cases, such as one in the film *Red Menace*, a black character would exist to show the audience that communists would use black people as propaganda against the United States, but that in fact black people were treated better by the United States. Otherwise, Americans were presented as white. While this could be, to some extent, the product of film productions in the fifties that would rarely feature black characters except in subservient roles, this has the effect of normalizing masculinity and femininity as white. If the only way Cold War narratives depicted minorities was as subservient positions or as racialized, perverted communists, then they also reinforce the idea that to be American, and to be an appropriate man or woman, you must be white.

But moreover, implicitly, the roles that Cold War narratives presented for men and women were roles that assumed whiteness. As Lizabeth Cohen shows, the transformation of American life following World War II affected black Americans very differently than white

Americans. For instance, black Americans faced housing discrimination which prevented them from moving out of the cities and into the suburbs.<sup>22</sup> This meant that while white Americans were able to create nuclear families away from cities, black Americans were often forced to stay within the city limits, altering their experience of the transformations of the post-war family. As well, the jobs that black men were able to take were limited by the discrimination they faced, and the higher rates of poverty in the black community created the need for many black women to also hold jobs instead of have the opportunity to stay home as a housemaker.

As a result, Cold War narratives defined what it meant to be an American man or woman as something that was inherently white. Defining gender roles as such had the consequence of degendering the black community. If black Americans could not perform the roles that these narratives assigned for manhood and womanhood, black Americans, according to Cold War narratives, failed to perform as men or women. Moreover, in multiple films and books, it takes the efforts of white Americans performing particular roles as husband and wife to repel the nonwhite communist invaders. In doing this, it created a view of citizenship that always presented minorities to be the non-American enemy. If it were really the case that it took white American families to stop communists, then what place in American society could black or Latino families possibly fill?

Whether explicitly stated in Cold War narratives or not, it is important to recognize that this construction of race coats the entire message that these productions present. When these narratives present roles for women or men, those roles are always implicitly roles for white men and women. Thus, these visions of post-war America were not universal, but

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<sup>22</sup> Cohen, 89, 170-171



focused on a particular section of American society: one that experienced the changes in American life uniquely from others, but whose voices were favored in popular culture above others, and are thus easier to uncover.

## V Sources

The sources used in this study are a collection of Cold War films and books that all examined themes relating to the Cold War and to communism. Nearly all of my sources were produced in the early period of the Cold War, between the years of 1948 and 1954. I chose this range because 1948 coincides with the disintegration of good relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, one year after the Truman Doctrine. I chose 1954, on the other hand, because it was the year that McCarthy was censured and also marked the end of the height of the Red Scare.<sup>23</sup> In this range, I have tried to examine as many films and books as possible, and tried to draw out similarities and differences in their depictions of communism. In two cases, that of *The Iron Petticoat* and *Jet Pilot*, I have chosen to go beyond this range of dates, but at the same time, the bulk of analysis for these films is dealt with in the epilogue.<sup>24</sup> Though these two films fall outside of this range, the importance of the films in reflecting key themes of the Cold War, and the ability to compare two films that have a nearly identical plot, makes these films unique enough to include them.

I am hesitant to go beyond this range primarily due to the fact that the farther one

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<sup>23</sup> Ellen Shrecker agrees with this this year as the end of the height of the Red Scare, though she argues that McCarthyism still continues in a less intense form for more than a decade after this. See Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), xix

<sup>24</sup> However, *Jet Pilot* was produced during this my chosen time frame and only released later in 1957, so as a result it still falls comfortably into this range. *The Iron Petticoat*, on the other hand, is useful for comparison to *Jet Pilot*, and as a result is used despite being released in 1956.

ventures from the end of the McCarthy period, the more anticommunist films and books become less a call to action against a dangerous threat, and more a parody of the excesses of the early 1950s. *The Manchurian Candidate*, *Dr. Strangelove*, and *The Rocky and Bullwinkle Show* are all examples of late Cold War narratives which parody, rather than echo, anticommunist messages.<sup>25</sup> These productions mark a period where Cold War narratives were less concerned with showing the danger of communists and more concerned with satirizing the excesses of anticommunism. As a result, this study focuses on the era during which depictions of anticommunist discourse tended to be sincere, and tended to comment on the danger of the Soviet Union rather than the ridiculousness of the Cold War.

In choosing this material, my original goal was to collect all the early Cold War movies that reflected anticommunist themes, and a sizable portion of written Cold War narratives. However, the limited availability of some films that have never been rereleased made this goal unrealistic. As for novels of the time period, the fact that no record organized around anticommunism has been created has meant I could only come across paperback books and less ephemeral novels using a variety of indirect methods. Regardless, in the case of literature of the period, I have tried to create a representative sample of the types of literature available to readers of the time period. In order to do this, I have selected the well known and best selling *One Lonely Night* along with nearly forgotten paperback novels produced at the same time, such as *The Dangerous One* and *Pattern for Panic*. These selected novels are by no means exhaustive but present a range of Cold War narratives

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<sup>25</sup> For instance, William Darby argues of the book version of *The Manchurian Candidate* that in fact Johny Iselin is a transparent satire of Joseph McCarthy. The novel proceeds to attack McCarthy by showing how Iselin is a weak man controlled by his communist wife, and that the paranoia he causes against communists is just part of her plan to make Americans susceptible to communist influence. Thus, the Red Scare and McCarthy, rather than communism, are the real dangers to America. See William Darby, *Necessary American Fictions*, (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987), 86-87

concerned with communism, and therefore can help to capture how representations of communism and ideas of gender were related in the early Cold War.

In both cases, the sources used for this study have been limited as much by choice as by practicality. However, because this study features a wide variety of different types of early Cold War narratives, it still should have the ability to provide a representative sample of the themes found in these narratives. The representative nature of this sample allows us to fully understand the discourse that these narratives helped create and play a part in, and allows us to come to conclusions about the nature of how Americans responded to social changes in the post-war United States.

While this study is organized around books and films of the 1950s that all espouse anticommunist themes, to characterize this as a study of anticommunism would be misleading. Unlike studies such as Hendershot's, that try to elaborate the themes that anticommunist productions all held in common, this study is better characterized as a study of how some Americans recast the ideal roles for men and women in response to the economic changes that transformed the post-war United States. In particular, this study focuses on a strand of discourse that may have resonated with a group of American men and women who, in later decades, may have been labeled socially conservative. By focusing on these narratives less as anticommunist artifacts and more as narratives of the Cold War that appropriated anticommunist language, my hope is I can help reveal how this discourse falls into a larger tradition of American dialogue concerning gender that transcends the anticommunist rhetoric used to express it in the early Cold War.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Another reason to avoid simply focusing on these as “anticommunist” productions is because this term masks the diversity of reasons that these narratives were created. Obviously, some authors felt strongly about the dangers of communism, and produced their films and novels with the purpose of exposing the danger of communism to an unknowing public. John Wayne, for instance, was staunchly anticommunist, and

## VI Conclusion

In organizing this study, I have modeled the examination of themes in anticommunist productions on the structure of *Invasion USA!* Political implications of anticommunism have been addressed by other historians and are thus not the focus of this study, but the three other stories this film tells are all representative of the greater themes this study examines in detail. As a result, I have focused the second chapter on the family, the third on masculinity, and the fourth on the complicated dialogue surrounding depictions of female communists. Through this strategy, I have tried to examine every facet of how early Cold War narratives' depictions of communism also elaborated views of gender.

In the second chapter, "Marrying Stalin," I examine early Cold War narratives that presented depictions of the family and its relationship to communists. I argue in this chapter

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created his own independent production company in order to make the anticommunist film *Big Jim McLain*. Similarly, Leo McCarey, who directed the anticommunist *My Son John*, was a witness at the HUAC hearings and believed that his films played a role in exposing communism. Lastly, the case of *The Woman on Pier 13* (also known by the title *I Married a Communist*) presents an example of an anticommunist film produced entirely because the owner of the film studio (Howard Hughes) was anticommunist and wanted the studio to produce films that reflected his outlook. On the other hand, some authors did not feel strongly one way or the other about communism. Mickey Spillane, the writer of the anticommunist *One Lonely Night*, was never interested in conveying a certain message. Instead, Spillane contended that he wrote only to make money, and his eye was always on writing as fast as possible, without an artistic interest in his craft. Erin A. Smith, in a study of the pulp-fiction writers who preceded the paperback book industry found that this attitude towards writing was not uncommon for this type of writer. She argues that pulp writers thought of themselves more as manufacturers or writing factories than artists. Though she is concerned with the pulp-fiction writers of the 20s, 30s, and 40s, because paperback books were in many cases the successor to the type of fiction found in pulp magazines, it is likely that many paperback writers felt the same about their own fiction. See Ron Briley, "John Wayne and Big Jim McLain (1952): The Duke's Cold War Legacy," *Film & History* 31, no. 1 (May 2001): 28-33, 28, Glen M. Johnson, "Sharper than an Irish Serpent's Tooth: Leo McCarey's *My Son John*," *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 44-49, 44, Daniel J. Leab, "How Red Was my Valley: Hollywood, the Cold War Film, and *I Married a Communist*," *Journal of Contemporary History* 19 (1984): 59-88, 66, Alf H. Walle, "Hack Writing vs. Belle Letters: The Strategic Implications of Literary Achievement," *Journal of Popular Culture* 30, no. 3 (Winter 1996): 185-196, 186, and Erin A. Smith, *Hard Boiled: Working Class Readers and Pulp Magazines*. (Temple University Press, 2000), 21

that economic changes in the post-war United States had created the need for Americans to reconsider how men and women could act. Cold War narratives presented one interpretation of these changes that fully embraced the post-war focus on the family. Through the ways in which early Cold War narratives created favorable depictions of wives and husbands that focused their attention on their children and their homelife, and the way in which communists were condemned for not doing this, these productions constructed versions of manhood and womanhood that revolved around the home.

In chapter three, “Reds, Robots, and Renegades,” I examine how narratives of the Cold War reflected a cultural enmity for the conformist organization man, and in doing so entered into the large dialogue about masculinity that pervaded the culture. Narratives presented anticommunist themes which advanced the argument that modernity had an effeminizing effect on men, causing them to be conformists, and most dangerously, communists. By locating the cause of this conformity in the outside world, these productions created a complementary critique to the one explored in the previous chapter. By showing that modern society emasculates men, these narratives continued to reinforce the idea that masculinity could be, and should be, defined through home life rather than work life.

Lastly, in the final chapter, “Sexual Battlefronts,” I examine depictions of women in books and films of the early Cold War with anticommunist themes, and argue that these depictions focused more on men's relationship to women than on women themselves. Through graphic depictions of sexual violence towards women as well as through the construction of communist women as uncontrolled voracious prostitutes, anticommunist cultural productions reinforced the lack of agency allowed women in the postwar society.

They also betrayed an anxiety over independence in women by showing single women to be sexually promiscuous and manipulating. These depictions of single women show that in the discourse of these early Cold War narratives, female roles in society were tightly circumscribed: though these narratives often praised independence in wives, single women were inevitably communist agents rather than praiseworthy figures.

By investigating the depictions of gender in films and novels of the early Cold War, a particular discourse surrounding gender in the post-war United States emerges. These films and books collectively construct an ideology that idolized the family as the most important unit of American life. At the same time, they condemned men who focused on work life instead of the family, as well as unmarried women who showed independence. This response to the changes in post-war America was one of a range of responses, but an important one. By exploring the relationship between anticommunism and a critique of gender, we better understand the nature of the Cold War, and how it was focused not only on political battles but also cultural ones. But we also better understand the way that Americans reacted to the changes that the end of World War II brought. By understanding this reaction, we are able to complicate the picture historians normally paint of a consensus 1950s. Instead, the 1950s was filled with its own debates about the nature of society and the gender roles that accompanied it.

## Chapter 2

### Marrying Stalin: The Communist Attack on the Post-War Family

#### I Introduction

Anticommunist books and films of the early Cold War were fascinated with the American family. Often, mothers were depicted as being able to cure the communism of their children, or family, or instead the menace of communism was dangerous because of what it might break up or pervert the family. One of the clearest examples comes from the motion picture *Red Menace*. Produced in 1949, the film relates the stories of many different loosely related characters as they deal with the Communist Party in America. One man named Harry is ruined and commits suicide because of his relationship with the Party. This prompts his girlfriend, Molly to leave the party herself after the constant urging of her mother, and his friend Sam to go home with his father and abandon his ties to the Party. In either case, the decision to leave the Party is wed to a decision to listen to parents and embrace the family.<sup>27</sup>

But what makes the link between family and escaping communism most explicit in *Red Menace* is the ending. The final scenes of the movie show the main characters, Bill and Nina, trying to escape the Communist Party by driving away through the Nevada desert. They drive nonstop, afraid that the communists, or the federal government, will find them.

Eventually, though, Bill changes his mind about running. Instead, he decides that they need to turn themselves in. They meet a sheriff and explain to him their story. Surprisingly, the sheriff does not punish them but instead forgives them for their mistaken affiliation with

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<sup>27</sup>*Red Menace*. Videocassette. Directed by RG Springsteen. 1949. Republic Pictures, 1998

the Party. In an effort to contrast the draconian methods of the Communist Party with the humanity of the United States, the film shows how their mistake in joining the communist party holds no negative consequences now that they have rejected it. Instead, the sheriff proposes a better idea. He tells them, “What you two need to do is to get yourself hitched, raise a couple of real American kids.” Of course, the couple is elated to do so. After he leaves, Bill and Nina ask a passing boy what the sheriff’s name was. The child answers, unsurprisingly, that the sheriff was Uncle Sam.<sup>28</sup>

At first glance, this connection between communism and the family might appear perplexing. What possible link could there be between a political and economic system, or even an international menace, and the family? How does raising a family, as Uncle Sam suggests, stop the spread of communism?

The answer lies in understanding the relationship between the Cold War, the society of the 1950s, and how many Americans reacted to both of these phenomena. The anticommunist movement developed at a particular point in American history in which social, economic, and cultural changes were reconfiguring the meanings of masculinity and femininity for many Americans. Following the end of World War II, a dialogue concerning the proper ways to perform gender emerged in the society, and different models of appropriate masculine and feminine behavior developed. Anticommunism was as much a response to these changes as a reaction to the external international threat. Due to this, Cold War narratives that presented anticommunist themes were not simply concerned with communism as a threat to the United States. In addition, these productions often reflected insecurities over certain expressions of gender in the post-war United States.

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<sup>28</sup> *Red Menace*.



The view that these Cold War narratives provided of appropriate performances of gender was centered around a belief that masculinity was defined by autonomy, the idea that a man must be able to be independent at both home and at work, and thus be free from outside influences. Femininity, on the other hand, was defined around a woman's ability to take care of the home and her children. Following from this was a belief in the importance of the family, in particular a version of the family in which husbands had duties to their wives as part of a team devoted to raising children as their primary goal.

Given the range of discourse concerning gender in the early 1950s, however, Americans who shared these beliefs about men and women's roles were confronted with many competing frameworks for masculinity and femininity. Because communism was perceived to subsume the individual to the group, those who were worried about men's roles moving away from autonomy also tended to harbor anxieties over communism, connecting the two subjects and creating the possibility for communism and worries about gender to become intertwined. As Michael Rogin shows, the tendency of antiradicalist movements in American history was to translate their attack on an outside other into an attack upon domestic problems they found equally alarming, and in this case, anxieties about communists were transformed into anxieties about gender.<sup>29</sup> This conception of communism, that communists at once both represented a Soviet threat and a threat to proper performance of gender, made it possible for films such as *Red Menace* to connect the fight against communism to the proper performance of gender roles.

How Cold War narratives constructed communism as a symbol of gender deviance betrays an allegiance to masculine autonomy and to a family-centric view of womanhood.

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 68

Moreover, these constructions of male and female gender roles were closely connected to a belief that the family should be the most important unit of American life, and Cold War narratives often used the tools of anticommunism to connect communism to a disregard or a danger to the family in order to highlight its importance. But most important is to note that this conception of gender was not created in a void. Instead, economic and structural changes facing Americans after World War II forced Americans to reconceptualize roles for men and women. Anticommunist discourse provide one such model, one that embraced some of the changes in American life and tried to attack alternative conceptions that had an alternate vision of post-war gender roles.

## II The Post-War Family

Though historians are generally reticent to argue that there was a crisis of gender roles following World War II in the United States, most will argue that Americans in the late forties and early fifties faced a society in transition.<sup>30</sup> Troops who came home from the war found themselves in the position to start raising families and to find jobs to support those families. At the same time, government programs and societal forces shaped the type of family they would be raising and the way the society itself would be reshaped. Together, the confluence of the experiences of veterans, the government promotion of a single earner family, and the economic realities of the post-war United States created a situation in which the family structure was in flux as men and women sought to adjust their practices to the post-war

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<sup>30</sup> James Gilbert, in particular, sees fault with the characterization of the period as being overly simplistic, though he still uses the terminology of a “crisis of masculinity.” See James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 220-221

world.

Lizabeth Cohen argues that numerous factors involved in “reconversion” after the war shaped how post-war families would constitute themselves. In particular, she argues that federal policies converged to favor a family structure in which the husband worked outside the home while the wife became a homemaker. For instance, Cohen argues that the GI bill disproportionately allowed men to go to college, receive unemployment benefits, or receive loans. Women were less likely to be veterans, and even those women who were veterans were less likely to take advantage of the GI bill. The result was that, following World War II, it was primarily men who went into the workforce with the skills necessary to get a career, favoring men in the workplace.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, the new tax code following the war pushed families to adopt a single-earner family structure. Because of the way that the tax code was structured, a single-earner family paid less in taxes than two working spouses, creating a situation where women were economically pushed towards either giving up work altogether, or never moving beyond the part-time or clerical work that was becoming the norm for women in the workforce. As a result, economically, society was being restructured to favor a family in which men worked outside the home and women no longer pursued careers.<sup>32</sup>

Veterans' expectations and experiences also played into the family structure that emerged after the war. For instance, home ownership was one of the primary ways Americans would define prosperity following the war. Both veterans and civilians saw

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31 Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, (New York: Alfred A Knoff, 2003), 137, 140. For other analyses of the gendered implications of the GI Bill, see Margot Canaday's *The Straight State*, especially 137-173, where she deals with how the GI Bill regulated sexuality, particularly by denying benefits to veterans who were suspected of being homosexual. Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009)

32 Cohen, 141-142

housing as part of their reward for their hard work fighting World War II and imagined that the post-war United States would provide them with a home in which they could raise a family. Moreover, this idea of a home, argues Cohen, was almost always that of an isolated, suburban nuclear home. Government propaganda and popular culture reinforced this image of the family, and government spending was used primarily on constructing suburban households to meet the housing shortage that the war and the Great Depression together had created. As a result, when veterans came home and began to set up families, their ideas of what those families would be like were shaped to a very specific idea, most of the time featuring a nuclear family living in a suburban household.<sup>33</sup>

As well, these expectations were framed by veterans' experiences as children during the Great Depression. Elaine Tyler May argues that most of the men and women creating families after World War II had grown up during the Depression, when gender roles were threatened or disrupted all together. The Great Depression had created a situation in which an ideal two parent family with a stay at home mother became hard to maintain. However, she finds that this caused the children, rather than embracing these changes in gender roles, to instead view the effects of the Great Depression negatively: increased independence for women, for example, was something to be endured because of poverty, not something to work towards.<sup>34</sup> As a result, the children of the Depression were especially insecure about an unstable home life and grew up in a position to try and create traditional home life to counterbalance this.

May also argues that the movement to idealize the nuclear family was in part based

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33 Cohen, 73-74

34 May, 52-54

upon the threat of the Cold War. Her argument is that as response to outside pressures during the early years of the Cold War, such as fears of a nuclear war with the USSR, Americans “turned to the family as a bastion of safety in an insecure world, while experts, leaders, and politicians promoted codes of conduct and enacted public policies that would bolster the home.”<sup>35</sup> According to May, “domestic containment,” as she calls this movement, was a direct response to fears of outside groups destabilizing American life. Stability in the family thus defended Americans from everything else that went on and created a society that had the illusion of security in an insecure world.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, there was the effect of the baby boom. Returning veterans and their wives together created one of the largest generations of children, who were brought up in the early 1950s. Elaine Tyler May argues that due to the societal makeup of the United States, there was a “reproductive consensus,” meaning there was societal and cultural pressure to produce offspring. The converse to this was the belief that, according to May, childlessness was “considered deviant, selfish, and pitiable.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, following World War II, the generation returning from the war became a generation of mothers and fathers, who had to quickly learn the appropriate ways of performing those roles.

All this had the effect of creating a dialogue in society about how families should be constituted. While individuals interpreted these changes, cultural productions like films and novels became a space in which different interpretations could be expressed and could compete against other ideas. Cold War narratives were part of this negotiation of the meaning of these changes, one that embodied certain responses that, in some respects endorsed the

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35 Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. (New York: Basic Books, 2008). Pg 9

36 May, 1

37 May, 132

new social structure, and in other, railed against the changes it brought. Coming out of this context, Cold War narratives used anticommunism to present a possible interpretation of modern American society.

One possible way of reconstituting the family following the war, the one that Cold War narratives supported, was a family structure in which the husband was in control of the household and was not beholden to any other person. To Americans who found the anticommunist message that these narratives presented appealing, masculinity was defined by a man's autonomy: his ability to make his own choices and run his own life free from the control of anyone else or any outside forces. Men who were beholden to other powers or who were not individualistic were scorned in favor of those that had control over their lives.<sup>38</sup>

This idea of autonomy came out of the belief that the family was a secure sphere separate from the rest of the society, as Elaine Tyler May argues. These changes that favored Americans living in the suburbs caused Americans to treat the family as separate from the outside world. As an extension of this idea, the autonomy of the family, and the sacredness of the barrier dividing it from the outside world, became one of the pieces of the anticommunism conception of the ideal American family. Moreover, in a society that focused on raising children and exalted the domestic sphere as a “secure bastion,” one possible interpretation of a man's role was to link it closely with fatherhood. Cold War narratives concerned with anticommunist themes fully endorsed a reconstitution of society based around a focus on the domestic, in part because they saw a decline of opportunities for masculinity in the workplace. They saw this as part of the ideal of autonomy for men: if a

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<sup>38</sup> However, autonomous masculinity was perceived to be under attack as well outside the family, creating even more of a need to promote it inside the family. See the next chapter for a larger discussion of this attack on autonomy.

man no longer had an active part in his family, then he had lost his control of the family and thus his autonomy. In contrast to a model of husbandhood that would have argued for men to be primarily breadwinners, these narratives presented depictions of praiseworthy husbands who viewed the family as their priority.

This was not to say that husbands were supposed to have total authority. Autonomy meant the ability to be free from the control of others, not necessarily power over others. As part of the anticommunist belief in the duty of mothers to raise children, the family was understood to be ideally not a patriarchy but a companionate system where husband and wife cooperated to raise the children. Cold War narratives presented it as supremely important that the husband and wife of a family were able to run it free from interference from outside forces, such as communists, but they were less concerned with the husband being in charge. In fact, these narratives often allowed for strong mothers to take command if their husbands were unable to fulfill their husbandly duties. The main concern of these books and films was that husbands would fail to take part in the family, not that they would assert dominion over it.

This was not the only possible response to the post-war reconversion. As Elaine Tyler May argues, following the gender upheavals of the 30s and 40s, there was the real possibility of women's work being normalized and egalitarianism in marriage being more widely accepted.<sup>39</sup> As well, James Gilbert, in *Men in the Middle*, argues that there were many differing conceptions of what masculinity was. He argues that thinkers in the 1950s presented a range of ways masculinity could be understood. For instance, David Riesman's gave a model of masculinity based around cooperation and empathy, while the television program

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<sup>39</sup> May, 56-57

*Ozzie and Harriet* modeled a masculinity defined by domesticity. On the other hand, reactionary thinkers argued that individualism was the most important to conceptions of masculinity but that it was under attack from women and modern conveniences.<sup>40</sup> Lastly, some groups may not have reconceptualized gender in any meaningful sense, but simply acted in a way that transgressed against the anticommunist version of gender roles. All these conceptions of gender were ones anticommunist productions competed against.

Though many differing cultural productions may have offered varied responses to the societal transformation of the post-war years, anticommunist Cold War narratives were unique in that they united a critique of post-war gender transformations to a rally against a perceived communist threat to the American way of life. But these depicted that American way of life in a particular way that assumed certain responses to those societal changes. By framing the debate as such, Cold War narratives could use the language of anticommunism to limit the possible discourse of gender by silencing opponents who might argue for alternatives to the family.

### III The Family Under Attack

*Invasion USA!*, as we have seen, is one of the most overt cases of the communist threat being depicted as a threat to a husband's ability to protect his household. Here, a husband is unable to protect his wife and children from a flood caused by a Soviet attack. But two other films, *My Son John* and *Red Planet Mars*, also depict communism as a danger to a husband's autonomy, as well as the family's stability. Though these Cold War narratives are

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<sup>40</sup> Gilbert, 35-36, 78-80, 162-163



not complicated in their construction of communism and the family, they present ideal examples of how the cultural productions of the early Cold War often presented the threat of communism in terms of how it assaults the family. By examining these productions, we also get a sense of what was important about the family in this discourse, and what gender roles were at stake if the family was not prioritized by Americans.

*My Son John* was produced by Leo McCarey in 1952. The film is about Lou and Dan, two parents who have three sons, two of whom leave to fight in Korea. Their last son, John, the smartest of the three, is sent off to college instead. However, due to the influences of college, John does not end up a patriotic soldier like his brothers. Instead, he became the exact opposite: a communist.<sup>41</sup> *My Son John* is about John's parents' experiences when John comes back home for a visit, and they find that he's not the same as he used to be.<sup>42</sup>

John's brothers treat their parents as sons should. They have a dinner with their mom, and they hug and kiss her before they leave. Conversely, when John comes to see his parents, they are immediately struck by how he treats them oddly. He is condescending to his father, treating him as though he was dimwitted and mocking his father's patriotic speech he has written for the American Legion. When his mother tries to comfort John by talking to him of her memories of him as a child, he laughs at her rather than accepting her kindness. He never has a meal that his mother has made as well, unlike his brothers. Instead, he stays out late every night, talking with teachers who are more important than his parents. As a communist,

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41 Beyond the depiction of communism and the family that I discuss here, *My Son John* also has an anti-intellectual message. The film implies that John's college education has made him a communist, by explaining that he met a communist girlfriend in college. John also embraces an old professor who may have introduced him to communism as though the professor were his father. See *My Son John*. VHS. Directed by Leo McCarey. 1952. Paramount Pictures. Also see <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2009/feature-articles/my-son-john/>

42 *My Son John*.

