

“History and Politics on Film: The Cold War and Social Consensus in the United States”

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History and Politics on Film

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The Cold War officially lasted from the end of World War II into the 1990s. A race for supremacy between the Nations of the United States and the Soviet Union, it gave rise to the arms race, *Star Wars*, and a number of other competitions between these two super powers. What many don't understand is how deep this race touched the lives of the people who lived under the governments engaged in their icy battle of espionage and rivalry. For both nations, dominance could only be achieved by gaining the consensus of its people. Here I will focus on the United States and how that government was engaged in a very strong propaganda campaign throughout the Cold War, of which remnants still remain. This campaign was organized by government agencies to give Americans the ideology they needed to adopt in a stand against the supposed communist threat. In this way, "patriotism became synonymous with the avoidance of class or cultural conflict as well as the making of a new *American Way*," (May, 173). It was no longer acceptable to point out the root of the problem that caused the Great Depression, nor to cite the pervading problem of economic issues among the citizenry of the United States, as that made capitalism and the US look inferior when contrasted to communism and the Soviet Union. The free world, embodied in the Western nations, mostly the United States, feared the danger of being swallowed up behind the ever-expanding walls of totalitarian oppression (Ross, 198). Therefore, they could not show themselves as weaker of morals or fortitude than the enemy. Out of this desire to be the best came the Cold War Consensus and the propaganda war it accomplished.

Beyond the depth of the propaganda war, it is further not realized that the roots of the Cold War conflict lay in the years well before the Second World War. In his work *Movies and American Society*, Steven J. Ross discusses these views:

Movies have played a vital role in shaping the way in which Americans think about communists, socialists, leftists, and the desirability of radical change. The Cold War did not start in the late 1940s, as most Americans generally believe, but began in the days following the Russian Revolution of October 1917. (192)

What prevented the Cold War from having an official date at this time is that the American economy of the 1920s was doing quite well. Such appearances “undermine[d] Communist critiques of capitalism—that is, until the stock market crash in 1929,” (Ross, 194). If they wanted to be sure that capitalism stood in stark contrast to communism, they could not have any such ugly blemish as the *Crash* to counter the assertion. Prior to that, the prosperity of the twenties prevented any real concern. By the time the US economy could stand back up and a critique of the communists could be made, there was a new foe in the form of the German National Socialist Party and the deep desire of the citizens to remain out of any further conflicts post World War I. However, despite these distractions, there is a traceable undercurrent of anti-communist sentiment which made relations between the US and the Soviet Union tenuous.

The reason that communism was seen as such a threat is that Progressives (a liberal left group), in response to the unregulated actions of capitalists who they saw responsible for the Great Depression, called “for toleration of communists at home, and proclaiming a need for economic and social reform,” (Sbardellati, 499). Such leftist notions, many in the government felt, would surely lead the nation into a communist economy, as suspicion of capitalism and outright doubt were a popular way of thinking after the Depression. As May puts it, “laissez-faire capitalism had created chaos and disaster, and militant labor bred class conflict,” (May, 176). There was no longer a sense of brotherhood across class, awe and respect having been replaced with suspicion.

The call for regulations on business and banking, as well as calls for social reform, made their way into the feature films of the day. One of the most popular directors of this period, Frank Capra, reflected this in what Michael Rogin and Kathleen Moran call his *little man* films (222). Through the medium of film, “Capra spoke to the New Deal America in the 1930s and later, as the producer of the armed forces *Why We Fight* documentaries, for U.S. values in World War II,” (Rogin, Moran, 215). “The medium of Capra’s film was also its political message,” (Rogin, Moran, 218). Film had long since become the entertainment of the common man and to this day, much of the political and historical information the common citizen owns comes from the thousands of films produced and watched. Capra clearly understood film for the communication tool that it was and could yet be. It was not just art, but a way to spread a message. Thus, it is important to understand how filmmakers viewed their art form, as a way of unpacking the contents of films. For instance, “Capra is often credited with having invented the country innocent persona,” and that “Capra’s film[s]...were about the problem of mythmaking and the power of the media manipulator behind *the people*,” (Rogin, Moran, 221, 229). Capra’s focus on the *little man* correlates to the transition the majority of Americans made as they maneuvered the Great Depression. The elite had proven themselves untrustworthy, and perhaps the source of what held America back from greatness. They now saw the average man, the little man, as the creator of American greatness. Likewise, Capra’s focus shifted from those in power to the regular people, but it also shifted to reforming a national story that would define the regular people. Falling ill for a time, Capra stopped working. He was later convinced to return to directing by the lure of the power given to him by his director’s chair (Rogin, Moran, 221-222). Rogin and Moran further explain, “the condition of Capra’s return to work was that he...use his talent for comedy to make ‘a series of social-minded films’,” (Rogin, Moran, 221). Comedy was

traditionally used to bring tough subjects to the screen without the overbearing preaching a melodrama may carry, and ease the fears that a serious approach would incite in the audience, so that they were subtly conditioned to accept presented ideas.