John is unconcerned with his parents and treats them with contempt rather than giving them affection.<sup>43</sup>

John's mockery of his parents and his questioning of their authority leads to a breakdown of the family. John's heckling of his father's patriotism makes his father suspect him to be a communist. He confronts John, but John continues to mock him, causing him to lose his temper and hit John on the head with a bible, knocking him over a table. John's mother throws her husband out of the house as a result. He comes back home, much later, drunk and upset. John's mockery of his father makes him into nothing more than a drunken man who hits his kids, and moreover, one who is unfit to run the family, forcing his wife to run the family rather than share responsibility with him. Once he apologizes, he is still no longer self assured as he once was. He tells his wife what the root cause of the problems in their house is: John. The problem is that John “makes fun of his father” and doesn't grant his father due deference. And, if the point wasn't made clearly enough for the audience, he tells Lou that what John has done “is a communist specialty. Breaking up homes.”<sup>44</sup>

But the final aspect of this familial breakdown is shown when John's mother, who has believed in him the entire movie, finally finds out that John is a communist. At this point she breaks down, desperately yelling at her son to change his ways, and becomes bedridden.<sup>45</sup> John's communism, and his inability to be a good son as a result of it, causes a perfectly normal family to fall apart. The father becomes a drunkard, and the mother bedridden and sick with stress.

*My Son John* depicts a straightforward attack by a communist on the American

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<sup>43</sup>*My Son John*.

<sup>44</sup>*My Son John*.

<sup>45</sup>*My Son John*.

family. However, the way in which the family falls apart, and in how John acts to create this breakdown reinforces a particular view of how men and women should act. *My Son John* depicts the family as the center of John's parents' lives. His mother is always at home doing housework, and his father seems to have no job to speak of: he is always either at home or at the American Legion. But the danger of a communist like John is that his presence is enough to cause instability in the family by causing his father to lose authority and his mother to fall ill. Importantly, John's presence as an outsider in the family removes the ability for the family to function, and John's mockery shatters his father's ability to perform as a father and husband, turning him into a violent aggressor, simply by challenging his place. Without John's acknowledgment of his parental role, he is unable to perform as a father in the household. Instead he hits his son and drinks until late at night.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, by focusing not on John's communism but on his transgressive behavior,

*My Son John presents* an example of how Cold War narratives were unconcerned with the

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<sup>46</sup> Nora Sayre, in *Running Time*, gives a different interpretation of *My Son John*. Sayre argues that John's mom, Lou, is an example of a "hysterically possessive mother" and that his father is "violent," and "threatening." Sayre argues that these two parents are exactly the type of parents who were seen to lead to homosexuality, and that John's communism can be seen to stem from his parent's inability to raise him properly. Glen M. Johnson offers a similar interpretation of the film. Johnson sees the message of the film to be based around the idea of "the serpent's tooth," that is, the question of how a bad child can be born to good parents. Johnson believes that *My Son John* traces John's communism to two causes: a demon-like omnipresent communism that corrupts him, and the failure of John's parents to raise him properly. John's dad is depicted as incompetent, while John's relationship to his mother is, according to Johnson, depicted as unhealthy close. According to Johnson then, it is John's parents' failure to raise him properly that causes his communism.

Both of these interpretations have merits, and Johnson's interpretation in particular is strong because it has a similarity to other anticommunist productions in that it traces communism to a failure in the parents. However, both fail to account for the film's presentation of the family. Johnson's interpretation of John's father is that his drinking and abusing John was supposed to show how he was an unfit parent for John. However, this interpretation fails to understand that the film points to John's destabilizing effect on the family that causes his father to break down, not the other way around. It is the way John taunts his father that leads his father to drink and to hit him, not the abuse of John's father that caused him to be a communist in the first place. As well, this interpretation fails to understand that Lou's role is that of a strong mother that is able to repel the communists threat. His mother is not the reason John turned out wrong. Instead she is the reason Americans stand a chance against communism. See Nora Sayre, *Running Time: Films of the Cold War*, (New York: The Dial Press, 1982), 94, Glen M. Johnson, "Sharper than an Irish Serpent's Tooth: Leo McCarey's *My Son John*," *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 44-49, 46-47

actual content of communism, but instead concerned with using communism to reflect anxieties about the family. Notably, it is never explained what John was doing for the communists at all. Though it is hinted he was working for the party as a spy, the film never states this explicitly, because it assumes the fact that John is a communist also means he is working against the American government.<sup>47</sup> But the film spends little time on the specifics of what John's mission, because this is immaterial to the focus of the plot. What is important to show is how John, because he is a communist, leads to the disintegration of the family. In this film the actual specifics of what made John a communist, and what traits he has that cause the family to disintegrate are unimportant.<sup>48</sup> The important part is to link communists to threats to the family in order to discursively link both groups together.

*Red Planet Mars*, a science fiction movie produced the same year as *My Son John*, also shows how anticommunist fears of an outside threat were mixed with fears that the family would be subverted. The film is a simple science fiction film with a religious moral: it shows what happens when humans make contact with Martians who have proof that God exists. But the way that the scenario plays out, including how the filmmakers chose to portray both Americans and the Soviet Union, betrays the very same connection between the family and communists.

*Red Planet Mars* shows an American couple, Chris and Linda, who are scientists trying to contact Mars with radio signals. At the same time, the Soviets have forced an ex-

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47 Nearly all the cultural productions investigated in this study make the assumption that if someone was a communist, then they were also a Soviet spy or at the very least a Soviet fifth columnist. In fact, this assumption is never questioned; instead, the two ideas, communist and Soviet spy, are often used interchangeably. As a result, though John's mission was never mentioned in *My Son John*, the assumption is made that if he is a communist he is doing something to subvert the American government.

48 Though it is hinted by the film that John is made into a communist by his association with leftist professors and a communist girlfriend.

Nazi scientist to try and do the same thing before the Americans can. He fails, and instead listens in on the American broadcasts. However, the news they get from the Martians once they make contact is troubling for both countries. The Martians tell Earth that they live for 300 years and can get power their cities with the power they get from a single piece of coal. This information causes the coal and life insurance industries to fail, leading to the collapse of the economies of all capitalist countries. Then the Martians tell Earth that they know God exists, which causes the Soviet government to collapse, as it faces opposition from oppressed peasants who unite under the name of God. In the end, it turns out that the messages were faked by the ex-Nazi as a way to get revenge (except for the messages about God, which turn out to be sent from God and not from the ex-Nazi). However, to stop the him from revealing the truth, and risk the Soviet Union reforming, the Chris and Linda use the only option they have available, which is to blow up the laboratory and kill themselves along with the ex-Nazi.<sup>49</sup>

This plot need not even reference the family: at its simplest, it is a story of two scientists who contact Mars and the effect this has on the United States and the Soviet Union. However, like with other Cold War narratives, the film tells this plot while making sure the family is ever-present. The first thing the movie establishes is that the American scientists Chris and Linda are a married couple who live in a house with their two children when they are not trying to contact the Martians. In nearly every scene at their house, the movie takes pains to remind the viewer of the presence of the children. For instance, before the experiment to contact Mars, Linda puts the children to sleep before confronting her husband about the experiment. When the economy crashes, the movie shows the effect this

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<sup>49</sup> *Red Planet Mars*. VHS. Directed by Harry Horner. 1952. MGM, 1998

has on Chris and Linda's children, who are dressed in Halloween costumes but cannot go outside to trick or treat because of dangerous rioting. When the Soviet system collapses, Chris is playing with trucks with his younger son, and puts him on his lap as he hears the good news. Even the contact with Mars only works because of their older son, who gives them the idea to contact the Martians by sending the digits of pi to them to see if the Martians continue the pattern. This is an idea he only gets while eating the slice of pie Linda made him.

By showing how the global panic over the Martians affects Chris and Linda's children, *Red Planet Mars* reflects a belief about what the main concern of American men and women should be: their family. Importantly, the film translates outside danger into concern over the family, implying that the family is what is at stake in the Cold War. Given this, the finale of the film is particularly relevant. The film ends with Chris and Linda blowing themselves up to stop the ex-Nazi from revealing that the messages were a hoax. Linda as they kill themselves explains how their sacrifice will allow their children can live in a world without communism.<sup>50</sup>

On the other side of the conflict, the communists are depicted as averse to domesticity. Only one communist is a woman at all, and she has a nonspeaking role and is dressed in the same androgynous military uniform the men are. All of the rest of the communists are large men dressed in military uniforms who are never seen in any non-military situation, much less even talking to a woman or a child. The film does show Soviet families. However, these families are the exception that proves the rule: they are the huddled peasants who listen to the Voice of America broadcasts and live in fear of the communists.

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<sup>50</sup> *Red Planet Mars*

When Voice of America tells them that the Martians have proven the existence of God, they take down their picture of the Soviet leader and march in the streets, where the communists shoot all of them, including the children. By showing the communists literally destroying families by firing upon them, the film makes clear the relationship between communism and the family.<sup>51</sup>

These depictions of communism are simple: they show bluntly that communists, or Nazis, in *Red Planet Mars*, are a danger to the family. In fact, Nazis and Communists can serve the same purpose as a dangerous outside threat, as, like *My Son John*, *Red Planet Mars* spends no effort distinguishing either ideology from each other. The important thing is that outside forces threaten the family, and only strong mothers and fathers can stand in their way. Both films also depict the family's ability to be run free from interference disrupted by outside influence, and they both present images of domesticity as counterpoints to communism.

Other depictions of communism, however, show more subtly how a husband's lack of autonomy and power in the family can lead to its disintegration. Though the film *Conspirator* and the novel *All My Enemies* both present cases in which communism and the family come into conflict, the communism of their characters is less important than the personal failings that communism causes. Though their communism is blamed, it is the inability to perform as husbands that results from their communism that causes their downfall. By showing these traits as both communist and as flaws, anticommunism linked them as in the same category, creating a conception of communist that served to vilify alternative performances of masculinity.

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<sup>51</sup> *Red Planet Mars*

#### IV Incomplete Men

*Conspirator*, produced in 1949, is an example of how Cold War narratives presented a depiction of communism that allowed communists to be used as a way to discuss alternative conceptions of masculinity in order to attack them. In *Conspirator*'s case, it shows the tensions between a masculinity defined by family life and the need to prioritize home life over work.

*Conspirator* tells the story of a young American woman, Melinda, who meets an officer in the British army, Major Michael Curragh, with whom she quickly falls in love. He seems like the ideal man for her, and very quickly they get married. Following their marriage, Melinda stays with him in England. Soon, however, she finds that he acts suspiciously. He leaves at odd hours on business and receives strange postcards with the London Bridge and nothing else on them. Little does Melinda know that the purpose of these postcards is to inform Curragh of meetings of the Communist Party, for which he is a spy.

When Curragh meets with his communist superiors, they act hostile to his marriage, arguing that it will interfere with his work for the Party and try to pressure him to end it. When his wife finds out that he is a communist, they push even harder and order him to kill her. He fails, finding himself unable to shoot her. But because of his failure, the Party members he was working for have deserted him and are planning to assassinate him. Once he has been abandoned by the party, Curragh finally realizes the error of his ways. However, it is too late for Curragh; the only option he finds he has left is suicide.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Conspirator*. VHS. Directed by Victor Saville, 1950. MGM, 1998



*Conspirator* is an important film to consider because it is a clear case of a Cold War narratives that depicts how communism affects family life. One key aspect of *Conspirator* is that the situation the film presents mirrors the domestic situation many Americans had moved into following the war. Even though Melinda and Curragh live in Britain, their experiences mimic those of a contemporary middle-class American family following the war. Melinda understands her role as wife as a homemaker, while her husband (a veteran), works away from the home for most of the day. In fact, the divide between Curragh's work life (which happens to be for the Communist Party) and his home life is magnified from how a contemporary family might have experienced it. In Melinda's case, she cannot even know what job her husband does.

Once this is understood, it becomes easy to see *Conspirator* not as a case of communist subversion of the family, but as a morality tale showing the downfall of a husband who is unable to balance his work life with his home life. This is not to say that the film does not have an anticommunist message. On the contrary, communists are blamed for the problems Curragh faces as a husband, because they are at once the origin and the continued reason for his inability to perform as an autonomous man. However, the point is that problematic traits are labeled communist not because these traits were actually communist, but because by labeling these traits communist, this behavior could be labeled subversive. Though *Conspirator* is a morality tale about balancing home life over other priorities, its role in demonizing this situation further by linking it to communism is also important.

For her part, Melinda can successfully perform her role as a housewife in her pseudo-

suburban household. She arranges dinner parties, redecorates the house, and makes sure all the household chores are done.<sup>53</sup> Curragh, on the other hand, is a failure at being an autonomous husband. Despite his outward appearance of self-assurance, is in fact completely dependent on others. For instance, scenes near the beginning of the film show that he is unable to provide for the family: his aunt is shown providing him money to pay for his house, which shows that Curragh is the head of his household in name only. He is also beholden to the needs of the Communist Party, to the point that he prioritizes the Party over his ability to be at home for Melinda. He leaves at the drop of a hat, abandoning Melinda when he needs to leave on short notice to Communist Party meetings. His communism also makes him a bad husband when he is at home.<sup>54</sup> Though he is normally charming, when he is afraid Melinda will find him out by handling his coat, he violently shakes her, ordering her to never handle his clothes. Fear that Melinda will find out his secret makes him abuse his authority by physically assaulting her.<sup>55</sup>

*Conspirator* also shows how Curragh's allegiance to the Communist Party makes him unable to be a good husband by portraying his allegiance to the party as an affair. For instance, Melinda's first reaction when she finds Curragh always gone is to worry that he is seeing another woman and that he has grown tired of her.<sup>56</sup> Her husband gives her all the reasons to think this: when going to a meeting with the communists, he dons a large trenchcoat and a hat so as to hide his appearance as he sneaks away to a meeting with the party. The language he uses with the party members cements his relationship with the party

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53 *Conspirator*

54 *Conspirator*

55 The film *Pickup on South Street* has a similar scene. When the lead woman refuses to give her ex-boyfriend (a communist), information he wants, he violently attacks her, ordering her to tell him. See *Pickup on South Street*. DVD. Directed by Sam Fuller, 1953. Criterion, 2004

56 *Conspirator*

as a type of marriage. For instance, when the party members tell him that he should not have gotten married because it will split his loyalties, they tell him that “the bureau has been married thousands of times before, in every country of the world,” so of course they know that marrying a woman is a bad idea.<sup>57</sup> Curragh responds to them by arguing that “my whole life is wrapped up in devotion to the cause,” notably choosing the phrase “wrapped up in devotion” to describe his relationship to the Party as much more personal than businesslike.<sup>58</sup> Later, when the party orders him to kill his wife, they tell him that he must prove his “fidelity to the party,” describing his actions for the party as though they were not just to prove his loyalty to a political program, but also to prove his faithfulness to a wife.<sup>59</sup> When he fails to kill Melinda, his real wife, he goes back to the apartment where he met other party members, only to find the belongings gone and the room completely empty. When he tries to call the party, they fail to answer. Fearing that they will assassinate him and leaving him with no choice, Curragh heads home and kills himself.

Whether communism is seen as Curragh's work or as his adulterous lover, the film shows how Curragh is ruined because communism pulls him away from his rightful place at Melinda's side. But it also shows how communism interferes with Curragh's ability to treat Melinda as an equal partner in their marriage. When she finds out he is a communist, in order to control her, he falls back on his authoritarian right as a husband, telling her that she must “obey [him] in all things” and that “the only thing a wife can do is behave like a wife,” which means that she must support her husband and not turn him in as a traitor. *Conspirator* implies that, as a husband, Curragh has a duty to support his wife, financially as well as emotionally,

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57 *Conspirator*

58 *Conspirator*

59 *Conspirator*

by being reliable and participating in activities with her. As well, the proper role of a husband, as *Conspirator* shows us, is one where he does not use his authority to silence his wife as Curragh does. Curragh fails to properly perform any of these duties.<sup>60</sup>

By implicitly condemning Curragh's actions when he tries to bully Melinda by using his status as her husband, the film also shows an allegiance with a model of marriage that historians like Alan Petigny and James Gilbert call the "companionate marriage." Both historians argue that during the 1950s a move towards a marriage that placed both partners on a more equal level was becoming more accepted. Petigny shows this by appealing to polls conducted during the 1950s that show that people believed that husbands and wives should have equal authority in making financial decisions for the family.<sup>61</sup> Gilbert argues that shows like *Ozzie and Harriet* demonstrate that in the 1950s perceptions of masculinity were changing. In the show, Ozzie constantly tries to act as a patriarch, running his family as the boss of his wife and children. However, the show tended to avoid praising this type of family; instead, the storylines poked fun at Ozzie by showing how his attempts to be the head of the home only show how incompetent he is. Instead, the show highlights how his wife Harriet works alongside him to keep the family functioning.<sup>62</sup>

Not all Cold War narratives that focused on anticommunist themes completely

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<sup>60</sup> The novel, *Intruder From the Sea*, written four years after this, mirrors this image of a communist perverting the proper husband-wife relationship by being an authoritarian tyrant. *Intruder From the Sea* depicts a woman, Liza, who was originally shown to be a tomboy but was sharply controlled after her marriage to her communist husband. She is not allowed to go into his study (and thus have any connection to his workplace) and says of this that she obeys this edict because "I believe what Johnny believes A wife is a wife. I have my job. The study is Johnny's." Moreover, in a one disturbing line, she hints towards his sexual domination of her, explaining to him that she will not let him boss her around in the kitchen, because "[he] may be the boss in the bedroom, but not in the kitchen." In both this case and *Conspirator*, the idea that a woman should be completely subservient to her husband is rebuked and labeled communist. See Gordon McDonnell, *Intruder from the Sea*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953), 155, 165

<sup>61</sup> Petigny, 136-137

<sup>62</sup> James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 155, 163, 220

endorsed the companionate marriage, but the tendency of these books and films to reflect an egalitarian approach to marriage suggests a progressive dimension to the prescriptions of gender they present. The conception of marriage presented by early Cold War narratives, while not always completely comfortable with equal roles, prescribes a role for the husband beyond breadwinner, creating a space for husbands to share in raising children or sharing burden's with their wives.<sup>63</sup>

The problem in Curragh's case is that his association with the Communist Party makes it hard for him to fill his role as husband to his wife. Because he is ordered by them, he loses his autonomy and is not in control of how he should act at home. With someone else in control of his actions, Curragh is forced to act in such a manner that he cannot properly perform as a husband. Thus, the film establishes two key ways to perform masculinity: prioritize the family over other relationships, and be in control of the family rather than let someone else have a position of power.

*All My Enemies*, written two years later by Stanley Wade Baron, also presents an example of a Cold War narrative that models this same conception of masculinity. Like *Conspirator*, *All My Enemies* presents a character who is unable to balance communism with a domestic relationship. Through the depiction of communism in *All My Enemies*, we can further see how anticommunism was used by Cold War narratives to build a particular role for men in the family.

*All My Enemies* is about a communist named Hugo Schneider, who visits the United States. He visits ostensibly to meet with his old love, Clara, but secretly his mission is to get in touch with a friend of Clara's, a scientist he is under orders to bring back to the USSR. He

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<sup>63</sup> The limits of this role for women will be discussed in more detail in chapter four.

uses her old affection for him and has sex with her, even though he despises her, in order to get to the scientist. At the same time though, he meets a young woman named Jo, with whom he starts having sex with for his own amusement. However, he soon falls in love with Jo.<sup>64</sup> Jo moves in with him, and he contemplates leaving the party to marry her. However, once Clara finds out he is still with the party, he ends up killing Clara, ruining his chances of the domestic life he finally realized he wanted. As a result of his communist mission, he is arrested, and he is unable to live out the life he wanted with Jo.

Hugo is introduced to the reader as a coldly logical person. The first description of him notes that “he generally felt none of the conventional emotional responses to people.”<sup>65</sup> However, he changes upon meeting Jo. Jo, in the ways she quickly adopts a housemaker role, is thoroughly domestic. For instance, *All My Enemies* demonstrates her growing affection for Hugo by showing her moving into his apartment. She moves in almost immediately and stays in the apartment at all hours trying to approximate being a good housewife. She cooks for him and takes care of him when he falls ill. Baron makes her domesticity the key component of her relationship to Hugo. Baron writes of Hugo that “with Jo, he experienced a replica of normal life, as if they were children playing a game of marriage. He watched her moving the furniture, cooking in the tiny kitchenette, setting the table [...] Her domesticity amused him; sometimes when he came home he half expected to find her cutting out dolls' clothes.”<sup>66</sup>

One important aspect of this passage to note is how Baron creates a definition of a

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64 The way that Hugo uses sex either to take advantage of a young woman (Jo) or his past lover (Clara) for his own personal gain might also serve to condemn communists by showing how they do not value sex as part of a loving, companionate marriage but instead use it for the power it provides. In doing this, these presentations also implicitly condemn men who have promiscuous sex with multiple partners, suggesting that communism and the inability to control sexual urges might be related. See chapter three for a larger discussion on men's sexuality.

65 Stanley Wade Baron, *All My Enemies*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1952), 10

66 Baron, 115

“normal life.” Baron normalizes a household with a homemaker wife and a working husband as the normal family relationship that Americans experienced. Hugo and Jo, not married, and Hugo a communist only playing at this life for fun, create a fake American life, one that “amuses” Hugo, but is not in any sense real. Depicting Hugo and Jo's relationship as a “replica of normal life” does two things: first, it allows Baron to explain what a normal life would look like, and second, it shows how a communist could approximate a mockery of that life, while at the same time, using his wife only as a toy and having sex with another woman entirely, his old lover Clara.

But importantly, Jo has an effect upon Hugo that changes him from the reprehensible state; Baron writes that after living with Jo, “somehow Jo had infiltrated through [Hugo's] carefully composed shell of insensibility [...] it was almost painful for him to imagine a complete separation from her now.”<sup>67</sup> His cold rationality was a sign that Hugo, as a communist, had something wrong with him that made him unable to form proper emotional attachments to people, something required of a man in a domestic relationship. Jo could take care of the house and show Hugo her affection, as would have been demanded for a proper wife. But Hugo would also have to be able to express his own affection for her to be able to fulfill his duties as a husband. Fortunately, Jo fixes this, by making him feel. In this respect, the unfeeling Hugo begins to become a normal person with emotions as a result of his connection with Jo.

As a result of Jo's impact, Hugo starts to question his mission. Baron writes that instead of being content as just a spy, Hugo started to feel that “the novelty of this experience had added a new dimension to his life: the possibility of dissatisfaction. He had never

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<sup>67</sup> Baron, 117

realized how muffled and blinkered he had been in that former existence. [...] And now he must return to it, become half a man again.” This is a key piece of the anticommunist conception of masculinity. By just focusing on his work, all Hugo can be is “half a man,” and lead a “blinkered” life. The novel even shows how Hugo, without a connection to a woman, is barely a person at all, but instead a cold and emotionless robot. It takes a home and domestic life to turn Hugo into a person.<sup>68</sup> A job, even as a Soviet spy, is not enough to be a man.

However, as in Michael Curragh's case, his communism also makes it impossible for Hugo to experience the life of a regular man. After killing Clara because she found out he was a communist, Hugo realizes he cannot have a normal life with Jo. The reason for this is that, as a communist man, he never truly become normal. Baron writes that,

[Hugo] was indeed different from other men. He could not ape them; could not imitate their manners and mannerisms; could not respond as they responded or trust himself to their emotions. He was a man finally outside the limits of normal relationships, and he was dangerous to those who mistook him for the real article. It seemed to him now that he, in fact, was the person in the mirror—not all the others. *He* was the removable reflection, *he* the unreal image.<sup>69</sup>

Most important to this is how Baron writes about men. Hugo is something else, something lower than a regular man. Though Hugo can pretend, for a while, to be masculine and fit the role of husband to Jo, in the end, as a result of who he is, he cannot aspire to that life. As Baron implies, a normal man could respond emotionally to women, and would fulfill his duties to his wife. After all, Hugo's downfall happens because he was having sex with Clara, which he was only doing so he could fulfill his mission for the communists. Had Hugo been

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68 Baron, 170

69 Baron, 233



faithful to Jo, or had he put his duties to her higher than his duties to the party, then he would have been able to perform as a husband. And though the influence of Jo's femininity might have started to mold him into a real man, capable of having a normal relationship with a woman, due to his communism and the sexual promiscuity that his communism entailed, Hugo is unable to fulfill his role as a man in that relationship.

In both Hugo's and Curragh's cases, we see an image of masculinity emerging. Hugo could not properly perform as a man without a wife, while both he and Curragh are indicted for treating their allegiance to the Communist Party as more important than their wives. In both their cases, Cold War narratives present a vision of masculinity that presents men as only being properly men when they devote themselves to the family, and when they are not beholden to others to the extent that their autonomy is taken away.

## V Communist Delinquency

Like *My Son John* and *Red Planet Mars*, *Conspirator* and *All My Enemies* ignore intellectual reasons for communism. They completely ignore ideology that might make communism appealing. Instead, communism, used as a symbol for how improper gender roles, needed to be treated as a character flaw. By treating it as such, communists were silenced, and communism could be ignored as a movement no properly raised person would agree to. At the same time, by making it a character flaw, Cold War narratives could treat communism as something psychologically motivated rather than intellectually motivated. And by tracing communism to psychology, anticommunist productions were able to link it to

improper parenting, further reinforcing a particular view of the family.

*Conspirator*, for instance, shows that communism is a personal defect more than an ideological threat. The fact that Curragh believes in communism is almost entirely absent from the film. The communists Curragh meets with never talk to him about any sort of communist ideological points. Instead, they focus on the spying Curragh is doing and on Curragh's personal life. Curragh, for his part, seems to have no political beliefs that would make him a communist. The closest he gets to expressing any rational reasons for his communism is in a conversation with his wife, when he expresses his pleasure that their rich neighbor died, since he was rich and deserved it. However, this moment is not used to show why Curragh believes in communism. Instead, it is used to demonstrate how little Curragh has really thought about communism. His wife can immediately see the flaw in this reasoning: Curragh's own house is just as expensive. However, he simply tells her that has nothing to do with it. The scene, rather than showing that Curragh believes the communist ideology, instead tries to convey how shallow the communist ideology really is and how hypocritical Curragh is for following it.<sup>70</sup>

But psychologically, it is clear why Curragh became a communist. For instance, the film makes it clear why communists are the way they are through a key conversation that occurs between two soldiers discussing treason. One soldier argues that someone becomes a traitor “because they became twisted. Well, frustrated. [...]They go to the first leader of any movement that takes advantage of their twisted thinking.”<sup>71</sup> Communism, according to the

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<sup>70</sup> *Conspirator*

<sup>71</sup> *Conspirator*. Louis Budenz, in his autobiography, gives a very similar description of communists. He writes that “Many Communists, too, as was the case with myself, enter the "movement" through their sense of justice; they become twisted and crippled personalities through the doctrine of hate which they adopt and the wooden soldier "discipline" which they are compelled to follow." See Louis Budenz, *This Is My Story*, (London, New York, McGraw Hill, 1947), xi

soldier, has nothing to do with the ideology. Instead, it is a symptom of a deficiency in the person.

More specifically, it is a deficiency created by the communist's upbringing. Curragh, for instance, was brought up poorly. Curragh's aunt points out that he was quiet as a child, and that he didn't grow up in a normal childhood, because his mother was strange, and hid guns under the house. Curragh himself explained he became a communist because his father did not like him or pay attention to him; instead of seeing his father, Curragh instead “used to sit on the footstool by the fire” and listen to party meetings.<sup>72</sup>

Hugo is a communist spy for similar reasons. Hugo never had parents. Instead, he was alone his entire childhood. As a result, “the Party became his family-- his parents, his brothers, his wives.”<sup>73</sup> Like Michael Curragh, Hugo became a communist because the party replaced his parents and raised him as a party member. He was cold and emotionless because he was alone as a child, and that made him join the Communist Party.

Cold War narratives often blame communism on an improper childhood. Showing that bad parenting led to communism served less to educate audiences about communism than it did to stigmatize parents who did not take the proper care in raising children. Blaming communism on parenting gave authority to the claims that the family should be the primary concern of men and women, because if failing to pay the proper amount of attention the family created communists, good parenting was not just a domestic duty but a civic one as

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<sup>72</sup> *Conspirator*: Cyndy Hendershot argues that part of the representation of communists in this film is how Curragh is kept infantilized by the party. Party Leaders forbade his to growing up and having a wife or making decisions without their approval. Instead, they have him play childish games, like sneaking out with the postcards. Notably, it is his interaction with Melinda that makes him realize that using postcards like this is “childish,” and he tells the party so when he realizes, showing how Melinda's influence helps him escape the infantilized state the party has put him in. See Cyndy Hendershot, *Anti-Communism and Popular Culture in Mid-Century America*, (North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2003) Pg 31

<sup>73</sup> Baron, 172

well. In this way, anticommunism was used to stigmatize bad parents, and in doing so shifted the dialogue around communism towards expressing the importance of the family.

As Elaine Tyler May showed, the early 1950s were focused on child-rearing because so many families were rearing children. As part of the post-war reconfiguration of society was based around understanding how to set up a family after the war, anticommunism, like other cultural movements, focused on the cultural implications of the changes in society would naturally focus to some degree upon the rearing of children.

Films focusing on juvenile delinquency were one such movement. Peter Biskind, in *Seeing is Believing*, shows that during the fifties, films focusing on teenage crime and delinquency became common. Films such as *The Blackboard Jungle* created images of criminal teenagers who lacked a moral center. Though films about poorly raised children existed before the 1950s, these were unique in how they portrayed children. Biskind argues that, unlike films about juvenile delinquency from the 30s and 40s, this genre in the 1950s depicted children such that they were “no longer criminals” like in earlier films, but instead portrayed them as “sick.”<sup>74</sup> As well, these films no longer focused on how the neighborhood might lead children to crime, but rather focused on how the teenagers were raised badly, and not getting the proper love they required from their parents.<sup>75</sup>

Biskind also argues that these movies portrayed the problems with children through psychological explanations, by showing that they are the way they are because of a lack of a good home, or a loving father. Consequently, the movies also blame parents for the troubles the children have. For instance, in *Rebel without a Cause*, Jim Stark's father is portrayed as

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<sup>74</sup> Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 199

<sup>75</sup> Biskind, 199

weak and indecisive, while Judy's father is too authoritarian to give her the sort of love a daughter requires. The problems with society are put squarely on the shoulders of parents who fail to properly raise their children, which causes their children to be psychologically damaged.<sup>76</sup>

Cold War narratives that focused on communism often shared much in common with films explicitly about juvenile delinquency. Both types of films heavily drew upon the rise of psychology as an explanatory model for deviance. As Alan Petigny shows, in the 1950s, Americans' use of professional psychiatry greatly expanded, and psychology entered the public consciousness in a way it had not previously.<sup>77</sup> This meant that problems of character were increasingly seen by the general public in terms of psychological illnesses. The most obvious example of this is alcoholism. Alcoholism was seen as a weakness of character before the 1950s, but after the rise of psychology, it was increasingly seen as an illness that could be and needed to be treated.<sup>78</sup>

As Petigny points out, this focus also contributed towards the popularity of using psychology to inform methods of child rearing. The methods of Dr. Benjamin Spock, for instance, stressed the effects of parenting on a child's development and recommended techniques that helped them socialize more effectively as they grew up.<sup>79</sup> These two trends-- seeing personal problems such as alcoholism as a mental disease and creating a supposedly scientific way to raise children with regards to their psychological development--gave people in postwar America an obvious way to explain deviance. First, by focusing on a disease

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76 Biskind, 199-201. Also important to note is how Jim Stark's father is feminized by his weakness, visually cued by showing him in an apron in key scenes. The implication here is that something about the modern world emasculates men, a theme that we will analyze in the following chapter.

77 Alan Petigny, *The Permissive Society*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 19, 21-22

78 Petigny, 26, 31

79 Petigny, 37-38

model, even a political ideology such as communism could be seen as a psychological illness that could be cured, in much the same way as homosexuality was seen as a disease in need of a cure.

But more importantly, psychological explanations of deviance pointed towards problematic childhoods as the cause of deviance, placing the blame for deviance on the deviant's parents. Elaine Tyler May shows that there was cultural pressure was put on mothers to raise their children correctly, and psychologists argued that raising them incorrectly was the cause of psychological problems later in life. May finds that the cultural consensus was that “mothers who neglected their children bred criminals; mothers who overindulged their sons turned them into passive, weak, and effeminate 'perverts.’”<sup>80</sup> Related to this was the concept of momism, the fear that American mothers were coddling their sons causing their children to become effeminate when they grew up. Ideas like momism popularized the notion that a child's inability to conform to correct gender roles could be traced to incorrect parenting or an imperfect family.<sup>81</sup> This reinforced the ideology of domestic containment by showing that the family was not just a protection from the outside world, but also the most important institution to make sure American children if parents wanted to avoid their children becoming homosexuals or communists.

The way that psychology gained authority in the 1950s gave anticommunist discourse a tool to transform fears of communism and deviance into a program attacking bad parents. Two examples illustrate this point and show how anticommunism linked child-rearing and communism. One of the clearest examples comes from the best-selling novel by Mickey

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<sup>80</sup> May, 93. James Gilbert, in *Men in the Middle*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 65-67, makes similar points about fear about momism. He links it to a fear of growing effeminacy in men during the period.

<sup>81</sup> May, 73-74

Spillane, *One Lonely Night*, published in 1951. *One Lonely Night* is a formulaic detective novel that happens to implicate communists in the murder that Mike Hammer, the protagonist, is investigating. One of those communists, a woman named Ethel Brighton, meets Mike Hammer and has sex with him.<sup>82</sup> Later though, when he realizes she is still a communist agent, he decides to cure her of her communist tendencies. His solution is to spank her with his belt. As he spanks her, he explains why this is a proper response to her communist affiliations. He tells her, “Maybe you should know why you're getting this, Ethel. It's something you should have gotten a long time ago. Your father should have given it to you when you started fooling around with one of those Commie bastards.”<sup>83</sup>

Hammer places the blame for her communism purely on her father: since he wasn't strict enough with her, and failed to punish her enough, Hammer would have to step in and punish her instead. By implicating an absent or unauthoritarian father in Ethel's communism, Spillane places the blame for communism not on the communist, but on the poor choices her parents made when raising her.<sup>84</sup> The solution is to do what her father could not: properly discipline her and thus take the role of active father in her life.<sup>85</sup>

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82 *One Lonely Night* does not seem to condemn Mike Hammer's sexual exploits, even though he has a fiancée at the same time as he sleeps with other women. On the other hand, the book condemns female sexuality by depicting any women who do have sex dying for various reasons later in the book. As for Velda, Hammer's fiancée, she escapes this by never having sex with Hammer, since he specifically avoids ruining her until his wedding night. See chapter four for a longer discussion of depictions of female sexuality.

83 Mickey Spillane, “One Lonely Night”. *The Mike Hammer Collection: Volume Two*. (New York: New American Library, 2001), First Published 1951, 128

84 Also, notably, Mickey Spillane treats communism as a symptom of mental disease. When Mike Hammer confronts the murderer, who he discovers is a communist, he explains to the man that “That's why you were a Commie, Oscar, because you were batty. It was the only philosophy that would appeal to your crazy mind.” In Oscar's case, Spillane thinks the only way to cure him is for Oscar to die, but it is still worth noting that communism is a symptom of psychological problems, not something that can be attributed to rational choices. See Spillane, 170

85 Important to note, however, is that while Spillane assumes a psychological model for tracing the origin of Ethel's communism, his solution to her communist tendencies is notably reactionary. One of the largest authorities on child rearing at the time was Dr. Spock, a child psychologist whose methods disapproved of corporal punishment in most cases. Spillane's depiction of Hammer spanking Ethel to make up for her father not doing the same when she was a child reveals Spillane's belief that child rearing techniques like Dr.

But more common than Spillane's depiction of correcting a communist through discipline is the depiction of communism as a perversion of the family. For instance, the novel *Catspaw*, by Mary Borden, illustrates how one effect of a child not getting loving affection from their parents is that the child may instead get that affection from the Communist Party. *Catspaw* is about a communist, named Alex, who is spying on an important government official. *Catspaw*, importantly, is not a novel focused on the family, such as *My Son John* or *Conspirator*. However, this does not prevent Borden from offering a psychological explanation for the communism of her main character. Alex explains to the reader that “My family didn't like me; I don't blame them, I merely note the fact, and I don't care for them,”<sup>86</sup> and relates that his father was “a liberal and a contemptible weakling” who “lived in the clouds,” while Alex's mother had multiple lovers.<sup>87</sup> As a result, Alex had no parental figures who took an active role in his upbringing. Therefore, as a child, Alex turned to the Communist Party. He says of his communism that “My emotional life was satisfied by Kubin [his communist friend] and my new faith. When I became a University student, I went with him to the more adult meetings of the Party.”<sup>88</sup>

Like the cases of Hugo and Curragh, Alex's communism is explained by how the Communist Party replaced his real family. The familial role of the family is made explicit a few pages later, when Alex's superior, Tula, becomes his surrogate father. Tula, upon bringing

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Spock's were not disciplinary enough to properly raise children. Though Spillane shows his belief that communism arises from improper child rearing through this scene, it is still necessary to recognize that his beliefs about child rearing are not those universally felt. Instead, Spillane is attacking the common prescriptions of child rearing, even while adopting their assumptions about the importance of raising children correctly. See Petigny, 41

86 Mary Borden, *Catspaw*, (New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1950), 35

87 Borden, 33, 36

88 Borden, 35. Phrases like this and others in *Catspaw* also serve to imply that Alex is homosexual, which further strengthens a relationship between communism, deviance, and improper parenting. For a more detailed discussion about this, see chapter three.



him into the party, tells Alex that “I shall nurse you, my child. [...] I shall adopt you. I have adopted many children but I can always do with one more.”<sup>89</sup> The language Borden uses makes clear the nature of this relationship: Alex has not so much as assented to be a communist as he was raised by communism.

## VI Married to the Party

But what of women's roles in the family? In contrast to the prescriptions of masculinity Cold War narratives present, those same narratives were much more ambivalent about the proper role for women. On the one hand, it cannot be denied that these films and novels exalt the role women play as domestic housewives. Melinda in *Conspirator*; Jo in *All My Enemies*, Linda in *Red Planet Mars*, and Lou in *My Son John* are all paragons of domesticity. Melinda and Jo, though without children, spend their entire activities in fixing up the house and doing domestic chores, while Linda and Lou are primarily defined by their identity as mothers. To say that these movies said that women had a place outside the home would be patently false.

But despite depicting these women as passive housewives, anticommunist productions praise the personal initiative each of these women take in stopping communists. Despite her passive character, when Melinda learns her husband Michael Curragh is a communist, she refuses to listen to him and “obey [him] in all things” and asserts her rights to go to the police to stop him.<sup>90</sup> John's mother, Lou, follows him on a plane

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<sup>89</sup> Borden, 51. Interestingly, Tula “nurses” Alex, signifying that Tula may in fact take the role of a mother in Alex's life, hinting at gender inversion in the Communist Party.

<sup>90</sup> *Conspirator*

to Washington DC to investigate her suspicions that he is a communist. Rather than fall apart like her husband, she is able to, by herself, find the truth. It is also her strength of character that allows her to make John see the error of his ways. And in fact, Cyndy Hendershot argues that *Red Planet Mars* presents in Linda an example of a liberated woman, one who is scientifically capable and is the protector of America, which the film opposes to the one Soviet woman in the film who is stuck to doing menial work.<sup>91</sup> These wives, though they properly fit into the domestic model, are made the heroes of their respective films because they fail to simply be passive housewives and instead show strength and resolve enough to resist communism. What this shows is that, within definable limits, wives were understood to have some ability to be assertive. In contrast to other cultural productions that might have created very circumscribed roles for women, often anticommunist productions allowed for the possibility of an assertive, powerful wife.

But this role for women was limited in how it was exercised. One way to view those limits is to examine the autobiography of Elizabeth Bentley, *Out of Bondage*. Elizabeth Bentley was a woman who in the 1930s became involved in the Communist Party and then later became the head of a group of spies that were giving secret information to the Soviet government. Later, Bentley defected to the FBI and testified in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee. In *Out of Bondage*, Bentley relates her experiences until the point she decides to defect to the American government.<sup>92</sup> In particular, she discusses her relationship with a communist spy, Jacob Golos. Through her relationship to the Communist Party, Bentley explains to her readers the danger communism presents.

91 Cyndy Hendershot, "Anti-Communism and Ambivalence in *Red Planet Mars*, *Invasion USA*, and *The Beast of Yucca Flats*," *Science Fiction Studies* 28, no. 2 (July 2001): 246-260, 250

92 Kathryn Olmsted, *Red Spy Queen: A Biography of Elizabeth Bentley*. (University of North Carolina Press, 2002)

*Out of Bondage*, due to its nature as a biography that purports to describe real events, is limited in what it can tell us about how communists were fictionally represented. However, even though Elizabeth Bentley writes from true events, as a writer she also imposes a particular narrative upon her own life's events. This means that we can use Bentley's autobiography for a different purpose: instead, we can examine how one person translated her life according to the mores of Cold War narratives. By examining how she portrayed herself, it suggests that Bentley made herself fit what she believed was the ideal behavior for an American women so that she could more effectively frame herself in relief from communism. By noticing how she framed herself and how she compared her own behavior to communists', Bentley provides a way to analyze the limits of acceptable female behavior for Americans sympathetic to anticommunist narratives of proper gender roles.

Elizabeth Bentley was hardly the ideal of a housewife who stays at home and nurtured her children. Instead, it must be remembered that she was an independent, strong woman who was unmarried throughout her entire life. Instead of being a stay-at-home housewife, she became a communist spy. In order to facilitate her spy work, she even worked independently as a handler, and ran a company herself as a front for her spying operation. Moreover, she was hardly conservative or traditional: Bentley was sexually voracious, having multiple lovers before her romance with Jacob Golos, and she was an alcoholic for most of her adult life.<sup>93</sup> Bentley was hardly the image of femininity that anticommunist productions reinforced through characters like Jo, Melinda, or even Lou.

And yet, a reader of *Out of Bondage* would be hard pressed to come to this conclusion. In constructing her autobiography, Bentley's presents herself as a model of

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93 Olmsted, 16, 25

femininity and a model American, despite the actual facts of her life. Kathryn Olmsted, in *Red Spy Queen*, argues that Bentley in *Out of Bondage* purposefully misportrayed her life to accentuate a false domesticity. Olmsted argues that Bentley had “rewritten her life story to make it fit into the gender norms of the 1950s.”<sup>94</sup> In fact, Bentley portrays herself, as Olmsted argues, as a “conventional housewife.” For instance, she never mentions she had lovers before Golos. She also tries to mold her relationship with Golos into a marital one. For instance, when Bentley finds out that Golos works for the Russian secret service, she describes her “wifely pride” in him.<sup>95</sup> As well, she writes of Golos calling her his wife, and his dying words to her are, “One of the things I regret most is the fact we never had any children,”<sup>96</sup> To explain her spying activities, she plants the blame on how she wanted to help her husband, or how she was pushed into spying as a result of the strong willed communists she worked with. She depicts herself as a submissive housewife who came under the control of her husband, not as an intelligent, assertive woman who was able to run a spy ring. Though in reality Bentley was far more in control of her situation than she lets on, in her autobiography, in order to fit into the conventional model of housewife, she shunts the responsibility for her actions to Golos and accepts a passive role.<sup>97</sup>

In *Out of Bondage*, Bentley does not hide the fact that she was spying on the United States, nor does she hide the fact that she ran a shipping company. But, she downplays these, and instead focuses on her romantic relationship with Golos. This falls into the same pattern we see with Melinda in *Conspirator* and, especially, Linda from *Red Planet Mars*. All three

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94 Olmsted, 25

95 As quoted in Olmsted, 166. Bentley only uses this phrase in the serialized version of the book, possibly due to the fact that that version was serialized in a magazine primarily aimed at housewives, and Bentley may have wanted to align herself with them as explicitly as possible.

96 Bentley, 211, 212

97 Olmsted, 166-167

of these women show the ability to be assertive, and Linda is herself a scientist alongside her husband. But Bentley's example seems to suggest that this assertiveness and independence is only acceptable as long as a woman is primarily focused around domestic duties. According to Bentley, she only acts as a spy to help her husband. As long her actions are centered around the family, she has considerable leeway, as do women in general in fictional anticommunist productions.

Bentley then opposes her form of “marriage” to Golos with the perversion of marriage that communism creates. The best example is of the marriage of Earl Browder, the head of the Communist Party USA. Bentley notes, upon going to Browder's house for dinner, that Browder's wife, Raissa, who was from Russia, was an overly aggressive woman, who had “an air of arrogance and thinly veiled cruelty.”<sup>98</sup> Bentley explains that she at the time wondered how Browder could love someone like Raissa, since she found him to be a nice man. Bentley then reveals that she found out only later that Browder never had a choice whether or not to marry Raissa. Instead, his wife was a high-level Soviet authority who had been assigned to Browder, so as to control him and make reports on him back to the Soviet government. Earl Browder had no choice in the woman he married, and she was his boss, the authority in his household.<sup>99</sup>

In the case of Raissa, the ideal marriage is inverted. Rather than support her husband, Raissa controls him by being assertive and domineering. Rather than focus her energy on the family, Raissa uses the family as part of her job for the Party. Rather than a companionate marriage, Raissa is the one in charge. The way that Bentley depicts Raissa gives an example

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98 Bentley, 184

99 Bentley, 185

of the dangers of assertiveness in a woman. If her assertiveness is not carefully circumscribed for the good of the family, then it becomes a force that perverts the family and takes away a husband's ability to be autonomous.

Even though Bentley is working from her real life experiences, the way that she positions herself and communist women like Raissa help elucidate the lines between acceptable and unacceptable female behaviors in the discourse of Cold War narratives. When Bentley chose to depict herself and Raissa as she did, she, intentionally or unintentionally, made a decision to make these depictions such that Raissa's assertiveness was unacceptable while her own was fine. As we can see assertiveness is not necessarily bad in women, but rather, it is bad when it favors another group over the family or takes away the autonomy of the husband.

Beyond this, Bentley also makes claims that cement the idea that communists are anathematic to marriage. She explains to her readers that communists claim marriage “was an institution invented by the ruling class to perpetuate its power.”<sup>100</sup> She also writes that Golos explained to her that, as a communist, “we can have no contacts that are not strictly necessary for the work of the Party. Even these few relationships must be kept on an entirely impersonal level, otherwise the whole organization might be endangered. We are forbidden to form close friendships and, especially, to fall in love. You and I have no right, under Communist discipline, to feel the way we do about each other.”<sup>101</sup>

As Bentley depicts “Communist discipline,” communists are a group that favors the work they do for the Party over any ties to family. Communists cannot balance family and

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100Bentley, 101

101Bentley, 101

work life, nor can they even have families, because they are completely devoted to the Party. As a result, as Bentley presents them, communists represent a performance that completely ignores the family that anticommunism puts at the very center of American masculinity and femininity.

The statement “We are forbidden [...] to fall in love” is worth remarking on in more detail as well, because it is representative of a theme in anticommunist that communists are not capable of being in a loving marriage at all. Important is the reason that love is forbidden: because they must “have no contacts that are not strictly necessary for the work of the Party.” Another anticommunist production, *Jet Pilot*, echoes this sentiment more succinctly. When a female Soviet pilot, asked about her beliefs about love and religion, replies that “both are dangerous narcotics. They make individuals forget about their duty to the state.”<sup>102</sup> By depicting communists as unable to love, Cold War narratives depict them as deviant and anti-family. But the important part of this is why they cannot love, namely, because it would take focus away from their outside loyalties, in this case, the state, or the Communist Party.<sup>103</sup>

*Out of Bondage* shows two things about how Cold War narratives treated gender. It shows first, how women's roles were complicated in that anticommunists praised a woman's assertiveness as long as it did not threaten the proper ordering of the family and as long as it did not pull a woman's focus away from her devotion to the family. But secondly, it shows

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<sup>102</sup>*Jet Pilot*. DVD. Directed by Josef von Steinberg, 1957, RKO. Universal City Studios, Inc.

<sup>103</sup>Two more examples of this communist inability to love are worth remarking on. The first comes from *My Son John*. When John's mother asked if he had a girlfriend, John tells her that “sentimentalizing over the biological urge isn't really a guarantee of human happiness,” which shows how as a communist, John doesn't believe in love. Secondly, *All My Enemies* repeats the theme. Stanley Wade Baron's description of Hugo as someone who “generally felt none of the conventional emotional responses to people,” implies the same thing, and is used by Baron to show that Hugo only sleeps with women for fun, not because he loves them. Both of these examples show how prevalent this idea was in anticommunist productions. See *My Son John*, Baron, 10

how, connected to this prescription of female action was also a converse depiction of communists as opposed to the family, or even love. Together, these two aspects of anticommunism work in tandem, showing at once how important the family is to a woman's role while at the same time showing how communism was connected to a viewpoint that thought the family unimportant. In both cases, the discourse elaborated by Cold War narratives cemented the family as the most important part of American's lives.

## VII Conclusion

As Lizabeth Cohen noted, the question following the conclusion of World War II that faced Americans was “Reconversion to what?”<sup>104</sup> As economic changes and federal policies reshaped the post-war American landscape, a cultural battle over the meanings of these changes also was fought.

Anticommunism was a movement created in this context and impossible to completely untangle from the discourse over gender in the early 1950s. Understanding this, it is easy to see that Uncle Sam's suggestion to Bill and Nina to raise some children once they had escaped the grasp of the Red Menace was not, as it appeared at first glance, an incongruous ending to a film about the dangers of communism, but a key part of the anticommunist depiction of communism. By falling in love and making a home with children in it, Bill and Nina were acting out the key behaviors that Cold War narratives promoted: that men and women's primary concerns should be with the raising a family. Thus, this ending is as natural an ending to *Red Menace* as Elizabeth Bentley's choice to defect to the FBI at the

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<sup>104</sup>Cohen, 109



close of *Out of Bondage*.

But the idea that Americans should focus on domestic concerns was not the entirety of the messages that Cold War narratives used anticommunism to present. As a flip side to the idea that a man should be autonomous in the home, these narratives also reflected a belief that a man should be autonomous outside the home too. However, while they presented an argument to adopt the changes the modern world brought in terms of the makeup of the family, they presented a vigorously anti-modernist stance when confronting changes in masculinity. By looking at how Cold War narratives used commentary on communism to wade into the debate about masculinity, we can see the partner to their praise of the family: the condemnation of the conformity they feared the modern workplace created.

## Chapter 3

### Reds, Robots, and Renegades: Masculinity in Modern Society

#### I Introduction

As we have seen, when early Cold War narratives provided commentary on the cultural discourse surrounding gender in the post war United States, they reflected a conception of masculinity that idealized two characteristics of men: the autonomy of men, and the ability of a man to take a central role in his family. But how did these narratives depict masculinity apart from the home? And how did these two defining features of manhood interact with each other in the construction of masculinity presented by Cold War books and films?

In fact, these two ideas are closely, if not obviously, linked in the discursive commentary on gender provided by early Cold War narratives. In the dialogue over the meanings of masculinity, Cold War books and films used anticommunism to give voice to a section of society that held tight to a conservative ideal of masculinity: that being a man was defined by a person's individualism, his ability to be free from the power of others, and his ability to make decisions on his own without becoming subservient or submissive. For Americans who were sympathetic with the anticommunist critique presented by Cold War books and films, in order to perform masculinity, one had to be able to express one's individuality.

Except, to this group of Americans, individualism was in decline. While serving in

World War II had supplied soldiers with ample ways to perform their masculinity, coming home to a United States that was transitioning to a new type of economy made performances of that masculinity harder. This conversion to a consumer economy changed the nature of men's work by making the normally available job that of a white collar office job. To men who were used to expressing themselves through fighting the war, this was even more a stark contrast.

As K. A. Cuordileone has shown, the effect of the emergence of white collar office jobs led to a fear that these jobs were engendering conformity and a loss of self in men. This was part of a greater problem with the forces of modernity: that the impersonality of bureaucracy, mass produced cultural productions, and consumer goods left Americans in a position to be dominated by others rather than to cultivate their own individuality. The fear of mass society, the idea that a conformist culture allowed totalitarian regimes to control people, was now a fear that American culture was creating the same outcome: a population that had no sense of self and were willing to follow others rather than think for themselves.<sup>105</sup>

Numerous thinkers in the 1950s expanded on the idea that the new social make up of the post-war United States was creating conformity. Most notable and well known were the ideas of David Riesman's "other-directed" personality and William Whyte's "organization man." Riesman, a sociologist, argued in *The Lonely Crowd* that societies, like the United States, moved through different organizational phases. The first, one that mimicked the social makeup of the pre-war United States, favored what Riesman called the "inner directed personality," which was characterized by "individual drive, initiative, and competition." On

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<sup>105</sup> K.A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*, (New York, Routledge, 2005), 98-99

the other hand, following the war, the United States started to become a type of society that favored an “other-directed” personality. The other-directed person was characterized by an ability to read social cues from others in order to better perform in a group and “get along with others.” The inner-directed person had an inner “psychological gyroscope” that would allow him to judge rightness and wrongness based on his own personal values, while the other-directed person got his cues from other people rather than from his own convictions. Riesman argued that the other-directed personality was becoming more dominant in society due to social changes in the United States, such as the need for men to get along with a team in the workplace rather than to work alone.<sup>106</sup> William Whyte's “organization man” was a similar idea. The organization man was a man in middle management in large corporations that was defined by his need to be part of the group. Many other characterizations existed in the 1950s, but Cuordileone argues that all of them were focused on this fear of the conformist man, and they all echo the same theme, in that they “reveal a self in danger of engulfment by forces larger and more powerful.”<sup>107</sup>

Early Cold War books and films often used anticommunism to present a harsh critique of the organization man. Part of what united this particular view of masculinity with anticommunism was that to those who felt autonomy and individuality were paramount to a man's identity, the idea of communism was particularly frightening. Riesman's concept of the “inner-directed” personality defined the correct performance of masculinity to many, and the implication that modern society discouraged this type of man was frightening. Communism, to a group threatened by other-direction, was easily seen as the embodiment of the excesses

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106Cuordileone, 105-106

107Cuordileone, 98

of modernity: communism was perceived as a structure of society that seemed to punish the individual and forced everyone into a bureaucratic social order that subsumed the self. The bureaucratic structure that some Americans felt was feminizing the American man seemed to be fully formed in the Soviet Union, making communism and the worst aspects of modernity seem connected.