From this powerful pulpit, Capra saw a clear duty to help rebuild the image of America among its despairing people. Capra's *little-man* films (*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Meet John Doe* and *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*) were an attempt to "resuscitate a usable American past," (Rogin, Moran, 222). In the Depression, finances were not the only thing lost. Americans were left reeling, doubting the institutions that had promised to uphold American ideology, the promise of justice and rightness. "In all three...the hero...is pitted against sinister powerful selfish interests," (Rogin, Moran, 222). These interests were the capitalists and bankers who had stolen the dreams of millions of Americans and stuck them on the bread line. However, there was a paradox to this. Hollywood was a financial machine that made use of "a financial system run by New York bankers/investors and studio producers," the enemy of the "disenfranchised groups" (Rogin, Moran, 222). However, Capra was able to navigate the contradictions of such a structure, and cleverly "thematize it," (Rogin, Moran, 222). In other words, regardless of the financial schemes of studios and their investors, the message was still being given and the people were still united by it. In addition to the studio financing practices, Capra

faced a more formidable challenge—how to unite a multiform, pluralist American audience around the little man's simple moral cause, how to create the people that Deeds, Smith and Doe represented. How to make the motion picture rather than political party or social movement, the vehicle for organizing a mass public? Deliberately exaggerating popular innocence...he operates brilliantly to convert his audience to his cause. (223)

Capra gave audiences an image of how they wanted to see themselves. Thus, he became a “master manipulator of popular feeling,” (Rogin, Moran, 223). For instance, “the typical Capra movie as a *fantasy of goodwill* in which ‘a messianic innocent’ ...pits himself against the forces of entrenched greed,” (Rogin, Moran, 227) gave the public an image of a hero who was like themselves. These average man heroes provided a model to those who would stand up to those who sought to destroy reward and justice for hard work.

The advent of the Second World War brought on a number of changes. During this period, government officials took note of how powerful a tool the film industry could be. Capra most likely stood out among them due to his popularity. However, Rogin and Moran tell their readers that “he never made a successful Hollywood film after 1942,” (Rogin, Moran, 215). This was due to Capra’s caving to bigger powers than himself. “World War II was also making it harder to stand with the disenfranchised little man against irresistible power,” (Rogin, Moran, 230). The government had come to Hollywood and they wanted to install regulations of their own, allegedly to aid the war effort. The propaganda machine of the U.S. was turned toward convincing the isolationist citizens of the nation that they wanted to go to war (Rogin, Moran, 231). This propaganda machine, linked to other past efforts (such as the first Red Scare after World War I), actually created fascism inside the U.S. despite their clear focus against those in Germany (Rogin, Moran, 216, 231-232). They did this “by wiping out the truly private” and installing their own version of a “domestic ideology” (Rogin, 5). In reality this level of control “threatened the family it was supposed to support,” because it made the private matters of domesticity public affairs, thus introducing fascism to American government and society (Rogin, 5, 9). Outsiders assessing the changes in the United States believed that “the brown shadow of fascism is descending lower and lower over the USA,” (Sbardellati, 524). (Brown shadow is a

reference to the brown shirts of Hitler's Nazi core.) This sort of social order persists today in the US, for example in telling people who they can and cannot marry, what medical procedures women are allowed, and that if a person falls ill they are subject to the mercy of their insurance company who can deny them coverage for treatment. These are deeply personal and private matters being argued in the public sphere.

At this point in the readings, several interesting questions were raised. I centered them around Rogin's assertion that "The history of demonology in American politics comprises three major moments. The first is racial...class and ethnic conflict define the second demonological moment...the cold war introduces the third moment" (Rogin, 1). In order to create the consensus, it had to be decided what that consensus would be. As has been inferred to this point, White Anglo-Saxon patriarchy was once again believed to be the destiny that would carry the United States to glory, despite that ideology having failed numerous times and most dazzlingly in the Great Depression. In the face of the whitening of non-white European immigrants and their subsequent acceptance into the sphere of acceptability, a different group would have to be blamed for the reasons why America might not be accomplishing its goals or had strayed from the virtuous path. For example, Ross describes the new perspective that excused the failures of the past: "The *system* works, though it often needs watching" (Ross, 195). The question out of this is: were blacks marginalized after the war as the *other*, who was foreign born and held tenuous ties to the U.S., who would subvert as a form of revenge for their history, and who had ties to the leftist liberalism that argued their liberation and fought for better conditions as a result of class and race divisions? Was the cold war a manifestation of male anxiety which they masked through their deflection of powerlessness onto the confrontation with communism? Were women the third demonological moment because they were actively being repressed and enslaved to the

home and state, while they simultaneously questioned the last point of control for the white male patriarchy by questioning their role in society? If this is the case, it explains the continued racial and social issues through the Cold War and into the present time. “Among racial minorities who were excluded from the suburban dream and the affluence they had done so much to create, a postwar sense of disappointment and anger grew even more intense” (173). Their exclusion questioned the success of capitalism and gave fodder to the enemy perceived in communism.

“The anticommunist crusade attempted to bring all parts of society into a cohesive whole” (May, 218). Gender roles and class barriers were just two items that were manipulated by those who worked to formalize the Cold War consensus. One of the best examples of an attempt to implement a consensus on all the above aspects comes in the form of one of Capra’s most beloved films: *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946). *It’s a Wonderful Life* was released as a Christmas film, but this was merely a façade to insert a challenge to *Godless Communism*. Using the backdrop of angels, prayer and the birth of Christ, it roots George Bailey as a good Christian man. Clarence the Angel’s reading of *Tom Sawyer* firmly links him to the Victorian Era, the source of the American consensus ideology, reimagined as *the gold old days*. As the picture of Victorian piety and goodness, Clarence is the perfect savior for Capra’s *little man*. Another aspect of this ideology can be found in the prominent *Ask Dad, He knows!* sign in the pharmacy. It appears to counsel George when he is given a task that he knows will hurt someone. The sign is a reminder that demands the reverence of the father, a significant ideal of the Victorian Era. Through these images, the film suggests that a return to the Victorian norms will right all wrongs and give purpose to one’s life above the myriad of frustrated dreams. This is why George’s life is centered around wishes and frustrated dreams, a common suffering of the common man. The film also roots this idea in the psyche of the viewer via another biblical comparison: Potter’s real

estate advisor says, “David and Goliath wisecracks.” This is meant to slyly attach the identity of Potter with the evil giant harassing the village, and thus the quintessential subversive figure that Americans have always defined themselves against (imperialist giants, fascist giants, and now communist giants). George is the *every-man*, David, who the average viewer was to see himself as. George is often counseled to take heart in a faith that all his ills are part of a larger plan and that he will overcome the giant and save his village, a destiny far more important than the one he dreamt for himself. This suggestion removes the freedom of will (choice) from the sphere of what the average American should expect from his or her life, replacing it with destiny designed by a greater power. The feminine roles of the film follow a similar measure:

When Capra’s little man comes on the screen for the last time, as George Bailey in *It’s a Wonderful Life*, he is married to the girl next door...this submissive helpmeet exemplifies the feminine mystique that the 1930s Capra happy ending may look forward to, but that never appeared on his screen before Pearl Harbor.

(240)

Rogin and Moran show that this gender ideology has been long employed by Capra, but did not come to full formation until much later. Mary is contrasted by the character of Violet, a girl whose questionable morals tempt George into making the wrong decision between the two women. Violet presents the only other role possible for women if they chose to defy the status quo. In the end, George’s kindness to her saves her from making another bad mistake and suggests that she too has been set right. These comparative roles were formula or staple characters in Film Noir movies, a genre that enjoyed its best hey-day just after the start of the Second World War and into the 1950s during the Cold War.

Class issues of a similar contour had long been employed along with gender expectations. For example, the “Capra film formula in which the people save their hero” (Rogin, Moran, 240). These films were allegories of the World War II era, where Americans came together to preserve freedom for the world, by helping their beleaguered neighbor. Because of this, “the war renewed his (Capra’s) genius for making the little people feel good about their country” (Rogin, Moran, 241). Capra was engaged in creating the American consensus through the ideological image of the perfect people on his screens, idols. To make the hold of an idol stronger they needed to be contrasted against their opposites. George’s opposite is therefore embodied in Henry F. Potter, “the richest and meanest man in the county,” who is “sick in his mind, sick in his soul,” as George’s father Peter describes him. There are other class confrontational characters in the narrative, but Mr. Gower is probably the biggest after Potter. As a small business owner and educated man, Mr. Gower represents another power figure in George’s life. When Gower loses his son to influenza, he gets drunk and nearly kills one of his customers by mixing up capsules of poison, instead of the medicine ordered. George saves him from ruin and saves the life of the unseen patient. However, George is not saved a beating for questioning Gower’s authority. Like when he loses his hearing saving his brother from drowning, George is again punished for his heroics. This is to say, you do what is right regardless of the result because it is what good people do and sacrifice is a noble act. Thusly it reflects the notion of modern day whistleblowers who sacrifice their well being to do the right thing for the majority. Consequently, George also succeeds in saving Gower from becoming a worthless drunk, redeeming the old man by returning him to the moral consensus.