This construction of communism was in part fueled by the writings of intellectuals in the 1950s. Horkheimer and Adorno, for instance, argued that the compulsion to be part of the group explained why people followed totalitarian governments. According to these two, people were willing to give up their individuality in order to be ordered, and communist governments (and other totalitarian ones) took advantage of this. Other intellectuals argued that communism was part of this compulsion to fit in and be part of the group, and that communists were “weak willed people who easily yielded to authority.”<sup>108</sup>

Due to the conceptual link between communism and the assault on individualism, it was easy for Cold War narratives to use anticommunist depictions of communists to espouse an anti-modern reaction against the changing nature of masculinity in society. Communists were used as caricatures of other-direction in order to show the debilitating effects of the modern world on men, while the heroes of Cold War narratives are often hyper individualists who show the superiority of the conservative view of masculinity.<sup>109</sup> The depictions of male

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<sup>108</sup>Courdileone, 111

<sup>109</sup> It is also important to realize that Riesman himself did not use the term “other-directed” pejoratively, but felt that this new personality type had strengths and weaknesses unique to itself. He never argued that other-direction was a bad thing, but instead believed that other-direction was a natural outgrowth of the changes in society. However, his ideas of other-direction were simplified and streamlined into a personality type that anticommunists could vilify and draw in contrast to their own ideas of masculinity. For instance, though Riesman believed that other-direction sprung naturally from the changes in society, anticommunists took a cue from Horkheimer and Adorno and pointed to communism as one of the root causes of other-direction. By showing how communism emasculates men by making them other-directed, anticommunist writers could construct a discourse where other-directed individuals were worthy of vilification, and thus attack this form of masculinity.

communists implicitly offered a code of conduct for men by contrasting an independent individualistic hero with a dependent other-directed communist.

However, though some early Cold War narratives were unsophisticated stories showing individualist men defeat weak-willed organization men, others presented a much more complicated picture of the plight of the individualist man. In these cases, Cold War productions often betrayed an ambivalence about the role of individualism in modern society, sometimes even an anxiety that modern society no longer had room for the individualist man.

Thus, the solution presented by conservative Cold War narratives was to abandon work as the way that men performed manhood and got fulfillment. Instead, these productions offered the home. As we have seen previously, Cold War narratives idolized the family as an important sphere where men could perform as fathers and husbands and attacked any alternatives to the notion that men should prioritize the home over other pursuits. In the same vein, some Cold War narratives recognize the unsustainability of individualism, and as a result offer the a familial manhood as the alternative to either individualism or inner-direction, and by doing so, abandon work as the measure of masculinity.

The changes in the post-war United States had given rise to the suburban nuclear family, a construction of family life that was relatively closed off and isolated from where men worked. Along with this social change came questions concerning the meaning of that suburban family. Cold War narratives used anticommunism to provide one answer. These books and films presented isolated suburban family as the solution for men who perceived masculinity to be eroding in their the public workplace. By embracing the suburban family, not only as a “bastion” against outside forces as Elaine Tyler May argues, but also as one to

protect against the effeminizing effects of the new economy, the discourse that Cold War narratives were a part of at once embraced the changes in the post-war society and reacted against them. The suburban home was the solution to the effects of society that made men “other-directed,” and the only hope of men was to embrace family life as the only place left for them to perform as men.

## II Superhuman Robots and Mental Acrobats

Cold War narratives usually depicted the connection between communism and other-direction by depicting communists as weak willed, obsessed with their work, and eager to please their superiors. Moreover, they are also shown to be cold and emotionless, due to how they suppress their own personality, and surrender to the collective Party. By giving themselves up to the Party, communists sacrificed not only their individuality but also their ability to feel emotions like a normal person, and in effect became robots.

The transmutation of a man into robot meant that a man gave up everything but his work (in this case for the party), and instead he became nothing more than a bureaucratic machine. In fact, communists are robotic because of their devotion to the Party, showing how the other-directed man inappropriately cedes himself to his work instead of being an autonomous individual. Instead of thinking for themselves, they take upon themselves the thoughts of others, or change their thoughts to match whatever is most advantageous to them. Communists are also shown to be conformists who are unable to question their superiors, or opportunists who are simply good at reading what others want them to do. By depicting

communists as overly devoted to their work for the Party, early Cold War narratives used anticommunist language to depict the faults of communists as the consequences of being a part of the post-war bureaucratic workplace.

Returning to *All My Enemies*, by Stanley Wade Baron, it is important to note that Hugo, the communist agent of the book, is an unfeeling, calculating man, who “generally felt none of the conventional emotional responses to people,” instead just seeing everyone he meets as tools to be used in service of his mission for the party.<sup>110</sup> As an example of his unfeelingness, in order to get close to the scientist he is trying to approach for the communists, he has sex with Clara so he can in order to use her to locate the scientist. But more particularly, he even fakes his attraction for her in pursuit of his goals, because he realizes to use her would require “only a pretense, a carbon copy of affection, to bring her within his control,” rather than genuine emotions.<sup>111</sup> For Hugo, emotions are only an act to be used for his work.

As a result of the domesticity that begins to cure him, Baron mentions of Hugo that he starts to feel emotions. However, of these, he writes, “Pity, fear-- these belonged to other people, not to him. They were emotions that had died away with childhood.”<sup>112</sup> It is this emotional bereftness that defines him as a communist, to the point that what Jo's interference actually does to cure him is to “[touch] against a core of feeling that still lived in [Hugo]”<sup>113</sup> to make him more than “half a man.”<sup>114</sup> This dichotomy between working for the Party, and experiencing emotions in a domestic situation with Jo, reveals the way in which Cold War

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110Stanley Wade Baron. *All My Enemies*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1952). Pg 10

111Baron, 74

112Baron, 232

113Baron, 117

114Baron, 170



narratives depicted the effects of modernity on men: work was a debilitating, individuality sucking force, and only the effect of a family could make men into individuals once more. Stanley Wade Baron makes it clear that while the solution to communism is a correct family life, the problem communists have is that communism makes men into unfeeling automatons.

The theme of the unfeeling communist is repeated many times. Noel Sterling, in *I Killed Stalin*, written in 1951, gives the most succinct description of communists when he calls them “superhuman robots.”<sup>115</sup> According to Sterling, like robots, communists do not have any sense of humor or emotions and never smile or show any sign of “human feeling.”<sup>116</sup> As well, in the film *Big Jim McLain*, a communist is described as “neuter of a personality,” someone who is deficient in the ability to express emotions or interact with others emotionally.<sup>117</sup>

If communists had to suppress their personality, it was easy for anticommunists to also depict them as supplanting their personality with someone else's. Closely related to depicting communists as emotionless robots is the trend of depicting them as unable to think their own thoughts or make decisions for themselves. For instance, in the novel *Catspaw*, a communist named Konitz is described as so loyal to the Party that he has become mechanical. Mary Borden writes of Konitz that “There was a brain somewhere attached to his name, but it wasn't his own. It belonged to a machine called the MVD [The precursor of

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115Noel Sterling. *I Killed Stalin*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1951). Pg 174

116Sterling, 31

117 *Big Jim McClain*, VHS. Directed by Edward Ludwig, 1952. Warner Bros, 1991. Also important is that non-fictional accounts of communism, such as the autobiographies of Elizabeth Bentley and Louis Budenz, also use this terminology. Budenz, for instance, wrote of communism that it was a “Red strait jacket which turns men of courage into Russian robots,” while Elizabeth Bentley wrote that “all these old friends of mine had become, in the hands of the Communist movement, no longer individuals but robots.” See Louis Budenz, *This Is My Story*, (London, New York, McGraw Hill, 1947), pg 276, and Elizabeth Bentley. *Out of Bondage: The Story of Elizabeth Bentley*. (The Devin-Adair Company, New York

the KGB].”<sup>118</sup> To Borden, Konitz exemplifies the perfect communist, since what the Party requires is a “total abnegation of self.”<sup>119</sup>

Sometimes, communists are just depicted as opportunists who are communists only because it suits them. The best example of this tendency is given by Martha Albrand, in *The Hunted Woman*. Here, Albrand describes the meeting between two communists, one of which had become a communist only after realizing that his current group, the Nazis, would lose World War II.<sup>120</sup> Albrand writes of the two that “They knew their separate desires because they were the same: the urge for power. They knew what made them tick: cold, calculating ambition. They knew their secret faith: to be on the side of the stronger. And they knew what made each of them behave the same way in any given situation: whatever seemed most opportune at the time.”<sup>121</sup>

On the one hand, Albrand is depicting communists as unconcerned with any actual belief in communism, but instead just interested in power. But it is also important to consider

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118Mary Borden. *Catspaw*. (Longmans, Green and Co, New York, 1950) Pg 232

119Borden, 82. Louis Budenz, in his autobiography, *This Is My Story*, agreed with this assessment by writing that “when a man enters there [the Party] he signs his death warrant as a free agent in thought or word or deed.” What is most worrying for Budenz is how communism forces a man to not think for himself, but to only listen to others' thoughts. He focuses on an incident involving the head of the Communist Party USA, Earl Browder. Browder makes a political statement, which he soon contradicts, and then after meeting with Soviet leaders, contradicts again. Browder, due to his communism, cannot think for himself and instead has to change his mind whenever the Party tells him to. A similar incident happens later on, when Browder writes a political article. While it matches Soviet policy, the rest of the Communist Party praises him, but then they are forced to find ways to condemn him once the policy changes to contradict him. Then, when Soviet policy changes again, they praise Browder once more. The “mental acrobatics” required to praise, then condemn, then praise Browder are what worries Budenz: the communists cannot think for themselves and have been in fact trained to change their mind based on someone else's pronouncement. See Budenz, 128, 134, 274

120Martha Albrand. *The Hunted Woman*. (Random House, New York, 1952). pg 63. Relatedly, Louis Budenz also espouses the belief that communists are simply opportunists by writing that the communists were the same people who had previously worked with Bukharin until Stalin looked to be more powerful. See Budenz, 189

121Albrand, 161. Also important to note is that *The Hunted Woman* is a story of how Kobor, one of these communists, is trying to track down his ex-wife so he can kidnap from her his son and raise him as a communist, which reinforces themes of communists attacking the family.

that opportunism represented for a trait of other-directed men; the individuals that were praised in these Cold War narratives have a strong internal sense of morals which helped them follow their own convictions. Opportunists have no inner convictions, but simply follow who ever is advantageous for them.

These depictions, that of the robot and the opportunist, though they might appear to be unrelated, are in fact just part of the same projections of what was bad about the other-directed man. The opportunist is simply a man without the “inner gyroscope” of the individualist man: freed from his own principles, he can judge the needs and desires in order to figure out how to best act in his own interest. Both the other-directed man and the opportunist must be able to look to others, rather than themselves, for cues on how to act. The communist robot, on the other hand, gives up his individuality and his self. The reason he cannot feel, and appears cold and humorless is because he has given up what allows him to feel. Both the robot and the opportunist cannot think for themselves, but while one look to other as a way to benefit himself, the other looks to others because he has forfeited himself. Both are signs of other-direction and the subjugation of the individual to the collective.

All of these themes are also expressed best in the novel *The Brotherhood of Fear*. Written in 1952 by Robert Audrey, *The Brotherhood of Fear* is about Konnr, a police officer of an imaginary totalitarian state, who is told by the state to track down a criminal named Willy Bryo who was charged with reading forbidden English books. Due to a shipwreck, they both land on a small island that is part of the state but remote enough that the people are unfamiliar with the state's rules. Konnr proceeds to enforce the will of the state on the island, and in the process ruins the lives of everyone there, until they side with Bryo and shoot

Konnr.<sup>122</sup>

The first description of Konnr explains that he is the ideal man for a police state. Part of the reason for this is because he is “emotionally neutral” and properly disciplined.<sup>123</sup>

Konnr is the extreme version of what the organization man has become: a man so totally made part of a collective that nothing is left of an individual person. For instance, he comes from a society where the measure of a person has nothing to do with his personality or his merit, but simply the papers he holds. Konnr can scarcely imagine a world without papers.<sup>124</sup>

As well, so consumed by his devotion to the state, Konnr never had any devotion left for a wife. Even if he had the time, it would have been hard for him to relate to his wife, since the only sort of love he can conceive of is the approval of his superiors, and he views everyone in a strict hierarchy: those that he can order around, and those he must listen to and pay tribute to.<sup>125</sup> He uses sex not as a way to emotionally relate to a future wife, as Willy Bryo does, but instead for power. In contrast to Bryo having sex with a woman who he falls in love with, at the same time Konnr rapes a young girl on the island in order to humiliate the inhabitants. Konnr, rather than expressing his sexuality as a way to express healthy emotions like Bryo, instead takes advantage of a young girl only for gain, like Hugo.<sup>126</sup>

122Interestingly, Audrey writes an author's note stating that “*The Brotherhood of Fear* is a work of the imagination. The state described in these pages is an invention. If the reader seeks to discover a particular nation represented, then he will lose much of the story's point.” Moreover, the book does not mention communism explicitly, though it does mention the Party. Despite this, the state described bears striking similarities to the Soviet Union, or to an Eastern Bloc country recently taken over by the Communist Party. Audrey may have wanted his novel to be about the dangers of totalitarianism in general, or he might have wanted to stress how this could be any society under dominion of the Communist Party, an idealized Iron Curtain Country. Regardless, written in 1952, this book could only be seen by readers as a commentary, at least in part, on the Soviet Union. Moreover, the implication that Communism is indiscernible from other forms of totalitarian government shows how the threat posed by communism was not so much related to the ideology of communism, but to the threat of a system that would subsume the self. See Robert Audrey, *The Brotherhood of Fear*. (New York: Random House, 1952), pg 2

123Audrey, 18

124Audrey, 68-69

125Audrey, 18, 178, 285

126Notably, Audrey contrasts this scene of Konnr raping the young girl with a passionate love scene between

Konnr's obsession with authority and hierarchy need to be understood not just as a critique of totalitarianism, but also as a critique of the bureaucracy of modern society. Audrey argues this at several points, explaining to the reader, for instance, that Konnr was “a strange, monstrous product of his century's most scientific attention, part human, part machine,” explicitly linking societal and technological progress to the creation of the organization man.<sup>127</sup> More disturbing to Audrey is that the modern world that created Konnr genuinely prefers people like Konnr. Audrey writes:

When we are all gone, he will remain. His middlingness is infallible. He is neither too stupid nor too smart, too ambitious nor too laggard, too quick or slow. He is not even too loyal. He is the man in the middle. This is no longer a world where the strong survive. In the processes of our natural selection, the outstanding are exposed by their outstandingness, and the gifted betrayed by their gifts. In our new evolution it is the middling who are the fittest. Three generations from now, Konnr will lead us all.<sup>128</sup>

These two statements, taken together, might as well be the rallying cry behind anticommunist reactions to the new post-war society. Modern society has created men like Konnr, half man and half machine, who are completely without passion and individualism but simply cogs in a bureaucratic machine. But what is worse, and most despicable about Konnr, is that he is the “middling” man that modern society favors. The strong individualist man seems to no longer fit in the modern society; only the Konnrs of the world seem suited to the workplaces that the post-war United States offers. If society favors men like Konnr, as Cold War narratives seem to be worried is the case, then in the future all men will be organization men just like Konnr.

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Willy Bryo and a woman named Dolora. The implication is that Konnr somehow cannot use sex as an act of love as Bryo can, but instead perverts it into a show of power. See Audrey, 208  
127Audrey, 191  
128Audrey, 28

### III Making a Middling Man

Elizabeth Bentley, a former Soviet spy who defected to the FBI, wrote an autobiography that commented on her time with the Communist Party USA, giving the public a look into the daily workings of the Party. In her autobiography, *Out of Bondage*, she describes how the communists she knew used to discipline members of the Party who think for themselves. Party members who had made a mistakes would come before the Party and be verbally attacked by all the other members, who would critique their conduct and berate them for their failure. She explains to her readers how at first she thought this was a way for communists to show humility, but she then relates a more sinister purpose for the practice. Bentley argues that this process was used to “imbue him with a terrific sense of his own inadequacy, to make him so humble that he refuses to use his own powers of reason and relies confidently on the decisions of the Party.”<sup>129</sup> She says of a communist who goes through this process that he is left broken, “as if a shell of a man stood there.”<sup>130</sup>

Importantly, Bentley connects the subversion of an American to communism with a process that engenders conformity by punishing individualist free thinking. By identifying communism with this other-direction, she explains to her audience how communists broke down a man's identity, letting her readers know exactly how communists were a danger to individualism. The way she explains her actual encounters with communists shares much in common with how fictional accounts of portrayed communism. Cold War narratives of the

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<sup>129</sup>Bentley, 36

<sup>130</sup>Bentley, 60

period often gave the same judgment about communism that Bentley did: that communism subverts traditional masculinity.

Two films demonstrate a how Cold War narratives would show how communism emasculates a man by taking away his autonomy at work, and by doing so comment on the effeminizing effects of the modern workplace. The first, *Invasion USA*, is a film about what would happen if the Soviet Union started invading the United States. It details the invasion of the West Coast of the United States. During the invasion, atom bombs are dropped on cities and dams, blowing up or drowning helpless Americans. The film details the reactions, and eventual downfall, of four men and a woman who watch the events unfold over the television screen in a bar in New York. Each of them has a different reaction, and each of them have their lives taken from them in a different way by the Russian invasion.<sup>131</sup>

One of the men, a man named George, owns a tractor factory in San Francisco. Before the invasion, he had complained that the government was trying to force him to build tanks instead of tractors to help out with the war effort. George refused, because he could make more money with tractors than with tanks. But when the invasion starts, he immediately catches a plane home to San Francisco, hoping to start production on tanks to fight the communists before it is too late. However, when he arrives, he finds that the communists have already taken over. A small, balding, ugly man points a gun at him and orders George to make tanks for the Soviets instead. Courageously, George refuses, punches the man, and runs for the door. However, the communists shoot him as he tries to escape them, killing him.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup>*Invasion USA*. DVD. Directed by Alfred E. Green. 1952; Synapse Films, 2002

<sup>132</sup>*Invasion USA*.

What this sequence shows is how a man has his independence taken away from him in the workplace. George, before the communist invasion, fits idealized notions of individualistic masculinity in that he is an autonomous individual who owns his own business. Communists rob George of his autonomy: his only choice is to obey their orders or die. Under communist supervision, George must hand his business off to someone else and listen to their orders, in doing so loses his autonomy. George, as any individualist man should, does not agree to the communist's demands. But, his courageous resistance to them ends in his death, showing how a man cannot stand up to the conformist communists.

Notably, *Invasion USA!* recognizes a tension between the individualism required for manhood and getting along in the modern society. Importantly, the invasion is only possible because George refuses to build tanks for the government in the first place. George argues that he should not be beholden to the federal government, but he should have his own right to choose what his company will produce, because he thinks it infringes on his right to choose for himself. As the owner of a business, he should be autonomous and beholden to no one. But his unwillingness to listen to the government creates a worse alternative, as the communists strip away any autonomy he thought he had. The most obvious message this sequence provides seems to be a warning to its viewers to concede to the federal government lest communists take all of their rights away, but the message is more complicated than this.<sup>133</sup> The creators of *Invasion USA!* appear to know that George's pure individualism is bad for the modern society that needs individuals to cooperate with the group. *Invasion USA!* avoids confronting this tension by trying to show the fault of both total acquiescence and total autonomy. But as a result, it fails to offer a commentary on how much autonomy is

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<sup>133</sup>*Invasion USA.*



necessary for men to have, and thus seems to offer to the audience that autonomy is valued except when it conflicts with the American government.

*The Woman on Pier 13* (sometimes known by the title *I Married a Communist*) also presents a situation where a man is subverted by communists. This movie follows Frank Johnson, who, in his youth, was part of the Communist Party. He saw the error of his ways (he explains that he “graduated” from the Party) and moves to San Francisco so he can start a new life under the name Brad Collins. In his new life, he is very successful, and he marries a woman and becomes vice president of a shipping company. But, unfortunately for him, the communists find him and have plans for him.<sup>134</sup>

Brad's old communist superiors blackmail him by threatening to reveal his former communist affiliations to the company he works for and his wife. Afraid he would lose his job and his wife, Brad reluctantly follows their orders. The communists want him to disrupt a negotiation with the workers of his company, and he does so, ruining his career. In the end, becoming a stooge for the Party makes him lose both his wife and his job anyway after he is shot and killed by the communists.<sup>135</sup>

Again, as in George's case, we see an example of a autonomous individual, this time the vice president of a shipping company who has that autonomy stripped away from him by the Communist Party. In Frank's case, the film shows how his relationship with the communists strains his relationship with his wife. As he is forced to comply with the wishes of his communist superiors, he grows distant from his wife because he is afraid she will find out his secret. In the end, the film shows that his mistake was never trusting and confiding in

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134 *The Woman on Pier 13*. DVD. Directed by Robert Stevenson, 1950. RKO, 2006

135 *The Woman on Pier 13*. DVD. Directed by Robert Stevenson, 1950. RKO, 2006

his wife, who could have helped him find a solution to his dilemma. Instead, he dies in her arms, explaining that she married him too late, after he had already been tainted by communism and beyond help.

But the movie that shows most explicitly how communism sucks away a man's individuality, and his masculinity, is *Assignment Paris*. Released in 1952, *Assignment Paris* depicts the influence of communism very unsubtly. In this film, the main character, James Race, is a newspaperman sent to Budapest to track down an important story about Stalin and Tito. He goes there and is tortured by the communists until the newspaper company ransoms him from the communists to bring him back to safety. When he is returned they find him an expressionless robot due to his meeting with the communists.<sup>136</sup>

James Race, when we first see him, is the epitome of the individualist autonomous man. He is aggressive and stubborn, as the film shows by his refusal to leave an embassy in Budapest until he gets an interview despite the danger of being arrested. He is also forceful and charming when dealing with women. Upon meeting Moray, the strong-willed female reporter also in Budapest, he immediately asks her out. She refuses, but he responds to her refusal by showing up at her door with flowers and taking her out anyways. As a result of his aggressive pursuit of Moray, she eventually falls in love with him.<sup>137</sup>

Also important is his relationship with work. Race, as a journalist, is in a position that allows him to be pursuit of stories using his own individual drive and ambition, a work environment that seems perfectly suited to the performance of inner-directed masculinity. His relationship with his boss is also ideal for the individualist conception of masculinity: despite

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<sup>136</sup>*Assignment: Paris*. DVD. Directed by Robert Parrish, 1952, SPHE. 2011

<sup>137</sup>*Assignment: Paris*

having to work for someone else, he constantly questions his boss and is able to assert himself and make his own decisions rather than be forced to abide by his boss's choices. This is in direct contrast to the communists in the film, who never question the orders of their superiors, and follow a rigid hierarchy<sup>138</sup>

In Budapest however, when the communist authorities find out Race is getting too close to evidence for the story he's trying to write, they capture him and torture him. Their torture makes him unresponsive, and after being returned, he blankly stares ahead, not responding to the people around him, the complete antithesis of who he was before. Instead of responding to the woman he so aggressively wooed, he stands unresponsively as she tries to get him to remember her. Returned from the communists, James Race has been stripped of everything that makes him an individual and a man.<sup>139</sup>

In each of these cases men lose their autonomy, and in the case of Race, lose even their individuality. Whether it is a man's ability to be their own boss, to trust in their own decisions, or even to be an individual, communist domination would take it away from them. Communists themselves are constructed as an extreme version of the other-directed individual, and the danger posed by communism is that it takes strong willed, independent men and puts them in subservient positions.

#### IV "I Never Supposed..."

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138Assignment: Paris

139Interestingly, the film ends with Moray driving off with Race, and taking care of him in the back of the car, while other characters remark that with her touch, Race will eventually recover. This echoes the idea put forth by *All My Enemies*, that the domestic touch of a woman is enough to cure the dehumanizing and emasculating effects of communism.

One issue, the conflation of communists with homosexuals, is related to the construction of communists as other-directed individuals and requires more analysis. As can be seen through the way the red and lavender scares overlapped during this time period, often homosexuality and communism were conflated in the early 1950s.<sup>140</sup> However, despite the way the public conflated communists and homosexuals, it was uncommon for anticommunist books and films to make this connection. There are a few possible explanations for this. One reason this was the case was because of the limitations imposed by censors on the discussion of homosexuality. Until 1961, films were unable to make explicit reference to homosexuality without being censored.<sup>141</sup> Thus, if they did discuss the issue, films would often hint that a character was homosexual rather than state so outright. For instance, the characters Eve in *All About Eve* and Plato from *Rebel Without a Cause* were both implied to be homosexual through the actions they take in their respective movies without the films ever commenting on the fact.<sup>142</sup> In some cases actors might have chosen to portray a character as homosexual even though the script did not require the character to be homosexual. In Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*, for instance, Robert Walker played the character Bruno Anthony with the intention of playing him as gay. Because of censorship and the difficulties in ascribing authorial or actors' intentions to what may or may not be subtext, commenting on homosexuality in Cold War films is difficult.<sup>143</sup>

*My Son John* is an example of the difficulty in discovering depictions of homosexuality in anticommunist film. As scripted, the character of John is not homosexual.

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140David K Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1-2, 31

141 Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, (Harper Collins, 1987), 46

142 Russo, 94, 109

143Despite this, Vito Russo, in *The Celluloid Closet*, makes an important attempt to catalogue instances in film where homosexual themes are dwelt upon, whether implicitly or explicitly. For more information on this topic, see Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*.

The dialogue of the movie mentions multiple times that he has a girlfriend (one who is the root cause of his communism, no less).<sup>144</sup> However, Nora Sayre argues that the actor, Robert Walker, seems to play John with effeminate mannerisms, such as crossing his legs when sitting and talking in a stereotypically effeminate manner.<sup>145</sup> Whether or not this is true, or the actor's intention, there is also circumstantial evidence to suppose that the makers of *My Son John* intended this reading. For instance, the director of the film, Leo McCarey, according to Vito Russo had previously directed other films in which main characters had implied homosexual relationships.<sup>146</sup> As well, Russo argues that Robert Walker is echoing his performance as Bruno Anthony in *Strangers On a Train*.<sup>147</sup> All of this evidence is circumstantial, but does open up the possibility that *My Son John* was purposefully trying to link communism to homosexuality.