There is a constant contest between good and bad forces in George’s life. For example, when George misses out on his trip to Europe and attending college, in order to pick up his

father's mantle, he is faced with a test of character. One may think that the George should have let the Building and Loan fall, but when the viewer finds out that he was booked on a cattle boat (a low class and cheap form of travel), they begin to surmise the lack of a real choice for George. Despite the fact that he viewed working at the building and loan as unimportant, boring, and stifling, he is very aware of how important the work was to the community. George takes on the job after his father's stroke because he is worried what Potter will do to the people of the town. In order to avoid a total waste of the money he's saved up, George gives it to his brother Harry, who becomes the picture of cultured success that George had hoped to become. Another example of this contest between good and evil, sacrifice and selfishness, is when Harry returns home. Unexpectedly, Harry is married and already employed, though he had promised to take up George's post at the building and loan, and allow his brother to finally go to college. For George, it seems that when something good happens in his life, he pays for it with disappointment or loss. It also appears that fate conspires to prevent every one of his dreams, giving them to those around him. However, this is contrasted with the inference that each of his dreams would have drawn him away from his hometown and the people who needed him most.

By the end of the narrative, it is suggested that the life of one *little man* can touch the lives of many others, creating a chain reaction that impacts the world beyond simple perceptions. It tells the viewer to take heart, that though their dreams may be frustrated, that they have been the vehicle by which others have accomplished their dreams and thus are necessary beyond what they may think and should be happy and proud of their contributions because none are small. It tells the viewers to *count their* blessings. This was important to communicate to a cynical public who now questioned authority and sought answers to their existence outside of religion and

capitalism, and may have been feeling restless in the consensus that provided for the American way. In the same breath, these films built an ideology of self-sacrifice for the greater good.

The film also examined the economic collapse that led to the mistrust of American institutions, outside of the hardships experienced by the common man. The Bailey Building and Loan is contrasted against Potter's bank. The message here is that there are good institutions, the Bailey's, and bad institutions, Potter. Potter's institution represents the kind of vulture capitalism that initiated the economic crisis of the 1930s. Potter is a relic of the old regime, who victimizes immigrants (Martini) and poorer classes to make his money, thus undermining the greater good and causing collapse (as shown in the seedy, alternate world George experiences). Potter is one who causes class conflict, by highlighting the differences that the consensus insisted didn't exist, because in America all are created equal. It is Potter who steps outside of the consensus, disrupting the beneficial flow of capitalism with his greed and evils. Yet, like most films of this period, "at a time when mainstream moviemakers reassigned cultural and social authority to the wealthy, complete with English accents and proper diction, it was not accidental that" other moviemakers "continued to celebrate the beauty of vernacular speech and play, even in the most tragic and deadly situations" (May, 238). *It's a Wonderful Life* is no different in its use of diction. This is why the Bailey Building and Loan is the good bank. The good men and women of the film speak in common vernacular, using slangs and twangs to set themselves apart from the affluent characters who work against them. This is because, "the celebration of vernacular slang similarly asks viewers to...question prescribed codes of success and social roles" (May, 239). The Baileys are successful and highly respected in the town. When George loses sight of his *little man* quaintness through high desires of travel and adventure, and accomplishing grandiose accolades beyond the town, he is made to find out that the small things are the big

things. The film does its best to communicate that hard work and perseverance achieves the right life, not necessarily the life wanted. Again, the affect is showing that destiny not desire is praiseworthy.

It could be argued that this film created the consensus, but it is a product of several generations of developing thought. Pro-consensus films “isolated and contained” minorities, “celebrated male heroes who are loyal to universal ideals and patriotic sacred causes, showed “tolerance and the inclusion of outsiders,” and sidelined the “new woman” to limited roles as “the good girl or temptress.” (May, 219). *It's A Wonderful Life* fulfills all these parameters, but it was not come to suddenly. The nation and its inhabitants were being moved in the direction of a new American way that set itself as the antithesis of communism well before Capra embarked on the project. This film still focused on class conflict and the American Way was leaving that notion behind:

instead of class conflict and moral experimentation, the American Way focused on the rise of consumer democracy that reinforced classless society and introduced the dream of the *white pin-up girl* who channeled her wishes for liberation into the privatized suburban home. (May, 139)

May's statement encompasses the best description of what the new American consensus meant and explains why Capra's career was at an end. His little man had not successfully made the transition to the next step in consensus building, thus looking tired and worn to the audiences it was sold to.