But because of the difficulty in outright discussing homosexuality, most Cold War films that depicted communists avoided dealing with any such relationship. Instead, if they did, they tended to hint towards a relationship between homosexuality and communism through the effeminacy of the communist characters. If John was meant to be homosexual, the fact was only made apparent by the way he was acted, which made any commentary on the relationship between communism and homosexuality, beyond the existence of such a link, extremely difficult. Moreover, whether or not the audience would have clued into these cues is hard to say, and thus how much to make of the possible subtext of *My Son John* is not certain.<sup>148</sup>

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144 *My Son John*

145 Nora Sayre, *Running Time: Films of the Cold War*. (New York: The Dial Press, 1982). Pg 96

146 Russo, 72-73

147 Russo, 99

148 Other examples of a effeminate communists can be found in the film *Pickup on South Street*, in which the main villain, Joey, is presented as neurotic and weak, and *Conspirator*, discussed previously. For a

However, books did not face nearly the same restrictions. Because paperback books were for the most part ignored by censors, lesbian and gay issues were able to be discussed in a much larger degree. For instance, Ann Aldrich's *We Walk Alone*, a paperback book written in 1955, is written as an expose of the lesbian lifestyle, and thus speaks candidly on such issues.<sup>149</sup> Despite this, though, there are a few occasions when homosexuality and communism are explicitly linked. This is because the way that the authors of Cold War narratives tried to depict communists was not entirely compatible with a one-to-one equivalence with homosexual individuals. The way that many of these Cold War narratives depict communists is to show how communists inappropriately direct their emotions away from women and instead towards the Party. Connecting communism to homosexuality only indirectly works towards this characterization: it shows that communists were not properly masculine because they did not focus themselves towards heterosexual outlets, but it fails to show how communists devote themselves instead just towards the Party.

Two examples that illustrate this are Mickey Spillane's *One Lonely Night* and Mary Borden's *Catspaw*. Both depict homosexuality not as a unique characteristic of communists but as an extension of the claim that communists do not feel emotions appropriately.

*One Lonely Night*, written in 1951 as part of a series of detective novels following Mike Hammer, tells the story of Hammer investigating a murder that soon gets him involved in investigating the Communist Party. In their first appearance, Spillane describes the communists by drawing attention to their gendered characteristics: "Coming toward me, a guy who looked like a girl and a girl who looked like a guy altered their course to join one

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discussion of how homosexuality and effeminacy became linked, see Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 4-15  
149Ann Aldrich, *We Walk Alone*, (New York: The Feminist Press, 2006 (Originally 1955))

group. The girl got right into things and the guy squealed with pleasure whenever she said something clever.”<sup>150</sup> Obviously, a “guy who looked like a girl” who “squealed with pleasure” was intended to indicate to the audience that communists were not paragons of masculinity, but Spillane takes this further. The communists are so unmotivated and directionless that Hammer is easily able to trick them into thinking that he's one of the heads of the Party. He notices that all of them are buying black coffee even though they dislike it, so he orders coffee with milk. This, being the code for a high ranking communist, makes all of the rest of the Party members immediately assume that Hammer is their leader. Mike Hammer remarks about how, due to their willingness to follow, the communists are idiots. He even notices how, since they suspect he is higher ranking than they, all he has to do is look at any of them for them to start working harder on whatever they are doing.<sup>151</sup> Here, in Hammer's first meeting with the communists, Spillane has already constructed them as other-directed by showing how they are focused not on their own beliefs, but rather on following whoever is in charge.

All of this characterization is needed for the way that Spillane shows the difference between Hammer and the actual communist leader. When Hammer shows interest in a woman named Ethel, she gets confused, and then this exchange occurs:

“But...you aren't...I never supposed...” [said Ethel]  
“That I might have a personal interest in a woman?” I finished.  
“Well, yes.”  
“I like women, sugar. I always have and always will.”  
For the first time she smiled a smile she meant. She said, “You aren't a bit like I thought you'd be. [...]The other... agent... he was so cold that he scared me.”<sup>152</sup>

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150Mickey Spillane.“One Lonely Night”. *The Mike Hammer Collection: Volume Two*. (New American Library, New York, 2001, First Published 1951) pg 29

151Spillane, 32-33

152Spillane, 38

Of course, Hammer has sex with her. But the implication of this scene is important, because it supposes that communist men, as a rule, aren't interested in women. Taken in context, however, it seems less suggestive that communists are homosexual but rather that they are simply not interested in sexual relationships. By showing that communists do not direct their desires to the appropriate outlets, Spillane can further emasculate them. The fact that they so easily accept him as the communist leader reveals that communists do not think for themselves, but rather defer to anyone who shows authority. Their dependence on pleasing authority figures paints communists as other-directed in the sense that they look to others for guidance rather than think for themselves.

The implication that they may be homosexual is an extension of this portrait of other-direction: by implying that communists aren't interested in women and are “cold,” Spillane is just writing a variant of the communist robot who does not feel the appropriate emotions a man needs to feel to be a man. This is only subtly different from other depictions that also make them unfeeling, but it serves the same purpose: to show that communists are not individuals who feel and think for themselves. Just like Konnr in *The Brotherhood of Fear*, who gave so much to the Party he never experienced love with a woman, Hugo in *All My Enemies* who “didn't feel the proper emotional responses to people,” or John in *My Son John* who did not believe in love, the depiction of communism and homosexuality in *One Lonely Night* is part of a greater project of showing that communists are more concerned with the Party and their work for the Party than they are with women.<sup>153</sup>

*Catspaw*, though more explicit in its implications of homosexuality, uses

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<sup>153</sup>Audrey, 285, Baron, 10, *My Son John*. VHS. Directed by Leo McCarey. 1952. Paramount Pictures



homosexuality to make the same point. *Catspaw* is about a communist named Alex, who is sent to spy on a man named Louis who is an important official in a country that is taken over by the communist party. Alex, it is suggested throughout the novel, is attracted to Louis. His mission, given by his Party superiors, is that Louis “must be flattered, [...] seduced and hoodwinked,” which invests Alex's mission with an erotic component from its outset.<sup>154</sup> But Alex betrays his own feelings for Louis explicitly when he explains, “I could feel the warmth in him [Louis] when I stood near him like that. It was as if there were a fire smoldering in his thin side; a glow you could warm your hands at. Often I had been tempted to touch him, put my hands on his side to feel the warmth. A hateful temptation, disgusting.”<sup>155</sup> Borden's implication, presented by how Alex has urges to touch Louis and to feel his warmth, is that Alex is unable to express his emotions appropriately. As a result, Alex is depicted not only as having improper sexual urges, but also as being unable to express his emotions towards a woman.

More complicated, though, is that Borden does not make Alex's feelings for Louis the only attraction he feels. Alex is shown to be infatuated as well with Louis's wife, Isobel. In one case, the book describes a dream Alex has of the city burning in revolution while he saves Isobel by carrying her in his arms away from the danger.<sup>156</sup> His obsession with Isobel becomes a key theme in the book, despite mentions of his urges towards men.

Despite how complicated Borden's portrayal of Alex's sexuality is, in the end his homosexuality, as in *One Lonely Night*, is used to show how Alex has trouble appropriately expressing his emotions towards the proper recipients. Borden, at three different points,

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154Borden, 7

155Borden, 21

156Borden, 139

shows examples of other communists who are not interested in women: a man named Grunbaum is “unaware of the existence of women,”<sup>157</sup> his friend Kubin “[doesn't] like girls,”<sup>158</sup> and, as for a man named Konitz, “if he had a bed somewhere and a wife or mistress, no one ever heard of it.”<sup>159</sup> Throughout *Catspaw*, communists do not relate to women as the heterosexual gender norms of the post-war United States would prescribe. They are emotionally deficient, and instead they put their emotions in the Party rather than in women as they should. Alex's homosexuality is just an extension of this: unable to properly express his feelings, he develops homosexual urges for Louis. Borden's depiction of Alex as homosexual is not a separate component of how she portrays Alex, but rather just an extension of how she understands communism.

*Catspaw* illustrates another reason that homosexuality and communism are sparingly linked in anticommunist novels. If an author depicts a communist as emotionally deficient, it becomes much more straightforward to show how the communist channels their emotions towards the Party than it is to show them channeling their emotions to the same sex. For a communist to feel feelings for the same sex, however, would be an example of them having inappropriate emotions, but not directed at the Party, which would not do as effective a job at highlighting that communists are too unhealthily devoted to the movement they are a part of. As a result, homosexuality serves as an extension of an idea already commonly used, that communists cannot express themselves emotionally, but it is not the most obvious expression of that idea. Thus, homosexuality is rarely explicitly used in these depictions, and when it is used, it is far more common to show communists who lack sexual desire rather than ones

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157Borden, 223

158Borden, 29

159Borden, 232

who instead have inappropriate sexual desire.<sup>160</sup>

Moreover, feminizing communists, as Spillane or the producers of *My Son John* did, can serve a similar purpose of making communists less masculine and other-directed (as women were often assumed to be) without having to directly hint at homosexuality.<sup>161</sup>

Though few productions linked homosexuality and communism, Cold War narratives would link effeminacy and communism often by depicting communists as other-directed. As a result, depictions of other-direction could serve the same purpose as a depiction of homosexuality might have.

## V Cold Warriors

By presenting communism as they do, early Cold War books and films created an implicit link between the effects of modern society and communism, thus highlighting the effects of modernity they disapproved of and further stigmatizing modernity by depicting communism as its logical end. Through shaping the dialogue about masculinity in this way, Cold War narratives used anticommunist themes to identify other-direction with the feminization of men in the modern society and open up discursive space for an alternative form of masculinity.

In confronting the problems of conformity in the modern American society, anticommunist Cold War narratives can be seen as part of a larger genre of films and books

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<sup>160</sup>Female homosexuality was a different situation. Since communists women, unlike men, are depicted as being unusually sexually voracious, and since bisexuality was commonly understood as being someone who was too interested in sex, this construction of women was more natural. See, for instance, Ann Aldrich, *We Walk Alone*, (New York: The Feminist Press, 2006 (Originally 1955)), pg 95-103 for a contemporary interpretation of female bisexuality.

<sup>161</sup>Cuordileone, 119

in the 1950s that try to resolve issues of masculinity. Peter Biskind, in *Seeing is Believing*, argues that films of the 1950s often pushed for the strength of the group over the individual. He points to the example of *Twelve Angry Men*, for instance, because *Twelve Angry Men* is an example of how group politics and peer pressure allow Henry Fonda's character to sway the group towards a reasonable verdict. He also argues that the lone private detective films of the forties dissolved away in the 50s, to be replaced by films like *Dragnet* that idealized the group of officers over the individual. Lastly, he points to the last of the private eye films, *Kiss Me Deadly*, which no longer glorifies the individualistic private eye but shows him as morally bankrupt and not fitting into society.<sup>162</sup> Biskind also argues that conservative films of the era would denigrate the community building of the 1950s. For instance, *High Noon* shows a deep disdain for consensus building, and conservative war films condemn the group consensus that liberal war films idealized.<sup>163</sup> What Biskind shows is that the discussion over individualism versus conformity in the films of the 1950s was a complex affair.

The films and books of the early Cold War that focus on anticommunist themes, because of the understanding of masculinity they present, side with other conservative films of the decade in condemning subservience to the group. In contrast to the other-directed communists, these narratives present the readers with a protagonist that embodies the ideals of individualism and autonomy. For instance, the protagonist in *I Killed Stalin*, Alexis Bodine, is a strong willed assassin, trained to work alone, completely independently to infiltrate the Soviet Union and assassinate Stalin.<sup>164</sup> As well, Boke Carey, the protagonist of *The Dangerous One*, is an ex-navy officer who became a professional treasure hunter who

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<sup>162</sup> Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 52-57

<sup>163</sup> Biskind, 46, 60-61

<sup>164</sup> Sterling, Noel. (1951) *I Killed Stalin*. Farrar, Straus and Young, New York.

always works alone.<sup>165</sup> Characters like Bodine and Carey are common in anticommunist Cold War productions, and serve as alternatives to the lack of masculinity presented by the communists they contrast.

*I Killed Stalin* and *The Dangerous One*, like many others, do not present any implication that this construction of masculinity is problematic; instead, both praise the ability of the protagonists to work on their own against the communist opposition. However, more interesting are those films and novels that recognize a tension between the individuality that they praise and the needs of modern American society. The films *Big Jim McLain*, *Pickup on South Street*, and the novel *One Lonely Night* all present narratives of the Cold War that also show some skepticism of individualistic masculinity.

The film *Big Jim McLain*, starring John Wayne as Jim McLain, is an uncomplicated portrayal of an individualist man confronting communists that, regardless, seems to recognize the limits of the usefulness of independence and autonomy. In *Big Jim McLain*, McLain and his partner Baxter are House Un-American Activities Committee Investigators who are sent to Hawaii in order to hunt down communists. They find a communist plot and, with the help of the police in Hawaii, are able to end the plot and save America.<sup>166</sup>

Jim McLain and his partner Baxter demonstrate the character of the ideal anticommunist man. Their job as investigators keeps them essentially in charge of their own actions; they have no superior on the island except the police chief, a man who defers to them rather than gives them orders. The film presents them as being nearly autonomous, giving them the power to do the job they think necessary (even showing them joking with each other

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165 Ames, Robert. (1954) *The Dangerous One*. Fawcett Publishing Inc, United States.

166 *Big Jim McClain*, VHS. Directed by Edward Ludwig, 1952. Warner Bros, 1991

as they unseriously listen in on a honeymooning couple's wedding night), but it never presents them as abusing that power. Rather, they use their position to cooperate with others, but still maintain their power and authority over the situation.<sup>167</sup>

To make the point as obvious as possible, physically the communists are heavily distinguished from McClain and Baxter. Both the HUAC investigators are over six feet tall and muscular. One woman, after finding out McLain is seventy six inches tall, nicknames him “76” because “that's a lot of man.”<sup>168</sup> On the other hand, the communists are all short and not particularly handsome (all but one of them are men, and the woman never speaks). Their leader is tall, but he is extremely tall, close to seven feet, and his suit seems to fit him badly and make him look awkward rather than strong like McLain. In the climax of the movie, where McLain finally confronts the communists, he towers over them as they try to goad him into hitting them. They want to accuse him of assault, but their cowardly tactics are thwarted by McLain's restraint. The implication is that while McLain is manly enough to fight them, they would hide behind the law rather than face him in the same way.<sup>169</sup>

Despite how the film idolizes the individualism that McLain represents, *Big Jim McLain* reflects a tension between the masculinity of the strong, powerful, assertive man, and the ability of a man to work with others in uncovering a communist plot. For instance, Baxter is shown to be too aggressive and assertive. He angrily complains to McLain that he would rather strangle communists with subpoenas rather than simply follow the due process of the law. This is because Baxter sees no difference between the communists he fought in Korea and the ones in America and sees the law as a shield for communists to hide behind, a shield

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167 *Big Jim McClain*

168 *Big Jim McClain*

169 *Big Jim McClain*

they did not have when he fought them with guns. Importantly, as a result of his hotheadedness, Baxter is so headstrong he goes to deal with the communists all by himself, leading to his death at their hands. Assertiveness and individualism are important traits, but individualism that conflicts with a man's ability to cooperate with the group, as in the case of Baxter, is dangerous. In Baxter's case, it got him killed.<sup>170</sup>

McLain, on the other hand, shows restraint, which allows him to work together with others to apprehend the communists. When he confronts them, they try to get him to hit them, because if he did they would be able to sue him for assault. Importantly, McLain does not hit them. Instead, he tells them that he “can't do it. Because you're too small. That's the difference between you people and us I guess. We don't hit the little guy.” Despite his anger at Baxter's death at their hands, McLain holds back because he needs to work with the rules and regulations of society in order to deal with the communists.<sup>171</sup>

Also important is how the film resolves the tension between individualism and the group. One way it does this is by contrasting the attitudes communists have towards authority with McLain's. For instance, McLain and Baxter, working with the police in Honolulu, work as a team. They question each other's orders, but rely on each other's expertise. As well, when McLain and Baxter try to get the local unions to help them locate communists, they ask for their help, instead of using their authority to coerce the unions as they could have. The communists, on the other hand, never question each others' orders. The leader gives orders, and the rest follow without disagreement. They do not give their personal opinion, nor are they asked for it. For instance, in the climactic scene where the communists try to force

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170 *Big Jim McClain*

171 *Big Jim McClain*

McLain to attack them, their leader comes up with the plan and simply commands them to be silent. None of them bother giving opinions about the merits of the plan but all stay completely silent, deferring to the authority of their leader. Authority to McLain is something to back up teamwork. To the communists, it is absolute.<sup>172</sup>

Thus, in order to resolve the tension between conformity and individualism, *Big Jim McLain* argues that it is necessary to compromise the loner aspects of the idealized nonconformist masculinity in order to function in the group. Either extreme is dangerous. Reckless individualism, as seen in Baxter's case, cannot cooperate with others and gets men like Baxter killed. However, unswerving loyalty to the group just makes men into spineless communists. The real man should aspire towards the middle, like McLain, and be able to show restraint and work with the group while at the same time still being able to assert individualism and initiative. Only by resisting either extreme can he fit into a modern society that values teamwork without also losing the individuality that makes him a man.

Although the film seems to endorse a compromise between groups and the individual, *Big Jim McLain* never presents any uneasiness with that compromise. But the film also reflects the belief that individuality, work, and autonomy cannot be a man's sole expression of selfhood. As a result, the film offers the family as a possible alternative expression of McLain's masculinity. Interspersed with the scenes about tracking the communists, *Big Jim McLain* also features disconnected scenes around a subplot involving McLain's budding romance with a woman named Nancy. Many scenes serve no other purpose but to show McLain and Nancy on dates together, and eventually begin to act like a married couple living

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<sup>172</sup> *Big Jim McClain*. This depiction of authority is also seen in *Assignment: Paris*. Here, the newspaper reporters constantly question the authority of their head editor, and he listens to them, and gets their opinions on matters. On the other hand, the communists act in a strict military discipline, and never question their leader.



in a house together.<sup>173</sup>

On first glance, this choice to feature such a disconnected romance plot is an odd one, but as in the case of *Red Menace's* domesticity, this use of his relationship with Nancy makes sense in context. In order to best contrast the communists who work only for the Party, having a disconnected romance for McLain allows the film to show how McLain is not defined entirely by his work, but also by his personal life. Moreover, featuring these scenes allows the film to present another way out of the tension between individualism and working in a group. By showing McLain's character as defined in part by his relationship to Nancy, the film opens up a possibility: that masculinity could be in part defined by a man's relationship to his wife.

*Big Jim McLain* compromised the ideal masculinity to fit the needs of a modern American who must work in a group and offered a vision of manhood partially defined by relationships to fill that compromise. Other productions, however, find this tension much more difficult to resolve.

*Pickup on South Street* is a crime film about a pickpocket, named Skip, who accidentally steals highly classified microfilm that communists were trying to smuggle out of the United States. Once stolen, the police and a woman named Candy (who had been tricked by her ex-boyfriend into helping the communists) both start hunting Skip in order to retrieve the microfilm. Candy falls in love with Skip, and Skip continues to refuse to help the police because he does not trust them. In the end though, Skip does the right thing by helping to catch the communists and gives the microfilm back to the United States government.<sup>174</sup>

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173 *Big Jim McClain*

174 *Pickup On South Street*, DVD. Directed by Samuel Fuller, 1953. Criterion, 2004

The same contraposition of the hero and communists found in *Big Jim McLain* is also found in *Pickup*. Skip is handsome, smart, and courageous, and Candy immediately falls for him even though he is a criminal. Skip listens to no one and lives alone by the waterfront in a small shack, independent of anyone but himself. Conversely, Joey, Candy's ex-boyfriend and a communist spy, is cowardly, nearly always anxious and sweating, and beholden to the communist leaders who order him to find the microfilm.<sup>175</sup>

Their relationship to authority is also quite different. Joey dares not question his superiors and becomes constantly worried during his quest to find the microfilm and please them, because he is afraid of their punishment. Skip, on the other, is an autonomous man free from any sort of authority figures. He lives on his own as a street grifter in a shack all by himself, which makes him accountable to no one. Much of the plot of the film has to do with the police trying to get Skip to cooperate with them and hand the microfilm over to them. Skip refuses to work with the police, purely on principle, at once idealizing the independent man who works with no one while also showing its impracticality. Skip is an extreme example of the individualist, and it is his individualism that sets him apart from Joey and the communists.<sup>176</sup>

However, the film is not unequivocal in its praise of Skip's lifestyle. Skip's refusal to work with the police and acknowledge their authority forces another main character, Moe, to protect him and as a result gets her killed. Candy, likewise, is seriously injured by Joey because Skip refuses to take action. The turning point for Skip comes when he acknowledges the need to work with other people, including the police, which allows him to take

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<sup>175</sup>*Pickup On South Street*. Also note that Joey exhibits extreme anxiety, linking him to the depictions of the anxious, fearful communism that Bentley and Budenz presented.

<sup>176</sup>*Pickup On South Street*

responsibility. He finally helps apprehend Joey and retrieve the microfilm to give to the police, trusting them and acknowledging the need to work together with others to protect against communists.

Through the way Skip is characterized, *Pickup on South Street* shows an uneasy relationship with individualism and autonomy. Skip is the protagonist and clearly the character the audience is supposed to relate to: unlike the good but essentially cliché cops, Skip is created as a complex character, one who is given character growth and depth by the script. He's also charismatic, and even Candy, who is supposed to be competing with him to get the microfilm, ends up falling in love with him. But at the same time, while the film has been constructed so that the audience's loyalties lie with Skip, the film also presents to the audience evidence of how his life of individualism is, in the end, unsustainable and dangerous. The film's solution is to depict Skip's loner qualities being overcome by his love for Candy. Importantly, he makes the change from complete loner to accepting responsibility because of Candy getting injured due to his negligence; when his autonomy puts a woman at risk, he must sacrifice one ideal of manhood in order to idealize another. The ending of the film confirms the message that Skip must temper his autonomy to continue to perform as a man when it implies that his relationship with Candy ensures that he will lead a reputable, normal life with her and allow him to fit into society. While the film praises his individualism, in the end, the better way for Skip to perform as a man is to give up his complete independence and start a relationship with Candy. As a result, *Pickup on South Street* reflects an acknowledgment of the tension between an individualist masculinity and American society, by demonstrating that individualist men cannot fully function in the

society. Like *Big Jim McLain*, the solution to this is a retreat from pure independence to a domestic relationship.<sup>177</sup>

But lastly, *One Lonely Night*, by Mickey Spillane, presents the most troubled acknowledgment of that tension. Mike Hammer, Spillane's protagonist, constantly worries about how he as an individualist man can fit into society and confronts the possibility that the individualism he represents is simply wrong.

Hammer is as nonconformist as they come: he works alone, he lies to the police because he hates the bureaucracy that they represent, and he does whatever he thinks is necessary to apprehend a criminal, including murder. Hammer listens to no one and is completely in control of his destiny.<sup>178</sup> However, *One Lonely Night* is not uncritical of Hammer. Instead, the novel grapples with the question that bothers Hammer: is he no worse than the criminals he fights because he acts as a vigilante? A judge thought so, and Hammer acts melancholically, wondering if he is part of the problem with society. Spillane makes sure the audience at least thinks of this as a possibility by having a woman jump off a bridge, afraid of Hammer, because she thinks him a monster.<sup>179</sup> And the question is important: how can Hammer, a man who works with no one, really be a model of how a man should act in society? Even the eventual solution to the dilemma is no help. Hammer realizes that he is “the evil that opposed other evil, leaving the good and the meek in the middle to live and inherit the earth.” Though his individualism and ruthlessness is bad, it is necessary to allow others to live regular lives.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup>*Pickup On South Street*

<sup>178</sup>A good example of his contempt for authority is present on pages 22-23 of *One Lonely Night*. See Mickey Spillane. “One Lonely Night”. *The Mike Hammer Collection: Volume Two*. (New American Library, New York, 2001, First Published 1951)

<sup>179</sup>Spillane, 11-12

<sup>180</sup>Mickey Spillane. “One Lonely Night”. *The Mike Hammer Collection: Volume Two*. (New York: New

This revelation puts Hammer's mind at ease, but it does not answer the question for the audience. If Hammer, the ultimate depiction of a nonconformist man, is a necessary evil, he is hardly a model for other men to aspire to. Is the correct way for a man to be in a society one of the “good and meek in the middle?” The message the book leaves the audience with is that, although individualism like Hammer's should be praised, it can hardly be a model for how all men should act. And if that is the case, then it leaves open the question: what model of masculinity should men follow?

As mentioned, not all Cold War narratives grappled with this tension. However, the anxieties these three productions present are important, because of how popular they were. *Big Jim McLain*, for instance, was a box office success, and was the twenty seventh highest grossing movie of the year, while *One Lonely Night* was one of the top ten best selling novels of the 1950s.<sup>181</sup> Though the individualism that other Cold War narratives modeled is also present in these productions, the fact that these were much more popular than others might be due to how these productions recognized this tension. The tension between the individualistic hero and the world he confronts might have resonated with the audiences more than more simple stories that unequivocally celebrated the individualistic man.

But regardless of their popularity, the point still stands that early Cold War books and films faced the idea of masculinity in modern society in very different ways, from the

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American Library, 2001, First Published 1951) pg 164  
181 Ron Briley, “John Wayne and Big Jim McLain (1952): The Duke’s Cold War Legacy,” *Film & History* 31, no. 1 (May2001): 28-33, 28, and Stephen J Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*. ( Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 34-35. Whitfield reports that *One Lonely Night* was the seventh best selling book of the decade, and the Mickey Spillane wrote six of those top ten, making him one of the most influential writers of the 1950s. It is also important to note that *Pickup on South Street*, the third production examined here for how it presents a complicated picture of individualism, was made by the well known director Sam Fuller, and was nominated for two academy awards. This is evidence to suppose that it as well was a popular film of the period.

uncomplicated praise of it in *I Killed Stalin*, to the worried non-answer given by *One Lonely Night*. But the most significant response was the one presented by *Big Jim McLain* and *Pickup On South Street*, in which the problem of individualism in modern society is acknowledged only to be resolved through suggesting masculine fulfillment through domesticity. In these depictions the link between the anticommunist allegiance to the family and their disgust with modern society becomes clear. If modern society will not allow men to properly perform the individualistic masculinity that anticommunists idealized, then the family is the alternative to the outside world.

Understanding this puts films and books featuring the family in better perspective. *My Son John*, for instance, makes the father's need to be taken seriously in the home important because to the anticommunist conception of masculinity the family was the only place left for manhood to be performed. As well, *Red Planet Mars*, by showing a husband in an active role in his family, demonstrates how this view of masculinity could look: Chris, through the way he takes care of his children and works with his wife, can perform as a man regardless of the effects of modern society. Moreover, the ending of *Assignment: Paris*, in which James Race is implied to be cured by Moray's domestic touch, and the implication in *The Woman on Pier 13* that Frank should have trusted his wife rather than fall into the communists clutches, both reinforce the message that masculinity was intricately connected to the domestic. Despite how they might look unrelated, early Cold War narratives that focus on the family and those that focus on masculinity are closely related: one shows the problems in the outside world, while the other shows the solution to be found in the family.

## VI Conclusion

As James Gilbert argues, in the 1950s, different cultural productions began to navigate the changing roles of men in the post-war society. In particular, Gilbert examines the television show *Ozzie and Harriet*. In this show, he shows how Ozzie represents a new type of masculine protagonist: one who spends no time outside the home or at work, thus, as Gilbert points out, “the very opposite of the inner directed individual.”<sup>182</sup> But the domestic world Ozzie inhabits is one that he wants to be in, one that he now, in the new economy, must become suited to and learn the rules of. The comedy of *Ozzie and Harriet* comes from Ozzie's inability to adjust to the new role in society that men must adjust to: one where men perform their masculinity not in the workplace, but as a father in the home.<sup>183</sup>

Many early Cold War narratives, surprisingly, use anticommunist language to present much the same messages as *Ozzie and Harriet*. Both productions recognize the problems facing individualist masculinity in the new post-war society that favored workplaces highlighting teamwork and submission rather than the individualism traditionally praised as masculine. As a result, together, *Ozzie and Harriet*, Cold War narratives, and other productions in society all tried to navigate the new role for men created by this change in economic structure. While anticommunist Cold War narratives are by no means monolithic, they all reflected an aversion to the other-direction that the modern world was perceived to create. Some, in a similar vein to *Ozzie and Harriet*, presented the argument that by necessity men now needed to retreat to the home, and tried to re-imagine masculinity as not just

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<sup>182</sup>Gilbert, 143

<sup>183</sup>Gilbert, 143

framed by independence and individualism in the workplace, but also as defined through a man's connection to his family or wife.

Women's gendered role, however, was much more strictly confined. We have already seen how women were praised as wives, but as single, independent women, anticommunist productions treated them much differently. By examining anticommunist materials that deal with women in the 1950s, we can see how women's sexuality was a key component of the 1950s conception of the Cold War, and how a woman's body was the key battlefield on which to fight communists.



## Chapter 4

### Sexual Battlefronts: Soviets and the Single Woman

#### I Introduction

As we have seen, early Cold War narratives that focused anticommunist themes contributed to post-war discourse over gender by creating a space for masculinity defined in part by a man's place in his family. To Americans who agreed with the critique these Cold War narratives provided, individualism was in decline, affecting men's ability to be independent, autonomous agents. These narratives, then, reflected a belief that the family was the last bastion of masculinity.

Early Cold War narratives that focused on communism also presented a commentary on modern society's effect on femininity and womanhood. The role that these narratives most focused on for women was the role of mother or wife. Lou from *My Son John*, Melinda from *Conspirator*, and Linda from *Red Planet Mars* are all examples of characters defined by their roles in the family and praised for fulfilling those roles. When Lou does whatever she can to investigate John's communism and eventually cure him of it, or when Melinda does what is right by trying to pull her husband away from his communist affiliations, they are fulfilling a gendered role for women that these Cold War narratives constructed as the proper role for women in the post-war United States.

The praise that mothers and wives receive in these productions is reminiscent of previous moments in American history where women's roles were defined through their

reproductive abilities. For instance, during the American Revolution, the ideal of republican motherhood praised women's roles in raising good democratic children.<sup>184</sup> Later, during World War One, an ideology of patriotic motherhood was constructed that defined women by their abilities to raise children for the war effort and to strengthen the nation's resolve.<sup>185</sup> Cold War books and films created a similar role for women. Women, according to this conception of gender, served a particular role as mothers and wives in the family: they raised children, kept them away from influences that might infect them with communism or homosexuality, and helped their husbands perform as men and avoid the emasculating effects of the modern workplace. It was a woman's duty to perform these tasks, and as long as she did so, she was praised. Early Cold War narratives present numerous strong female characters who exemplify the role of the strong wife and through the strength of that role repel the communist threat to their families.<sup>186</sup>

But the rejoinder to these conceptions of women was that other roles for women, such as ones independent from the family, were stigmatized. As a result, because single women challenged a family-centric view of American society by potentially offering a role for women outside of that family, anticommunist Cold War narratives focused on attacking this possible performance of femininity. The independence of single women threatened to destabilize the conception of the family that these narratives presented, and thus in order for a woman to be acceptable, her independence and her sexuality needed to be contained.

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<sup>184</sup>One elaboration of this role for women is given by Rosemarie Zagari in *Revolutionary Backlash*, (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 2007), 5

<sup>185</sup>Kathleen Kennedy, *Disloyal Mother and Scurrilous Citizens: Women and Subversion During World War I*. (Indiana University Press, 1999), 16

<sup>186</sup>For examples of wives being the virtuous defenders of America against communism, see *My Son John*. VHS. Directed by Leo McCarey. 1952. Paramount Pictures, *Red Planet Mars*. VHS. Directed by Harry Horner. 1952. MGM, 1998, and *Conspirator*. VHS. Directed by Victor Saville, 1950. MGM, 1998.

At the same time, however, depictions of women in Cold War narratives were more complicated than similar depictions of men. While depictions of men carried with them the assumption that men were always agents worthy of narrative focus, depictions of women, often being presented from a male viewpoint, often were used to comment on the male protagonists rather than on the woman herself, thus turning female characters into little more than props. Thus, Cold War narratives with anticommunist themes could construct women not only as people with agency, but also as objects to be acted upon by others.

When women are agents, they are condemned for their lack of sexual control. These depictions of women serve to attack what a perceived loosening of women's roles in the post-war United States. However, when women are treated as objects to be acted upon, the focus is less on them, and instead on the men who protect them and the communists who threatened to gain control of them. Because of the focus on women as objects, these characterizations also focus on the depravity of an outside "other," a communist who threatens to despoil or pervert American women. Despite this, even these depictions of women as objects indirectly commented on womanhood by showing how in fact women were powerless objects in need of male protection.

Together, both types of depictions reinforce the assumption that women's identities were defined by their sexuality and serve to attack loose or uncontrolled female sexuality. They also, however, have two more subtle consequences. First, these depictions reinforce a view of masculinity based around the family by constructing masculinity around a role of protector to good, virtuous women. By depicting men as emasculated by watching women be violated by communists, the narratives reflected a belief that masculinity was relational

defined by a man's relationship to a woman. Secondly, in order to draw distinctions between American women and communists or make scenes of the violation of women more alarming to audiences, sometimes these narratives would depict communist in racialized ways. In these cases, communists were defined as fundamentally, and racially, different from Americans, making their uncontrolled sexuality not only illicit but signs of their racial inferiority.

## II Dangers of Independence

Besides changing the nature of work, the events before and during World War II created the potential for a reconfiguration of the female role in American society. Lizabeth Cohen's analysis of the way a transformation to a consumerist society redefined women's roles is just one example of this. She shows how in the 1930s, the growing consumer protection movement created a space for female activism. As women were in charge of keeping their families safe from harmful things in their foods, lobbying for protections against companies selling dangerous goods created a political space for women to be independent outside the home.<sup>187</sup>

World War II, moreover, offered other ways for women to define themselves independent of domestic life. On the one hand, the idea of consumerism being linked to a woman's role became more pronounced as government propaganda linked victory in the war with women on the home front obeying price control policies. These sorts of messages helped create a political role for women, equating their roles outside the family with victory on the homefront.<sup>188</sup> But more importantly than that, World War II created a need for women

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<sup>187</sup>Cohen, 36

<sup>188</sup>Cohen, 62

to enter the workforce. This transition created the possibility of an independent female role in American society, one in which women could work jobs outside of the traditional caregiver roles they were normally pushed towards.<sup>189</sup>

Elaine Tyler May argues that changes like this could have heralded an alternative female role in the post-war society, but instead a gendered system of containment was adopted. Cohen further argues that this independent role for women was diminished in part by government tax codes and the GI bill, which were indirectly prejudiced against women being in the workforce.<sup>190</sup> She also finds that women voluntarily withdrew from political activism following the war instead of embracing this role.<sup>191</sup> Instead of the 40s creating a widening of possible female roles, the promises it created were pushed to the sideline.

Regardless, the independence of women, and women's sexuality, were both traits viewed negatively during the war, and this view just became magnified following its end. Marilyn Haggerty has shown how, during World War II, there was an ambivalence concerning women's roles in the war effort. On the one hand, women were supposed to be sexually available for troops, but on the other hand, women were viewed with suspicion for being promiscuous, and their promiscuity was said to be a sign of venereal diseases.<sup>192</sup> But following the war, promiscuity and female independence were both seen to be unequivocally dangerous. Strength and independence were no longer idealized in films, and popular culture instead replaced independent film characters with housewives. Moreover, experts continued to caution soldiers returning from the war to avoid loose women, because they worried that

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<sup>189</sup>May, 87

<sup>190</sup>May, 87-88, Cohen, 141-142

<sup>191</sup>Cohen, 135-136

<sup>192</sup> Marilyn Haggerty, "Patriot or Prostitute? Sexual Discourses, Print Media, and American Women during World War II," *Journal of Women's History*, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1998: 111-136. 112-113

strong, promiscuous women would sexually prey on men. As a result, it showed that women needed to be domestic and submissive in order to also curb their sexuality.<sup>193</sup>

Moreover, female identity became identified with a woman's ability to curb her sexual desire. May argues that through the fifties Americans placed the duty of controlling sexual activity on women and it was up to them to prevent premarital sex. She argues that a woman's reputation was closely linked to her sexual behavior, making this duty more important for a woman than for a man. A “good” woman would abstain from pre-marital sexual contact, while a “bad” woman would freely engage in sexual activities. If a woman was seen to be “loose,” men, including men with whom she engaged in sexual activity, might treat her badly or not respect her since she was “disgraced.” As a result, the pressure in society was on women to control both theirs and men's sexual activity, with the person hurt by a failure to control it being the woman herself.<sup>194</sup>

Alongside this cultural demonization of female sexuality was the changing social trend that may have motivated it. According to Alan Petigny, the rate of single motherhood doubled between the years 1940 and 1953, indicating a sharp rise in premarital sex.<sup>195</sup>

Though Petigny admits that it is very difficult to get accurate numbers on sexual practices, he

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193May, 68-69, 86. Donna Penn's research into depictions of lesbianism in the post-war United States also illustrates how, following World War II, female sexual desire and promiscuity were stigmatized and attacked. She argues that depictions of lesbians in books and films of the 1950s constructed the image of a lesbian as a woman run entirely by sexual desire. Because lesbianism was considered deviant by the post-war society, these sorts of depictions also helped define sexual desire in women as also deviant. Because of how these depictions linked the two, audiences could come to see sexual desire as a sign of lesbianism, and thus condemn it as deviant for the same reasons they were uncomfortable with lesbianism. This served to circumscribe the allowable forms of female sexuality were permitted by society at large by tying female desire to certain impermissible behaviors. By linking incorrect female behavior to sexual deviancy, mothers and homemakers could than be defined in relief to sexual desire, and help create an image of safe and appropriate sexuality. See Donna Penn, “The Sexualized Woman: The Lesbian, the Prostitute, and the Containment of Female Sexuality in Postwar America”, *Not June Cleaver*. Ed. Joanne Meyerowitz. (Temple University Press, 1994), 359-360

194May, 116-117

195Petigny, 122

argues that this was a trend starting in the 1940s to the 1950s and showed how sexual behaviors were changing, even if norms were not. The difference between this trend and later, more visible trends, was that sexual activity was kept discreet in this period, and young people that were having sex were keeping it quiet even while condemning the practice.

Petigny blames this change in sexual practices on two causes. First, he argues that the changes during World War II that gave women more independence also created more chances for young women to engage in pre-marital sex, and that despite the tightening of social controls on this following the war, the practice continued. But his main argument is that culturally, psychologists, who had taken a center role in American culture, had begun to argue that sexual inhibition created anxiety and stress. Theodore Adorno, the same theorist whose ideas concerning masculinity had been echoed by anticommunist Cold War narratives, was also one of a group of theorists who argued for a loosening of sexual practices to relieve social anxiety. Petigny argues that with the increasingly cultural power of psychology in the 1950s, views such as Adorno's contributed to a society that was increasingly engaging in more sexual activity.<sup>196</sup>

Whether or not this explanation is correct, the end result was that, following the war, female promiscuity may have appeared to some to be out of control. Not only was there the fear that previously independent women may be able to rival men in the workforce, but also the fear that women's sexuality may have been out of control. Moreover, as Petigny shows, sexual activity in unmarried women was on the rise in the society. All of these factors combined could have created an environment worrying to Americans who viewed female promiscuity as a threat to established gender roles.

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<sup>196</sup>Petigny, 132-133

In particular, it would be threatening to a construction of gender that equated masculine and feminine roles with the family. Promiscuity, and the connected concept of independence for women, offered alternative roles for women, in that they there existed a space outside of marriage for women to construct their identities. Moreover, powerful women offered a danger to the conception of manhood provided by Cold War narratives, because they threatened to take away a man's autonomy. If a women could use her sexuality outside of the control of a man, there was the possibility that she could control a man and make him subservient to another.

And so, in response to this, Cold War narratives centered around communism provided a reactionary message to these changes in American society, one that depicted loose women as connected to communism. These depictions, along with others, also served to reinforce that a woman's identity was defined by her sexuality. Defining women by this characterization helped create a black and white contrast between “good” women and “bad.”

It is also important to note how much these depictions owe themselves to earlier forms of American antiradicalism. For instance, Kathleen Kennedy, in *Disloyal Mothers and Scurrilous Citizens* shows how, in World War I, the notion of patriotic motherhood developed. This notion was that women should devote themselves to raising children for the war effort and that they should support the war effort through their political participation. On the other hand, pacifism and objections to the war effort were connected to “sexual degeneracy and gender perversion.” Women who challenged this particular characterization of motherhood were seen as subversive, with the power to up-end the system. As in early Cold War narratives, this characterization of women as patriotic mothers also defines a



woman's identity in part through her sexuality, making the implicit assumption that if that sexuality is controlled and focused around a goal that promotes the war effort it is safe, but if it opposes the war effort it is dangerous.<sup>197</sup>

The construction of women and their roles found in anticommunist Cold War narratives shares much continuity with the antiradicalism of the 1910s. Like the ideal of patriotic motherhood, Cold War books and films depicted motherhood as the proper role of women and argued that proper mothers and wives would not only be morally strong enough to stand up to the threat of communism but also able to properly raise their children to repel communism. And, in both constructions of womanhood, those who did not fit into the role of motherhood were condemned for their dangerous uncontrolled sexuality.

However, when Cold War narratives made use of anticommunist language to present critiques of promiscuity, these attacks were uniquely part of the early Cold War. In these productions, promiscuity was not just a sign of uncontrolled female sexuality but rather subverted female sexuality. These Cold War narratives connected sexual desire in women to communism and made the sexuality of a woman dangerous because it could also bring men into the communist fold. By linking female sexuality with subversion it gained political significance in a way similar but distinct from the characterization in World War I: loose sexuality made it possible for communism to intrude upon American life in a way that equated any form of female sexuality outside of marriage with an outside force that threatened the United States.<sup>198</sup> While disloyal mothers in World War I were perceived as dangerous because they threaten to weaken the resolve of Americans, sexually promiscuous

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<sup>197</sup>Kennedy, 11

<sup>198</sup>See Michael Rogin, 68, for a similar interpretation of the uniqueness of anticommunism in regards to antiradicalism in general.

women in the Cold War presented the danger that Americans would be subverted by the outside forces threatening the family. Conversely, good mothers and wives were America's best hope of repelling that same menace.

### III Women as Agents: Duty to the Party

But if good mothers and wives can repel the communist menace, single women represented an uncontrolled threat that might subvert Americans. Cold War films and books that depict communist women often focus on them as sexual creatures, connecting sexual voraciousness with communism.

The book *Pattern For Panic*, written in 1954 by Richard Prather, is a case in point. In the book, the protagonist, Cliff Morgan, is confronted by two women in particular. One of which is the dainty innocent girl, Buff, while the other is the experienced woman Monique. Prather explains the difference between the two women by writing that Morgan “thought of Buff as 'light,' and Monique as 'dark.' [Monique] was warmth, heat, fire. She just plain looked hotter than hell.”<sup>199</sup> As it turns out, the “hot” Monique was sexually voracious, and has sex with Morgan. Notably, this description of Monique, combined with her willingness to have sex, was a hint of her actual nature, one that readers of paperbacks would have seen repeated in multiple contexts and may therefore have been familiar with. He indicates with this description that she was a sexually promiscuous woman, and when it turns out she having sex with Morgan as part of a mission, it should surprise no one that it turns out she was a

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<sup>199</sup>Prather, 15-16

communist spy.<sup>200</sup>

This is one of many examples of a production that links communism to a woman's voracious sexual appetite. Notably, the descriptors of promiscuity, “fire,” “heat,” and “hotter than hell,” indicate to the audience not only that she was sexually promiscuous, but also that she was a dangerous woman. When it turns out her sexuality is linked to the Party, these descriptors make even more sense: an audience may have been able to make a connection between her sexually immorality and her membership in the Party. As we look at more examples of promiscuity in Cold War narratives, this connection happens again and again: either a sexually voracious woman is being used by the Party, or a Party member turns out to be sexually voracious.

Monique, by sleeping with Morgan, is performing an act for the Party. Her sexuality is being used as a weapon for the good of the Party; in this case, to spy on Morgan. One implication of this is how Monique, as a character, is not actually in charge of her sexuality, but rather it is under the control of her communist superiors. Monique, in her ability to help Morgan chase after the enemy he is seeking along with her aggressive demeanor, is depicted throughout the book as an independent woman. But Prather shows that the independence of a woman who has given control of her sexuality to another is just an illusion. Monique is not independent or autonomous: she is just a pawn of the communists.

The film *Red Menace* also elaborates on these same themes. *Red Menace*, produced in 1949, is a film that follows Bill Jones, an ex-GI who got scammed by a real estate agency out of his GI loan. Because the government does nothing to protect GIs from such scams, he begins to blame the government for his problems. Communists take advantage of his anger to

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<sup>200</sup>Prather, 171

pull him into the Communist Party.<sup>201</sup>

One example of how women's sexuality is subverted for use by the Party comes from the example of the woman Nina. Nina is good-looking and works as a teacher for the Communist Party, teaching people communist doctrine. Bill goes to the school she teaches at due to her looks, but, as it turns out, she only teaches the first lessons to entice people to come. After that, an ugly, balding party member teaches the rest of the lessons. Nina's good looks are used by the Party to entice men, but they are nothing but a false promise: once she has lured men into the Communist Party, her job is over.<sup>202</sup>

But a more explicit example is that of Molly, one of the first communists Bill meets after becoming angry at the government for losing his pension. He meets her in a bar where she explains how the Communist Party believes the same way that he does, introducing him to communism as he goes on a date with her. The film focuses specifically on how Molly uses her sexual allure to entice Bill so that he will listen to communist rhetoric. In one particular scene, where she has invited him to her apartment, he explains to her, "I always heard that commies peddle bunk. I didn't know they came as cute as you."<sup>203</sup> She uses this to her advantage. Molly kisses Bill, and then when he leans in for another kiss, she hands him instead a copy of *Das Kapital*. However, the point of that scene is not that she holds back from Bill, but that in the end, she uses her sexuality to entice him further. When she hands him the book, he shrugs her off, complaining that she should give him more than that. She relents, and they kiss, and the scene ends suggesting they have sex together.<sup>204</sup>

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201 *Red Menace*. Videocassette. Directed by RG Springsteen. 1949. Republic Pictures, 1998

202 *Red Menace*

203 *Red Menace*.

204 *Red Menace*. This scene, commented on by both Nora Sayre and Glen Johnson, is often misinterpreted. Sayre uses this scene to show how heavy handed the communists are portrayed. However, in the actual scene, handing Bill *Das Kapital* is not at all the focus of the scene, but instead it's his sleeping with her at the end. See

But the consequences of Molly's promiscuous sexuality are implied later in the film. Later scenes imply that Molly's job for the Party is to sleep with new recruits, luring them in with her dangerous sexuality in order to subvert them. She has no power over the use of her sexuality: the Party, as in the case of Monique, have turned it into a tool to be used for the good of the Party instead of something that she, as a woman, has control over. In effect, by taking away her control of her own sexuality, communists have stripped her of her identity as a woman.

The full effects of this, however, are seen through how her actions affect her boyfriend, Harry. Harry urges her to be not to sleep with men for the Party, but the Party has usurped his role in helping protect her sexuality, and he cannot oppose the Party in making Molly have sex. The implication is clear: the promiscuity that communism creates makes it impossible for a woman to have a correct relationship to a man. But it also emasculates Harry by taking his role away. When this, among other things, leads Harry to commit suicide, it shows how the communist theft of Molly's sexuality hurts not only her but also the man she is romantically involved with.

Early Cold War narratives often assumed that women were required by the Party to have sex for the Party. For instance, a Party member named Ethel has sex with Mike Hammer in *One Lonely Night* when she thought he was a senior Party member, and therefore she thought she was doing her duty, while another woman, Linda, has sex with him because she “tr[ies] to do anything [she] can for the party,” as she tells Hammer.<sup>205</sup> Whether they are trying to recruit new communists or just trying to please high ranking communists, women's

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Nora Sayre, *Running Time: Films of the Cold War*. (New York: The Dial Press, 1982), 84, and Glen Johnson, (Spring 1980) “Sharper than an Irish Serpent’s Tooth: Leo McCarey’s *My Son John*,” *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 8, no. 1, 44-49.

<sup>205</sup>Spillane, 61, 80, 88

sexuality is used by the Party for its own purposes.<sup>206</sup>

In examples such as these, the line between promiscuity and communism blurs even further. In the service of the Communist Party, women explicitly become prostitutes as their control over their own sexuality is subsumed to the will of the Party. Rather than being able to control their own sexuality, and thus negotiate the line between “good” and “bad” women, communist women are forced to assume a role of loose sexuality, taking away the important feminine ability to guard her sexuality. In order to be a communist, a woman loses what makes her a woman.

This also has the effect of emasculating men by taking power away from them. Unleashed, the power of women's sexuality is enough to control men, and thus, using this power, the Party can also gain control of them. Bill, in *Red Menace*, cannot resist the power of Nina and Molly's sexual lures and joins the Party because of their power over him. Moreover, the power of women's sexuality emasculates men by making them weak.<sup>207</sup>

These depictions of female sexuality serve to demonize any expression of sexuality that deviates from maternal gender roles. By blurring the line between promiscuity and

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<sup>206</sup>Elizabeth Bentley, in her autobiography, also describes scenes that betray an assumption that this is how communist women act. For instance, Bentley mentions a Russian communist, Mrs. Glazer, who is suspected as being homosexual but also taking an unnatural interest in sex. Glazer explains, for instance, that women working for the Party in Europe “often had to perform unpleasant tasks and had to do a lot of drinking and sleep with many men,” and Bentley describes how she was sickened by Glazer's “obvious relish” in talking about these duties Party members had to perform. Important to note is that Bentley can show with this event how normal it is for communists to use sex for the good of the Party. By having Glazer, a woman who is sexually transgressive herself, explain about the misuse of female sexuality elsewhere, it reinforces how female communists have their sexual identities perverted by their affiliation with the Party.

Bentley also relates how her lover, Jacob Golos, explains that the Party has been trying to use her friend, Mary Price, for sexual purposes in the United States. He explains to her how she could fit the uses the communists have for her, because she is “attractive and single.” As a result, they planned to “set her up in an apartment, buy her fancy clothes, and let her use her wiles on men who would be useful to the cause.” Though Golos complained to his superiors that they could have just hired a prostitute instead, making Mary into a prostitute was preferable to them. See Elizabeth Bentley, *Out of Bondage: The Story of Elizabeth Bentley*. (The Devin-Adair Company, New York, 1951). Pg 47, 198

<sup>207</sup>*Red Menace*.

communism, these narratives could present any attack on communism as implicitly also an attack on promiscuity. This link between communism, an unacceptable form of expression in the Cold War United States, and any form of nonnormative expression of female sexuality implied that these forms of female sexuality were just as unacceptable. Thus, in the discourse these Cold War narratives played a part in, viable forms of female sexuality were constricted, and thus the acceptable gendered roles women could play in society were limited. By making only a very specific type of sexual behavior acceptable for women, these depictions also reinforced that a woman's gendered identity was based upon her sexual conduct.

Almost as common as these depictions that show women exercising their sexuality as part of their duty to the party were depictions of women whose sexual desire and lust was a part of their communism. These depictions were not only able to serve the same purpose of conflating communism and female promiscuity, but they could also demonize uncontrolled female sexuality. Showing how sexual desire transforms a woman into a communist reinforces the unacceptability of female sexual desire and reinforces the importance of controlled female sexuality.

*I Killed Stalin*, written by Noel Sterling in 1951, draws the link between sexual voraciousness and communism directly through the depictions of the female characters created by Sterling. *I Killed Stalin* is about Alexis Bodine, a spy sent on a mission in the near future to kill Stalin where other have failed. As part of his mission he poses as a communist to get close to Stalin, until he can kill him, setting off nuclear missile launches but ending the Cold War. *I Killed Stalin* is an important anticommunist piece of literature because it shows the connection between communism, sexual lust, and the dangers it could pose to both

women and men's identities.

The way that Sterling characterizes communists is notable for how he depicts Russian communists as sexually promiscuous. Once in Russia, every woman Bodine meets has an uncontrolled sexual appetite. Even a minor character, a secretary named Greta, is only in passing described as “bilingual, bisexual, and monominded.”<sup>208</sup>

However, the character of Rita Barstow is the best example of the link between communism and promiscuity. Rita is described by Sterling as a beautiful woman who used to work night clubs before she became a communist. The author links communism to the same sexual implications of the night clubs by explaining it was a shame she threw away her talents “into the gutter for the cheap little thrills that communism offered up as lure.”<sup>209</sup> Significantly, the “cheap thrills” (which Sterling uses as a euphemism for sexual opportunities) of being a communist are more alluring to Rita than what she could experience in even the sexualized atmosphere of a night club. To Rita, the lure of being a communist is its ability to satisfy her sexual desire, and, as this comment suggests, communism and sexual desire are deeply linked. As Bodine points out, Rita “is constantly on the make for every presentable man she sees,” and being a communist allows her to have sex with all of them.<sup>210</sup>

Rita is defined as a woman by her sexual desire, and when Bodine refuses her, it “was an affront to the core of her womanhood.”<sup>211</sup> This is a perversion of the idea in postwar America, as shown by May, that a woman's reputation was based upon her sexual chastity. Instead, for a voracious communist, the exact opposite is true. Rita feels that she is less of a woman because she was not able to seduce Bodine.

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208 Noel Sterling, *I Killed Stalin*. Farrar, (Straus and Young, New York, 1951), 131

209 Sterling, 114

210 Sterling, 117

211 Sterling, 117



Sterling implies it is her uncontrolled sexuality that in fact makes Rita less of a woman. Alexis Bodine does not sleep with her not because he is aware of the danger of having sex with a communist, but instead because he feels that for “all of her dripping sex, this Rita Barstow had as much effect on me as fat ladies' night in a turkish bath.”<sup>212</sup> Through Bodine's statement, Sterling implies that Sterling finds Rita unattractive, possibly because of the promiscuity that is her main character trait. To Sterling, and to the readers that were receptive to his message, women like Rita may have been appropriate targets of derision precisely because of this transgression of appropriate female behavior. Thus, Sterling depicts women without the ability to control their sexual desires as though they are no longer appropriate sexual objects, and in doing so, Sterling's depictions defeminize them. And, because her communism is tied to her promiscuity, what makes Rita into a communist is the same aspect of her that makes her less feminine.

Hand in hand with a voracious sexual appetite were also those women who became sexually frustrated. For instance, in *The Woman on Pier 13*, the main character, Frank, is blackmailed back into the Party after escaping from it when he was younger. But the communists entrap him back into the Party not simply because they need him. Instead, the reason they turn their eye to him is because his old communist girlfriend, Kristine, wants him back and hopes that forcing him into the Party will take him away from his wife and back to her. Here, the idea of communist entrapment is linked not just to blackmail, but also to sexually frustrated women.<sup>213</sup>

*The Red Menace*, however, gives the best example of the archetype of the frustrated

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<sup>212</sup>Sterling, 119

<sup>213</sup>*The Woman on Pier 13*. DVD. Directed by Robert Stevenson, 1950. RKO, 2006

female communist in the character of Yvonne. Yvonne is an aggressive, loud, masculinized woman (she dresses in masculine suits) who outspokenly tries to dominate others. Both her clothing and her personality serve to masculinize her by linking her to traditional masculine traits. In the first scene in which she appears, she herself tries to make a pass at Bill, only for him to go home with Molly instead.<sup>214</sup> She complains, despite her own sexual proclivities, about Party members having romantic entanglements and wants to condemn Nina, the communist schoolteacher, for going out on dates with Bill. This prompts one of the other communists to quip to her, “we can't object to a little romance now and then. In fact, I'd recommend it for some other party members. It might calm them down a little.”<sup>215</sup> Here, the implication is clear that he is accusing Yvonne of being aggressive (and thus masculinized) by the fact that she does not have a man. Her communism and her sexual frustration are clearly linked, as is her inability to be a feminine woman.<sup>216</sup>

Again, in both these cases, communism and sexual appetite are linked, and women who cannot control their sexuality or have such sexual needs that they are frustrated end up being part of the Party. Unlike men, who are stripped of something by their relationship with the Party, most notably their individualism and their autonomy, women, if anything, are transformed by the Party into promiscuous, loose women (or became Party members due to already being promiscuous). While men were emasculated by being put under someone else's power, women were defeminized by what communism caused them to do.

Cold War narratives concerning communism focus on this uncontrollable sexuality as the key trait of deviant, communist women. The frustrated and voracious female communists

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<sup>214</sup>*Red Menace*

<sup>215</sup>*Red Menace*

<sup>216</sup>*Red Menace*

fail to display enough restraint to properly perform as women, while the communists who become prostitutes have their ability to dissent taken away from them. In either case, a woman is no longer in control of herself, but under the control of her urges, or of someone else entirely. In the context of the 1950s, in which some Americans may have found female independence worrying, Cold War narratives could focus on how independent women were not really in control of themselves, but had their control stripped away by someone else. Thus, like earlier American cases of attacking women, they depicted women who they found dangerous as not in control of themselves and thus in need of male supervision.

Moreover, by showing the danger of female sexuality, Cold War narratives could present uncontrolled female sexuality as a dangerous weapon that needed to be contained. By constructing female sexual expression as a tool for communists to use, it stigmatized any expression of female sexuality, and thus tried to limit any possible expression of female independence and sexuality that was not contained by the family.

#### IV Women as Objects: Communists and Sexual Violence

These depictions we have analyzed, however, only constitute one type of the constructions of women in anticommunist literature. These depictions were partially centered around women's identities. By reinforcing the link between promiscuity and communism, Cold War narratives were produced messages that had the effect of vilifying certain female behavior and offering alternatives. These messages betrayed anxieties about women's conduct in the modern society, arguing that the perceived (and actual) rise in female sexuality

was dangerous and should be curbed.

But a second type of depiction of women, distinct but one that shared similar assumptions about women, failed to be about women at all. These were depictions where women are brutalized by communist aggressors. A common theme, especially in paperback anticommunist literature, sexual violence to women served a number of purposes. First, it reinforced the same construction of female identity that other depictions of women reinforced: that women were defined by their sexual conduct. By making the main way a communist damages Americans sexual violence, it assumes that women were no more than their sexuality.

But these depictions, more significantly, comment on the role of men. By showing a woman violated by a communist, the production shows how communists can exert power over a woman who should be an American man's property. In doing this, the American protagonist is emasculated, and the construction of masculinity as defined through being in a relationship with a woman is strengthened.<sup>217</sup> Moreover, the idea that women are someone's property is not challenged: the problem is that women have been appropriated by the wrong group, and it is up to the American hero to reappropriate his woman to regain his masculinity and restore her femininity.

Three novels best show this depiction of women. In *Pattern for Panic*, *The Dangerous One*, and *One Lonely Night*, there is a repeated theme of sexualized violence done to women by communist men, and by analyzing these productions, we can understand how anticommunism used women's bodies in order to elaborate fears of emasculation and fears of

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<sup>217</sup>One obvious example of this construction of masculinity already mentioned is how Hugo is “half a man” without the love of Jo in *All My Enemies*.

an other.

*Pattern for Panic*, a paperback written in 1954 by Richard Prather, is one example of a depiction of communism that revolves around sadism towards women. *Pattern for Panic* is set in Mexico, where communists have kidnapped the American scientist Doctor Buffington and have tried to force him to create a deadly poison that they can use for their schemes. Cliff Morgan, a detective on the trail of a related blackmail case, works to save Doctor Buffington and his daughter, the beautiful but dainty girl who goes by the nickname “Buff.” In the process of rescuing Buff and her father, Morgan is chased by brutal, perverted communist men at the same time as being propositioned for sex from nearly every woman he meets.<sup>218</sup> In the end, the trail leads him to the leader of the communists, a man named Villamantes, also known as the Culebra, or “The Snake.”<sup>219</sup>

Unlike depictions of communists that stress the emotionless robotic aspect of communists, Villamantes is passionate.<sup>220</sup> Prather describes Villamantes as a “sadistic sonofabitch.” He is shown to be extremely emotional, sexual, and afraid of no one. The first time Morgan sees him, Morgan finds him at a party with naked prostitutes, and Villamantes squeezes one woman's breast so hard he leaves a bruise. Later, the novel explains that he derives sexual pleasure from hurting people. He also has a gruesome assortment of possessions in his house, including a picture of a nude woman mutilated on a cross. As if to make sure the readers understood the depth of Villamantes' depravity, Prather also mentions

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<sup>218</sup>The one woman that does not proposition him was a maid who he only briefly talked to over the phone and never met in person. However, Buff, the communist spy Monique, the rich Russian woman he was hired by, at least one prostitute, and a woman who sells cigarettes all try to have sex with him at some point in the novel.

<sup>219</sup>Richard Prather, *Pattern for Panic*. (Abelard-Schulman, Inc. New York, 1954)

<sup>220</sup>Cases like Villamantes are rare, and tend to be in cases where the communists are presented in racialized ways. Moreover, they are usually restricted to paperback books that feature these scenes of sexual violence. See further in this chapter for analysis of communists as racialized others.

how the communist tortures people with snakes.<sup>221</sup>

Nothing about Villamantes has anything to do with being a communist, and if he were not named as one, he would not stand out as different from any other villain. Instead, Villamantes' communism seems to be signaled by his sexual depravity. In fact, Villamantes' blackmail of a general's wife by using pornographic pictures of her is described as “an old communist trick.”<sup>222</sup> But by showing him to be sexually perverse, *Pattern for Panic* is able to show the reader how communism violates virtuous American women. The pinching of a prostitute is the first depiction of Villamantes as a sexual pervert, but Villamantes' torture of Buff is the most effective means of showing this violation. After being rescued from his lair, Buff relates a story of how she was abused by Villamantes. He tortured Buff by having his henchmen strip her naked and whip her, while he watched the scene. Prather hints at the erotic nature of the scene by explaining how Buff remembers the experience: she relates that she “never saw such an expression on a man's face before.”<sup>223</sup> In torturing Buff, Villamantes gets as near as possible to sexually violating Buff without an explicit description of rape.

This is heightened by the fact that Buff is, as May explained, a “good” woman. Though Cliff Morgan has, or nearly has, sex with just about every other woman, Morgan turns down sex with Buff, not wanting to spoil her for marriage. This is because she is the sort of woman Morgan sees as the kind one marries; thus he describes her by explaining that “[Buff] made me think, once in a while, of fireplaces, long lazy conversations, home-cooked meals.”<sup>224</sup> Buff is not just a love interest, but she's also perfect material for marriage. As a result, Villamantes' assault on women is especially dangerous because he is violating Buff in

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221Prather, 74, 107 (for quote), and 218 for descriptions of Villamantes' house.

222Prather, 53

223Prather, 207

224Prather, 17

particular. Buff is the image of the perfect potential American housewife, and by violating her, Villamantes is ruining her and spoiling an innocent woman's femininity.

Because these narratives suggested that women's sexuality was closely related to their identities, Villamantes' violation of Buff must be understood not just as an assault on her physically, but also as taking away an integral piece of her identity. This highlights the degree to which gender was constructed differently for women than for men. Men are in danger of becoming like the communists. Women, on the other hand, are in danger of having their femininity stripped from them as they are violated by communists.

*Pattern for Panic* is not unique in using this situation to show how dangerous communists are to women. *The Dangerous One*, by Robert Ames in 1954, repeats a similar situation. In *The Dangerous One*, a professional adventurer named Boke Carey is hired to track down lost Spanish gold that was stolen from the communists. In order to do this, he rescues Sheila Thayer, a woman who might have information about the gold, from a prison, and they get on a ship to find the gold. However, along with them a communist named Lopez also joins the crew, and he, among other things, tortures Sheila until Carey can save the day.<sup>225</sup>

Lopez might have been the same character as Villamantes. Lopez is shown throughout the book to abuse Sheila, and in this regard he fits the same purpose as Villamantes in that he shows the effects of a communist on women's bodies. And like Villamantes, Lopez's treatment of Sheila is explicitly described. In the book, after Carey and Sheila have been captured and tied up, Lopez strips Sheila naked and starts to torture her. By describing Carey's reaction, Ames is able to simultaneously show how Lopez violates Sheila

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<sup>225</sup> Robert Ames. *The Dangerous One*. (United States: Fawcett Publishing Inc, 1954)

and also show how Carey has been made helpless by being forced to be an observer to the event. Carey describes the scene by explaining that “She lay there naked, shivering, her eyes closed. I began to shiver. I watched him light a long, thin Mexican cigar. I tried to close my eyes, but I couldn't. I watched him touch her with the lighted end, first one rounded white breast then the other. After she'd cried out the second time I couldn't take any more of it.”<sup>226</sup> Again, as was the case in *Pattern for Panic*, the communist's treatment of women is highly sexualized, in order to highlight how communists might sexually violate women.

But more important is the fact that Boke Carey is helpless to do anything but watch as Sheila is being violated. Carey has been emasculated by the communists by being captured and forced to watch. Carey's weakness in the face of communists shows to what degree communism subverts a man's role of protecting women. This is the most important indicator of how communism is dangerous in these depictions: it is not dangerous because of what it does to women per se, but because it takes the power away from men to control and protect their women.

This theme of sexual violence is used further as a way to emasculate the character Mike Hammer in the book *One Lonely Night*, one of the most popular novels of the 1950s. *One Lonely Night* features the detective Mike Hammer as he investigates a murder and in doing so gets involved in a communist plot. During his investigation, his secretary, Velda, who is also his love interest, gets kidnapped by the communists. When he goes to rescue her, he finds another scene of sexual torture.

Hammer is suggestive of the same hypermasculine figure that Boke Carey and Cliff Morgan embodied. Like them, Hammer is a violent, powerful man whom women find

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<sup>226</sup>Ames, 128



irresistible. He also idealizes individualism as a masculine trait: he works on his own, except for his secretary Velda, and is not burdened by the rules and regulations the police have to follow. However, his masculinity is taken away when the communists kidnap Velda. He laments about how they strike him where he cannot defend himself, by complaining, “Why couldn't they act like men and fight with me! Why did they have to pick on women!”<sup>227</sup> Due to their unmanly tactics, Hammer fails in protecting a woman, which leaves him without power over the situation.

When Hammer finds her, he finds a scene reminiscent of both *Pattern for Panic* and *The Dangerous One*. The communists have stripped Velda naked and have begun to whip her. Spillane describes the scene with unsubtle sexual overtones:

*“There was only beauty to the nakedness of her [Velda's] body. [...] There was the beauty of the flesh that was the beauty of the soul and the guy in the pork pie hat grimaced with hate and raised the rope to smash it down while the rest slobbered with the lust and pleasure of this example of what was yet to come, even drooled with the passion that was death made slow in the fulfillment of the philosophy that lived under a red flag!”<sup>228</sup> [italics in original]*

Though never explicitly raped, Velda has been sexually violated by the communists. This is all the more important when we realize that Velda, like Buff before her, is a perfect example of a virtuous woman whose sexuality is protected. Though Hammer sleeps with nearly every woman he meets, he never sleeps with Velda, preferring to save her for marriage. Even when she tempts him by wearing revealing clothing, Hammer avoids seeing her naked or having sex with her, in order to avoid spoiling her.<sup>229</sup> The fact that Velda's sexual identity is one that has been protected by him up to this point only underlines how much of a violation her torture by communists is. The first time Hammer sees Velda naked, it is in a state where she

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227Spillane, 156

228Spillane, 163

229Spillane, 47-48

has being brutalized while other, unmanly men, sadistically whip her and slobber in sexual lust over her.

To protect her honor, and thus his own, Hammer regains his masculinity through the only way he knows: brutal violence. He shoots each one of the communists, reveling in their deaths, and then burns down the warehouse in order to make sure no one who had seen her in a state of undress survived.<sup>230</sup> By being able to protect her and reclaim her reputation from the communists, he is able to reassert his masculinity.

Spillane depicts the character of Velda mainly through her identity as Hammer's fiance rather than as a woman herself. For instance, as was mentioned, Velda is a virtuous woman whose sexuality has been guarded by Hammer. But she is also more complicated than just a simple romantic interest. *One Lonely Night* shows her to be a tough, competent woman. She joins Hammer to look for the criminals he is hunting down and is tough enough to kill one with a gun. The book shows her not simply to be a woman in distress, like Buff, but a capable actor in her own right.<sup>231</sup>

Except that in the end, she's unable to do anything except be brutalized by communists. They kidnap her from Hammer's office when he was gone; without Hammer, Velda cannot protect herself. Despite how strong she might be, she cannot fight communism, but is only acted upon by the communists. It is up to Hammer to save the day and protect her sexuality. Her inability to fight the communists only highlights the degree to which her sexuality is not her own, but something to be fought over by American men and communist men.

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230Spillane, 164

231Spillane, 108

Obviously, the repeated theme of communist sexual violence in Cold War books requires some explanation. One way to explain it is by connecting this sexual violence to the tastes of the audience of paperback fiction. Paperback books were targeted towards a male audience and often capitalized on themes and messages that would resonate with this audience. Erin A. Smith, in a study of the hard-boiled pulp-fiction magazines that predated paperback books, noted that this fiction tried to cultivate a masculine appearance to distance itself from more highbrow women's literature. One way it would do this was by mainly featuring stories based around masculine heroes, such as cowboys and private detectives. Another was for the pulps themselves to present themselves as masculine. Women who worked on pulp magazines often used initials instead of first names, for instance, to give the appearance that the magazine was produced entirely by men. In one case, the fact that the pulp magazine *Black Mask* was edited by a woman was perceived as a scandal in the publishing industry. As well, the magazines would often publish examples of the manly exploits their writers were up to while not writing, and they would write pieces that assumed similar manly exploits of their readers.<sup>232</sup>

This trend continued into the paperback fiction of the 50s. The heroes tended to be idealized masculine figures that the reader could imagine themselves as. The protagonist of *The Dangerous One*, Boke Carey, for instance, is an ex-navy seal who has just wrestled and killed a shark as the book opens.<sup>233</sup> In *Pattern For Panic*, the protagonist Cliff Morgan is found irresistible by nearly every woman he meets. Moreover, lines such as "I should have known that not even a solid six feet of ex- US Army Ranger was a match for seven cops and

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<sup>232</sup> Erin A. Smith, *Hard Boiled: Working Class Readers and Pulp Magazines*. (Temple University Press, 2000), 26-29

<sup>233</sup> Robert Ames. *The Dangerous One*. (United States: Fawcett Publishing Inc, 1954) 1-2

one civilian,” referring to Cliff Morgan himself, highlight his masculinity and show the degree Morgan to which was the ideal, physically robust man.<sup>234</sup>

Another important clue to the audience of paperbacks is that the many of these novels are told from the point of view of the male lead. Cliff Morgan and Boke Carey both tell their story in the first person, as does Mike Hammer, the protagonist of *One Lonely Night*. This has a result of making the experiences of men, and the male viewpoint, normalized. Thus, communist sexual violence against women has to be understood as not focused on how it affects women, but how it affects the men who watch it happening to women.<sup>235</sup>

Thus, because these books' audience was primarily men, it is possible to infer that one reason to present scenes of sexual violence was to appeal to the prurient interests of their audience. By presenting the reader with scenes of sexually willing women who will do anything for the masculine protagonist, these depictions of women served as male fantasies while also providing erotic content for male readers. Also, in order to present more graphic content than might be allowed normally, authors might have depicted the sexual content negatively by connecting it to the communist villains. This would have allowed them to seem to disapprove of the sexuality, and thus include it to show their disapproval of both the sexual violence and the communists who would do such a thing, while also allowing them to include it for the benefit of their readers.

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<sup>234</sup>Richard Prather, *Pattern for Panic*, (New York: Abelard-Schulman, Inc, 1954), 9

<sup>235</sup>The theme of paperback novels, in particular anticommunist ones, being narrated by the main protagonist who's a man, is incredibly common in this genre. Alex Bodine, the protagonist in *I Killed Stalin*, and Mike Hammer, in *One Lonely Night* continue the trend of first person narratives by hypermasculine men who are pursued by every woman they meet. In fact, even in novels where the main character is a communist, if they are a man the book is described in the first person, assuming that the reader would identify with the character despite his communism. Even *Catspaw*, written by Mary Borden, is written from a masculine first person even though it was written by a woman. See Noel Sterling. *I Killed Stalin*. (Farrar, Straus and Young, New York, 1951), Mary Borden. *Catspaw*. (Longmans, Green and Co, New York, 1950), and Mickey Spillane. “One Lonely Night”. *The Mike Hammer Collection: Volume Two*. (New American Library, New York, 2001, First Published 1951).

Consequently, on the one hand these depictions of sexual violence may be nothing more than the result of the paperback authors appealing to the sensibilities of their audience. However, we cannot disregard these scenes so prematurely. Because, importantly, whether or not the goal of these authors was to simply sneak more sexual content into their books, the way they depicted this sexual content reveals anxieties over female sexuality and the exploitation of women. By connecting scenes of female violation to communists, paperback writers presented their readers with narratives of female powerlessness. By alerting men to how women could be violated by communists, it also commented on men's abilities to protect women in the face of communism and reinforced notions of masculinity as defined through a man's ability to protect a woman. Worse, it also relegated women to being objects which existed purely for the benefit of the men that save them from their fate.

By understanding how these books were focused towards a particular audience, it suggests that scenes like these are not warnings for the women who might be reading this material but a call to the men who are reading to be vigilant and watch for outside forces that might violate women. Importantly, the women in these depictions are always unable to do anything to withstand the communist menace. As a result, these are not warnings to women to behave properly, resist communism, or to themselves defeat communists. Instead, anticommunist productions urge men to take action. If not for the masculine courage of Mike Hammer, Boke Carey, and Cliff Morgan, these women would have been raped by foreign, overtly sexual monsters.

An extension of the wish fulfillment narrative that these productions provided, that it was a man's responsibility to defend women from communist molestations, was that is tried

to construct an image of womanhood that would be palatable to men who may have felt their dominance in society was fading in the face of women who usurped their positions. In order to look at this aspect of these depictions of women though, we also need to explore another thematic link between these scenes of sexual torture: the construction of the racialized communist.

## V Difference

Noticeably, in two of these three depictions of communists that violate women, the communist villains are nonwhite. Villamantes is a Mexican man, and Lopez is described as unspecifically from South America. Both of them, interestingly, are Latino communists. Unlike other depictions of communists, which have either presented communists as internal (Like John and Curragh from *My Son John* and *Conspirator*), eastern European but basically asexual (Hugo in *All My Enemies* and Konnr in *The Brotherhood of Fear* used sex just as a tool without emotion behind it, and the communists in *Red Planet Mars* are given Russian accents but are developed no more), or stand ins for gangsters (In *The Woman on Pier 13* or *Red Menace* for instance), depictions of communists that focus on women as objects present an entirely different view of communists: as sexually aggressive, dark skinned men who are a danger to women.

Films less commonly depicted non-white communists who were sexually aggressive to women, but the film *Invasion USA* presents one further example. Here, a man named Vince and a woman named Carla find love in New York as the Soviet Union is invading the

country. When they go back to the Vince's apartment, communists soon find them and threaten them with guns. Vince resists, but is shot in the back by an ugly, burly communist. As he falls to the ground though, the communist looks towards Carla, and in broken English, tell her excitedly that “He [Vince] is Dead. Now you my woman!” As he moves towards her in order to molest her, she screams and jumps out the window to her death in order to escape him. While this scene is similar to those shown in paperback novels, it is less explicit, possibly due to the more graphic nature of film as a medium. However, all the same pieces are there, including a man unable to protect a woman, and the implication of rape. Moreover, unlike films like *Red Planet Mars* that do depict Russian communists but underplay any racial characteristics of the communists, *Invasion USA* depicts this man with dark skin, a large and exotic mustache, and accented, broken English.<sup>236</sup>

On the one hand, viewed in context, the fact that Cold War narratives would couple racialized depictions of communists to scenes of sexual violence is easily explained. By appealing to racial stereotypes of sexually aggressive and savage nonwhite people, these narratives could appeal to racist alarm at dark skinned people ravaging the innocent and virtuous white American women. As Grace Elizabeth Gale shows in her examination of southern depictions of lynchings, the image of the “black beast rapist” was often in earlier decades used to display fears of white male impotence in the face of black sexuality, and the narrative of rescuing a white woman from her black assailant would symbolically reassert white male power. Cold War narratives were a discursive space where racialized depictions of white dominance could merge with depictions of an outside aggressor, thus constructing the communist in the same way that other narratives might symbolically construct black

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<sup>236</sup> *Invasion USA*. DVD. Directed by Alfred E. Green. 1952; Synapse Films, 2002

rapists. Through depicting these scenes of sexual violence using nonwhite communists, the threat of rape would be heightened by stigmatizing it with racial overtones.<sup>237</sup>

The women in these depictions, with this in mind, were also symbols of whiteness, and the way that they were put under threat by communist aggressors shows not only how communist's could threaten female sexuality, but also how they could threaten white racial purity. By making clear how these women were “light” or women that were being saved for marriage, it highlights how the civilized, controlled sexual nature of these white women was under threat from brutal, perverse, dark skinned communists. Thus, when Mike Hammer or Cliff Morgan save their respective women from communists, they are not only protecting her sexuality, but reasserting their own whiteness.<sup>238</sup>

This could also be an expression of communism being used to stigmatize race in the same way that these narratives used communism to stigmatize certain expressions of gender. Lizabeth Cohen shows that part of the transformation of the post-war United States was that the relationship between African Americans and society changed. Following the war, African Americans were less likely to accept segregation in businesses, and Cohen finds that, especially in the North where a larger proportion of African Americans moved to following the war, discriminating practices broke down and states began to pass civil rights legislation.<sup>239</sup>

Viewed in this context, the racialization of communists may have been a reaction to the changing place of racial minorities in American society. Not only would black Americans have moved to parts of the country that had previously had much lower black populations,

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237Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness* (Pantheon Books, New York, 1998), 232-235

238This idea is also expressed by Hale when discussing lynching narratives. See Hale, 232-233

239Cohen, 178-179, 184-185



but previous prohibitions against African Americans were breaking down. This could have caused the same sense in certain Americans as the changes in gender, causing some Americans to react against it. In this case, Cold War narratives might have been reflecting a call against increased black independence following World War II.

These depictions also had other effects. Most importantly, Cold War narratives were creating a discursive space to use anticommunist tools to contribute to constructions of race, Americanism, and gender. For by aligning white, male protagonists that are sexually controlled opposed to sexually aggressive or sadomasochistic communists, practices of sexual brutality and sexual aggression were made into a racialized characteristic of the communist, not the American. Behaviors that communists indulged in that were deviant were behaviors that American men would not indulge in because of their status as Americans and the greater control and sexual morality that came with being an American. Communists, because of their racially inferior nature, were genetically predisposed to uncontrollable, brutal sexuality. This is further reinforced by depictions of Russian communists such as Rita Barstow from *I Killed Stalin*: by depicting sexually desirous women as only Russian, it further reinforces the idea that sexual control was uniquely American and uniquely white.

The analysis of Michael Rogin also offers another explanation for the racialization of communists in these productions. In his study of American antiradicalism, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie*, Rogin examines the film, *The Birth of A Nation*, the famous epic by D.W. Griffith glorifying the Klu Klux Klan. Much of this film revolves around scenes of implied rape of white women by black men, similar to the scenes of communist sexual violence. Rogin argues that in fact these scenes are interrelated with fears of women gaining societal power.

By creating scenes of rape of women, the film plays out fantasies of “aggression against boundary-transgressing women as well as a weapon of terror against blacks.”<sup>240</sup> In effect, these scenes depict female powerlessness to dissuade their audience's fears of women stepping out of their place. At the same time, it could give power back to men by making them the ultimate vanguards of these powerless women. As the men castrated the black rapists, they regained power over women and over the other that threatened women.<sup>241</sup>

If Rogin is right about this, then it provides a similar explanation for these scenes of sexual violence in Cold War narratives. In the context of the 1950s, these depictions could answer anxieties of independent women. By creating a racialized other that could threaten white women, these narratives provided their male readers fantasies of powerless women who needed men to come to their rescue. The racialized communist could serve as a monster that needed to be dispelled by the hero, but one that could show women that in the end, they could not be independent, but needed protection from men.

If Rogin's analysis of this type of depictions is correct, than it shows us two important things. First, depictions of women that focus on their powerlessness may be evidence of increased anxiety over powerful women. If the audience of these paperbacks were entertained these sorts of images, they may have felt threatened in their real lives, due to a perceived dominance of women in their lives. Fantasies of powerless women thus would have been consoling to this audience, thus explaining the prevalence of depictions such as

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<sup>240</sup>Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 220. Grace Elizabeth Hale also elaborates on this idea, by arguing that in depictions of lynchings, “white women and black men were conflated as fear of and the desire to protect the white woman became fear of and the desire to destroy the black man.” However, she argues that, at least in the case of lynching narratives, these also served to give white women more power by giving them a place in the ritual emasculation and torture of black men. See Hale, 222-225

<sup>241</sup>Rogin, 220

these in paperback anticommunist productions.

Secondly, these depictions indirectly reinforce an image of women as powerless. By showing that women were unable to defend against communists without the protection of a man, these depictions of women disregard any possibilities for single women that allow them any agency at all. Anticommunist productions, by focusing on women as powerless, reinforce that assumption and by doing so give further evidence that women must be mothers or wives in order to fulfill their roles to society.

In either case, the way that Cold War narratives created a racial conception of communism shows how a critique of gender might become intertwined with similar critiques of race. By creating a racial other, anticommunist productions further stigmatize practices they disapproved of, both by linking those practices to an un-American target and by attacking the power of women. Nonwhite communists accentuate the dangers of the outside communist while at the same time showing how the American hero reasserts his whiteness along with his gendered role in protecting women. In doing so, these depictions conflate gendered anxieties over women with racial worries, and present narratives that resolve one using the language of the other.

## VI Conclusion

Americans, when they looked at the post-war United States, saw a world changing around them. The family was changing: people were moving to the suburbs, far away from the place of work, and nuclear families were becoming more important as people moved

away from their relatives. The workplace was changing, and with it, the place for individualism in American society. And though it seemed as if American women were set to the task of raising strong, healthy American children, this did not erase the perception that women could be overtaking men in the modern American society.

Cold War narratives used anticommunist language to reflect one particular reaction to these changes, a reaction that, on the one hand, praised those who prioritized the family. But on the other hand, those who might threaten the family, such as single women, were labeled communist in order to vilify them.

Whether discussing the family, men's roles, or women's roles, narratives of the Cold War used anticommunism as a tool to join a greater societal discourse about just how to reimagine men and women's roles in the post-war United States. Though framed in the discourse of communist against American, often the fears of what communism entailed were inextricably linked with the possibilities that the post-war United States could make into reality. By linking promiscuity, other-directed, and a work-oriented masculinity to communism, Cold War narratives provided a critique of these alternative visions of gender that depicted them as dangerous and un-American. Though one strand of the greater dialogue, Cold War narratives that focused on anticommunist themes, taken as a whole, give us a look into this complicated discourse and help us unravel one possible reaction to the changes facing post war Americans.

## Epilogue: Fighting the Cold War

After 1954, the year Senator McCarthy was censured, the Red Scare gradually came to an end. One year earlier, Josef Stalin had died, and the new Soviet Premier, Nikita Khrushchev, was much less of a polarizing Soviet presence. In 1959, Khrushchev visited the United States to participate in the Kitchen Debates with then Vice President Richard Nixon, an act that would have been unthinkable years earlier when Stalin had still been Premier.<sup>242</sup> Moreover, the excesses of the House Un-American Activities Committee had soured the American public to the witch hunt that McCarthy and his colleagues had been pursuing for the last four years, and television channels soon stopped covering anticommunist hearings due to their unpopularity.<sup>243</sup> Though many aspects of the Red Scare never stopped (and the firings of state employees suspected of being homosexual continued into the 1960s unquestioned), by the time Senator McCarthy died of alcoholism in 1957, the landscape of the Cold War was drastically different from the landscape that made Joseph McCarthy's rise to infamy possible.<sup>244</sup>

As the Red Scare faded, the cultural productions of the United States shifted focus. *The Iron Petticoat* and *Jet Pilot*, two anticommunist films released in 1956 and 1957, show the change in emphasis: they no longer treated communism as the dangerous menace that it once was in films like *Conspirator*; but instead use communism as a joke. Communists are

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242 For a discussion of the importance of the kitchen debates, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 21

243 Stephen J Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 165-166

244 For instance, David K. Johnson reports that even in 1961 Frank Kameny's petition to the Supreme Court fighting his firing by the government in 1957 was denied. See David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 179-180

still backwards, and still the enemy in these movies, but no longer are they the pervasive and dangerous threat to American life that they were in *My Son John* or in other films made at the beginning of the decade.

Instead, these films serve as presentations of the Cold War on a small scale. Both films draw comparisons between the Soviet Union and the United States, using the cultural differences between the two nations as a source of humor and as a way to show the inferiority of the Soviet Union. In this way, these films become a unique genre: a war film for the Cold War, one that plays out of the fight between communists and Americans, despite the fact that battles between the two nations can only be rendered through these fictional means. Significant then is that these films depict the fighting of the Cold War as one fought not over territory. Instead, to play out battles of the Cold War, the films present the war as one over women's bodies and comportment, bringing to the forefront the connection between fighting communists and gender.

*The Iron Petticoat*, released in 1956, is a comedy about a Soviet woman, Vinka Kovalenko (Katheryn Hepburn), whose jet fighter is captured by the American airforce and forced to land. She is captured, and surprisingly to the Americans present, she reveals herself to be a woman, even though she's a lieutenant in the Soviet Air Force. The military soon come up with a plan: if they can persuade her that the United States and capitalism are better than communism, they could use her condemnation of the Soviet system as propaganda. In order to fulfill this plan, they assign Major Chuck Lockwood (Bob Hope) to seduce her and try to get her to defect.<sup>245</sup>

Lockwood is unhappy with this plan, especially because he was due to go to Britain to

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<sup>245</sup>*The Iron Petticoat*. Videocassette. Direct By Ralph Thomas, 1956. MGM

get engaged to a rich aristocrat. So, in order to make sure he can still meet with his fiancée, he takes Vinka to Britain to teach her about capitalism. In Britain, he shows her a dress that she initially dislikes. Eventually, however, she buys it for a dinner party and arrives in the dress and red garters rather than the military uniform she had been wearing. Lockwood's fiancée resents her, and Kovalenko's obliviousness to wearing proper clothes around Lockwood leads to his fiancée leaving him. Worse, Kovalenko is kidnapped by Soviet spies, and she and Lockwood are taken to the Soviet Union. Fortunately, the regime has changed in the USSR, and their captors are killed instead of them. As a result, they head back to the United States to get married as a sign of friendship between the Soviets and the Americans.<sup>246</sup>

On the other hand, *Jet Pilot*, released in 1957, is about a Russian Lieutenant, Anna (Janet Leigh), whose jet fighter is captured over Alaska by the American air force. Colonel Shannon (John Wayne) brings her into custody, and she reveals that she is a woman, much to the surprise of the military officers present. The military comes up with a plan to teach her about capitalism so that she can defect to the American side. In order to do this, despite his protestations, they put Shannon in charge of seducing her.<sup>247</sup>

In order to make Anna fall for capitalism, Shannon shows her all the benefits of the American way of life, such as steak dinners, private hotel rooms, and consumer products. He eventually shows her American bathing suits, dresses, and lingerie, and she starts wearing those instead of her Soviet uniform. Eventually, they get married, and they fly to the Soviet Union, where the Soviets use drugs on Shannon to damage his memory. In the end, being in the Soviet Union makes Anna realize that the United States is preferable, so she rescues

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<sup>246</sup>*The Iron Petticoat*.

<sup>247</sup>*Jet Pilot*. DVD. Directed by Josef von Steinberg, 1957, RKO. Universal City Studios, Inc.

Shannon and they head to the United States to live happily as a married couple.<sup>248</sup>

Obviously, *The Iron Petticoat* and *Jet Pilot* share nearly the same plot. Moreover, one is not a remake of the other, and neither is based to any degree upon the other. This is due to the fact that though *Jet Pilot* was made in the early fifties, it was only released after *The Iron Petticoat*. However, both films were influenced by the 1939 film *Ninotchka*, which also tells a tale of a Russian woman being swayed by the lures of capitalism.

Despite their roots in *Ninotchka*, the fact that such a similar story was reused twice is significant, because its reuse suggests that it captured an important element of the Cold War. Both *The Iron Petticoat* and *Jet Pilot* show the battle between communism and capitalism to be fought through a woman, and either movie uses bodily metaphors to signal differences between communism and capitalism. For instance, both films signal a change in the female lead through the clothes she is wearing, whether they be masculine military uniforms to signal the incorrect gender roles of communism, or feminine dresses to signal the adoption of correct, American gender roles. As women become American, they conform to traditional feminine gender roles and even start to dress like women. The fight against communism, in the case of these films, is a fight to make women act like women.<sup>249</sup>

Their bodies are made into a Cold War battlefield at other points in either movie. In *Jet Pilot*, for instance, when Anna first meets Shannon, she is forced to dress in his presence. Like other representations of female communists, Anna uses her sexuality to her advantage and tries to tempt Shannon. Shannon replies to this by expressing how Anna's body is a Soviet weapon, commenting that her good looks must be “some new type of Russian

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<sup>248</sup>*Jet Pilot*.

<sup>249</sup>*Jet Pilot, The Iron Petticoat*.



Propaganda.”<sup>250</sup> In fighting the Cold War, as we have seen elsewhere, female sexuality is a part of the Soviet arsenal. When he takes her to buy new American clothes, Shannon again links women's bodies to fighting the Cold War. He shows her a bra on display at a store and remarks that, “That's something we have in common with the Soviets. We both believe in uplifting the ...masses,” while stressing the last line to make the *entendre* obvious.<sup>251</sup> If women's bodies are the place where the Cold War is fought, jokes like these that compare Soviet ideology to women's clothes make perfect sense.

*The Iron Petticoat* makes these same types of remarks. For instance, while Vinka is dancing with Lockwood, two officers remark:

“It's gonna be terrific!”  
“What, her dancing?”  
“No, her embracing democracy!”  
“She seems to be rather good at it.”<sup>252</sup>

This exchange equates her ability to dance with Lockwood, and along with it her sexuality, with the Americans winning the Cold War by getting Russians to embrace democracy. Though it is made as a light joke, the film still demonstrates the link between teaching Vinka proper American gendered ways of acting, such as dancing with an American man, and fighting the Cold War. Examples like this show that in these discussions of the Cold War, women's bodies and gender roles were central in how Cold War narratives presented the conflict.

And if these films make a women's body their battlefield, they make the problematic, Soviet expression of femininity one that asserts the power of women over men. The

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<sup>250</sup>*Jet Pilot*.

<sup>251</sup>*Jet Pilot*.

<sup>252</sup>*The Iron Petticoat*.

beginning of either film demonstrates how Anna and Vinka have destabilized gender roles, and thus constitute an attack on appropriate gender conventions. Both movies open with the unveiling of Anna and Vinka, and in both cases, the Americans remark about how bizarre and unorthodox a female lieutenant is. Lockwood, for instance, explains how uncomfortable it makes him by explaining, “Women in uniform bother me. I don't know whether to kiss them or salute them.”<sup>253</sup> Shannon has a similar problem when he tries to search Anna once she is captured. The procedure he should use according to the rules forces him into sexual situations as he asks her to give him her clothes to search or he feels her pockets for weapons.<sup>254</sup> Both of these situations show how a woman treated equally in the military upset normal power arrangements: Lockwood and Shannon cannot deal with their counterparts either as an equal or as a proper woman.

After this initial unveiling, the films make a point of showing how Anna and Vinka's role are properly masculine ones, and the inability of Lockwood and Shannon to deal with them in these roles shows how women outside of proper gender roles can appropriate men's power. This is further demonstrated by the attitudes that a strong woman like Vinka or Anna have as a result of their unique gender roles. For instance, upon Lockwood's first meeting with Vinka, he finds her brash and loud as she controls the conversation. She also constantly proves herself a better pilot than he is, by explaining how she has achieved far more as a pilot, such as having flown over the North Pole seven times versus Lockwood's once.<sup>255</sup> Anna and Shannon's relationship, on the other hand, involves competing in the air. She shows she is nearly able to out-maneuver Shannon with her plane (though he does come out ahead

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<sup>253</sup> *The Iron Petticoat*.

<sup>254</sup> *Jet Pilot*.

<sup>255</sup> *The Iron Petticoat*.

because her jet is not able to do the things an American jet can do without stalling).<sup>256</sup> But in either case, Lockwood and Shannon's masculinity is put to the test by a woman who can challenge them in a masculine field, and in Lockwood's case, beat him. The fact that Vinka is loud and aggressive furthers this notion of emasculation.

The inferiority of the female Soviet gender role is also linked to the way Anna and Vinka are forward with their sexuality. Anna uses her sexuality to control men, while Vinka just seems to be oblivious to the power it gives her, but both are defined through it. Anna, for instance, when forced to strip so that she can be searched, tries through many different schemes to seduce the military officers keeping track of her (John Wayne's Colonel Shannon, of course, is too much of a gentlemen to let her make him view her without clothes).<sup>257</sup> Vinka, while not wearing pants, walks into Lockwood's room at night to ask a question, not realizing her state of undress, which upsets Lockwood's fiance. As well, once Vinka has bought a dress, she shows off her red garters, unaware that the fiance sees this as an obvious communist sexual ploy to make Lockwood fall for her.<sup>258</sup> Both women show off their sexuality and use it, rather than show proper modesty, which allows the films to comment on the perverse nature of their sexuality, caused by their communism.

The uncontrolled sexuality of Anna allows her to control men. As was seen in *Red Menace* or other examples, despite Shannon's careful avoidance of Anna's sexual lures, eventually he succumbs to her and falls in love with her. This leads to Shannon marrying her and deserting his post to leave with her to the Soviet Union where she can be free. However, once they get to the Soviet Union, Anna reveals how she was in fact using his affection for

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<sup>256</sup>*Jet Pilot*.

<sup>257</sup>*Jet Pilot*.

<sup>258</sup>*The Iron Petticoat*.

her as part of her plan. In fact, she brought Shannon back to the USSR so her superiors could use him to learn about American technology, not because she loved him. As soon as they get there, she sheds any pretensions of correct female gender roles. She does not sleep in the same house as Shannon despite their marriage, and she does not cook or clean for him, though she mentions that the government will send a man to do Shannon's laundry (reinforcing the emasculating gender roles of the Soviet Union). Once they had arrived in the Soviet Union, Anna revealed her true colors and used any affection he had for her to make him betray his country.<sup>259</sup>

In *The Iron Petticoat*, the fact that the battle is a fight over a woman's body is even more literal than just a fight using her sexuality. Here, while Lockwood is trying to win over Vinka, communists are trying to kidnap her and take her back to the Soviet Union. They first try to seduce her with a Soviet man, but he is so effeminate that she finds him disgusting (which continues the theme that communist women effeminize men). Then they try to kidnap her to bring her back to the Soviet Union. The end of the movie, involving Lockwood trying to rescue her before she is brought to the USSR, becomes a literal fight between communists and Americans over a woman's body, and the overtones of comparing both ways of life heighten the effect to which the fight over Vinka is a proxy battle of the Cold War.<sup>260</sup>

These two films, both made after 1954, continue the themes that other Cold War narratives that focused on women had explored. Anna and Vinka both fit a similar stereotype of communist women that we have already seen: they present a fear of independent women who can subvert men's roles in society. The solution to either communist woman is to make

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<sup>259</sup>*Jet Pilot*.

<sup>260</sup>*The Iron Petticoat*

her American by marrying her and making her into a safe American housewife. Like other anticommunist depictions of communism, the inappropriate gender roles of the communists are contrasted with the correct American roles that idolize the family.

But what is different about these films is that they turn the Cold War into a domestic comedy, making differences of culture and politics into a retelling of *The Taming of the Shrew*. In these two films, more explicitly than any others before it, the gendered dimension to the Cold War is brought to the forefront. While in *My Son John* or *Conspirator* the gendered differences between communists and Americans is implied, in these two movies it becomes the entirety of the plot. The Cold War stops having even the pretenses of invasion or subversion of the American political system: instead, the entire war can be summed up by the choice Anna makes over the decision to wear a military uniform or a dress.

But though these films present narratives that assume gender and the Cold War were linked, neither one of them provides a critique of that assumption. Though *Jet Pilot* and *The Iron Petticoat* fit uncomfortably next to other earlier Cold War narratives due to how they represent the Cold War, their message, and their evaluation of the post-war United States are essentially the same. Though they recognize the gendered aspect of the war, they still fundamentally argue that female promiscuity should be condemned in favor of wifedom.

But at nearly the same time as these films were released, in 1958, the novel *Red Alert* was published in the United States. Written by Peter George and published two years earlier in Britain as *Two Hours to Doom*, it tells the story of a rogue American military general who, fearing an imminent Russian invasion, orders those under his command to bomb the Soviet Union. As this man, General Quinten, goes insane, he begins to believe that the only way to

survive the Cold War is through a first strike on the Soviet Union, and by going rogue he does his best to start that first strike. The novel is based upon treating seriously the idea that one unbalanced person could set off a nuclear war, causing World War III and nuclear holocaust.<sup>261</sup>

Unlike the messages of *Jet Pilot* and *The Iron Petticoat*, the subject matter of *Red Alert* would have been inconceivable at an earlier stage of the Cold War. The message of *Red Alert* was not that communists are an omnipresent group that might destroy the American way of life, but rather that a fear of communists might create an actual apocalyptic scenario. The paranoia of the early Cold War, seen as a virtue when it alerts Melinda in *Conspirator* to the fact that her husband is subverting the government, was now the threat to the democratic way of life, more so than the Soviet Union itself. A message like this, one that is critical of anticommunist paranoia, is no less a part of the Cold War, but represents a shift in how authors began to see the Cold War.

Much more important, however, is the novel's legacy. In particular, what makes *Red Alert* unique is that the novel became the source material for not one, but two films. The first, *Failsafe*, released in 1962, was a serious adaptation of the subject matter, taking the same stance that the novel did by becoming a cautionary tale against the possibility that the military was set up in such a way that one rogue leader could start a nuclear holocaust. The second film, however, was *Dr. Strangelove*.

*Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* was a film produced by Stanley Kubrick and released in 1964, in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis. It, like *Failsafe*, has a plot that closely echoes *Red Alert*. In *Dr. Strangelove*, a General goes

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<sup>261</sup> Peter George, *Red Alert*. (Black Mask, 2008 (Originally 1958))

insane and commands American planes to drop nuclear bombs on the Soviet Union. In order to prevent a catastrophe, the President alerts the Soviet Premier and together they try to either recall the American planes or to shoot down those who do not recall. The situation becomes worse, however, when it turns out the Soviets have a doomsday device that will destroy the entire world should the country fall under nuclear attack. Unfortunately, neither nation is able to stop one of the planes, and a nuclear bomb is dropped, triggering the doomsday device and causing the annihilation of the entire planet.<sup>262</sup>

However, unlike *Red Alert* or *Failsafe*, *Dr. Strangelove* is a satire. Rather than warn of an immanent catastrophe as these productions do, *Dr. Strangelove* instead uses this plot as fuel for a harsh critique of anticommunism and of the political consensus of the 1950s. General Jack Ripper, the anticommunist General who starts the crisis, is shown to be insane purely because of his anticommunism. He thinks that the Russians are poisoning the water supply and infiltrating the country, ideas that would not have been out of step with the anticommunism of the pre-1954 period, but here are evidence of his insanity. The president's right hand man, General Buck Turgidson, seems to see the entire thing as a game, and wrestles like a child with the Russian ambassador because he thinks the ambassador cannot be trusted not to spy. In one of the film's most famous lines, the president tries to control the general's childish anticommunist fighting by explaining that "You can't fight in here! This is the War Room!" By using this line to draw a parallel between the adolescent fighting of the General and the military posturing of the Cold War, *Dr. Strangelove* tries to show that all of the anticommunist hysteria of the Red Scare was nothing more than this: childish hysteria

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<sup>262</sup> *Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, DVD. Directed by Stanley Kubrick, 1964. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2001

based on either insanity or petty bickering.<sup>263</sup>

But even more notable is that *Dr. Strangelove* identifies the excesses of anticommunism directly with sexuality. The best example of this is the character of General Ripper. Ripper is obsessed with the purity of the American body, and his main fear is that Russians were corrupting that purity. Ripper believes that the Russians are perverting Americans' "precious bodily fluids" by fluoridating water, which makes Americans less able and fit to fight the Cold War. Ripper first came up with this theory during sexual intercourse, in which he identified his fatigue as the first sign that communists were corrupting his "precious bodily fluids." His solution is to keep himself pure by "denying women his essence." To Ripper, the danger of a Russian invasion is that it somehow makes men less virile, and thus less masculine, and his solution is to avoid letting women have power over him by avoiding sexual intercourse with them.<sup>264</sup>

The film continues this theme elsewhere. *Dr. Strangelove* opens to footage of two planes refueling in mid-flight in a scene that suggests the sexual nature of the military technology by accentuating the phallic nature of the refueling pipe. The finale of the film is no less suggestive. When the airplane launches its nuclear bomb, the pilot of the plane is accidentally launched with the bomb. Rather than be afraid, however, he waves his cowboy hat in the air while riding the bomb like a horse as he plunges towards the ground. In this scene, the bomb is transformed into a steed, and the pilot into a cowboy riding into a nuclear sunset. In this way, *Dr. Strangelove* brings into focus the assumptions of the early Cold War that interlocked with fighting communism were symbols of masculinity.<sup>265</sup>

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263 *Dr. Strangelove*.

264 *Dr. Strangelove*

265 *Dr. Strangelove*



Even the relationship between the two countries is satirized through the use of gender roles. The President of the United States' name is Merkin Muffley, a pun used to highlight his effeminacy. His effeminate nature is further highlighted when he calls the Soviet Premier to warn him about the incoming American airplanes. On the phone with the Russian Premier, Dmitri, Muffley explains:

“Well, I'll tell you what he did, he ordered his planes...to attack your country. Well, let me finish, Dmitri. Let me finish, Dmitri. Well, listen, how do you think I feel about it? Can you imagine how I feel about it, Dmitri? Why do you think I'm calling you? Just to say hello? Of course I like to speak to you! Of course I like to say hello! Not now, but any time, Dmitri. I'm just calling up to tell you something terrible has happened. It's a friendly call. Of course it's a friendly call. Listen, if it wasn't friendly,...you probably wouldn't have even got it. They will not reach their targets for at least another hour. I'm sorry too, Dmitri. I'm very sorry. All right! You're sorrier than I am! But I am sorry as well. I am as sorry as you are Dmitri. Don't say that you are more sorry than I am, because I am capable of being just as sorry as you are. So we're both sorry, all right?”<sup>266</sup>

This conversation between the two world leaders is written not as a political dialogue, but instead as a marital squabble. Rather than being able to be a strong man, Muffley is relegated to the role of the Soviet Premier's wife, and the Cold War is exposed as a gendered role reversal instead of a military campaign.

*Dr. Strangelove* is an important film because it consciously and knowingly satirizes the themes that the narratives of the early Cold War unconsciously displayed. The fear that the communists were weakening men by making them effeminate, presented by the insane General Ripper, was a real concern presented in such productions as *Conspirator*, *Catspaw*, and *Pickup on South Street*. As well, novels such as *I Killed Stalin* and *One Lonely Night* took seriously the notion that fighting the Cold War required an assertion of individualist

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<sup>266</sup> *Dr. Strangelove*

masculinity, an idea consciously mocked by turning the actual act of bombing the Soviet Union into a western. Though the methods are different, this act of cowboy individualism killing communists is not far from the message Spillane wants his readers to take seriously when he depicts Mike Hammer strangling a communist with his own bare hands.<sup>267</sup>

Because of the unique time that *Dr. Strangelove* was produced, Kubrick was in a unique position to create a film that was able to communicate such a knowing critique of anticommunism. By 1964, the Cuban Missile Crisis had shattered Cold War assumptions that a hard line stance against the Soviet Union was the only response, and the Cold War consensus of the fifties was slowly giving way to the protests of the 1960s. As a result, Kubrick found himself in a position where the society around him was no longer so assured of the fight that the anticommunists of the early Cold War had tried to rally behind. Thus Kubrick was able to critique the previous decade's excesses as he satirized the productions they created.

If *Jet Pilot* and *The Iron Petticoat* acknowledged the connection between the Cold War and gender roles, what makes Kubrick's satire of anticommunism and Cold War rhetoric so successful is how he not only acknowledged this connection but openly questioned it. *Dr. Strangelove* correctly identifies the underlying subtext of gender and sexuality present in the early Cold War and then proceeds to attack that connection. Portraying the War as a domestic squabble makes sense because interwoven with the warnings against communist subversion were also prescriptions of appropriate domestic arrangements. There was no way to separate these two strands of discourse, because they were in fact the same message: in Cold War

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<sup>267</sup> Mickey Spillane, "One Lonely Night," *The Mike Hammer Collection: Volume Two*. (New York, New American Library, 2001, First Published 1951), 170-171

narratives, fighting the Cold War meant living particular, gendered, domestic roles. *Dr. Strangelove* is an insightful commentary on the period because it correctly identifies the link between these two strands of discourse, and because it is the first film to actively challenge the the assumption that the political fight against communism must come wedded to a domestic, gendered one.

As the film *Dr. Strangelove* correctly perceived, anticommunism, far from simply being an antiradicalist discourse meant to vilify communism, was inextricably linked to a dialogue concerning gender and sexuality. The Cold War narratives that focused on anticommunist themes were part of the context of the early 1950s, and as *Dr. Strangelove* notes, that context is one that was as much enmeshed in concerns over gender as it was with concerns over communism. To disentangle a satire of anticommunism from these concerns over gender would be to give an incomplete satire. As a result, the preoccupations with military might and with matching the Soviets must come with concerns over loss of masculinity and depictions of domesticity.

Early Cold War narratives that focused on communism only constituted one part of the larger societal discourse over the meanings of reconversion in the 1950s, but that is no reason to discount this strand as unimportant. Because, though the majority of Americans probably did not agree with the entirety of the anticommunist project, the concerns that these narratives presented were real concerns their audiences had about the changes in the post-war United States. Recognizing these concerns, and the methods through how they were expressed, allows us to uncover the experiences of people whose voices may have been otherwise obscured by history. And by understanding a small piece of this discourse in depth,

we also can begin to see the dialogue over reconversion as a whole. Thus, to ignore anticommunist narratives as unimportant, or not representative of the whole era, is to miss the point. The best way to understand how the post-war United States turned out the way it did is to understand every piece of the dialogue concerning the reshaping of that society. Anticommunists won some battles, and lost others. But in choosing to join into the dialogue, they helped create the United States of the 1950s, regardless of the results of those battles.

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