The film *Conspirator* (1949), makes the best example of consensus building American film in the early Cold War era. Starring Robert Taylor and Elizabeth Taylor, the film warns against falling prey to the subversive element, while hammering home acceptable gender roles

and morals. Robert Taylor's character Michael grew up poor in Ireland and Wales, making use of the idea that communists were from poor foreign places, as the theory of subversion was ethnically and economically defined. However, as part of his disguise as a soldier, Michael keeps a very British home, complete with a fox head on the wall. This disguise is contrasted against his subversive persona who goes about in a Macintosh and glasses, wandering the Middle Class regions of the city where he makes his contact with Russian handlers. Through this, the film suggests that the poor and middle classes are the most susceptible to the guile of subversives. Due to their strained economic position, they are perhaps more easily purchased and that they are more easily wooed by promises of more evenly dispersed wealth.

Elizabeth Taylor's character, Melinda, provides the perfect example of the *feminine mystique* that was being portrayed on the screen at this time. Melinda is visiting London because her mother had sent a ham to her host family. It's a contrived reason, heavily steeped in domesticity and social decorum. Gender roles underwent a slight shift from the Victorian ideal to this more modern ideology of the feminine mystique (a gender definition created in the postwar period to convince women to return to the home and vacate the jobs the returning male soldiers would need. I will discuss it in greater depth later). One of the changes was the sexualization and meaning of the sexualization of the female image:

Domesticity and the pin-up girl had to be stripped of all reminders that consumption and sex created *black desires*, a process that gave birth to a home and consumer culture that restored the Victorian gender roles and the coordinates of white civilization. (May, 165)

When the protagonists meet the scene is really quite sweet and romantic, and most definitely idealized. The viewer finds out that Melinda is only eighteen years old and the man

she sets her eyes on, Michael, is thirty-one. The age gap if not intentional still has the effect of defining victims of the subversive foe as tragically innocent, and subversives as manipulative worldly individuals (Corber, 197). Melinda is further enshrouded in innocence by her foreignness. Because she's American, she doesn't understand the rank and file of the British Military and Michael is able to use this ignorance against her. Here, Melinda symbolizes the unsuspecting public who could be used by the subversive agents that scheme to sneak them into the yoke of Communism.

Innocence was also put to use to argue for the gender constructs being kept in place in the post war years. After having experienced so much freedom, "the dream appears to have gone stale for many" women who once viewed the images of the silver screen and its ideology with awe (May, 172). The war had provided an alternate vision of what women could accomplish in their lives. For example, June Allyson was considered America's sweetheart and the epitome of the perfect woman. Once married, Allyson turned to drinking and affairs to get through the *domestic bliss* of subordinating herself to her husband's control (May, 172). She saw the American consensus in a different light than it was shown to the public through film. Allyson explains in her words, "in the ideal suburban home 'I remained all my life a little girl' who 'had no idea who I was'" (May, 173).

Movies could be more powerful than the government in spreading consensus, or any message for that matter (Rogin, Moran, 228). Allyson's words reveal the despair that many women felt oppressed beneath. The carefully orchestrated propaganda had created a hostile environment for those who saw another way of life. Thus, images of innocence in danger, were put to use in films like *Conspirator* to help silence any reluctance to comply with the gender

consensus. Unfortunately, Allyson's fate was not unique as women had no outlet from which to air their grievances.

Only a few years later in the film *High Noon* (1952), gender roles for women were beginning to be challenged. However, men's roles were being reinforced. For instance, Kane's running away goes against the grain of what it meant to be a man in this time and is the driving force of the narrative. He must do what is right, and returns to town to stand up for his people. "I've never run from anybody before," Kane says in response to his doubts for staying. The film portrays the rugged individualism, American spirit, and machismo of the gender role envisioned for American males. His wife Amy in attempting to reason him away, saying that he need only make the choice to do so for her, is the quintessential female (for now). She is shown as weaker, a converted Quaker after having watched the male members of her family killed. However, Amy counters the image of the traditional gender role in two ways. Amy speaks her mind firstly, and marks herself as independent (no family to rein her in). Then, at the end of the film, she is threatened by Miller. Instead of cowering, she fights. Essentially, it is only a mere motion, but it says that she will not stand idly by. Though her husband does the actual killing, without her help in distracting him, they may have both been killed. She remains unsullied by blood, but the image still challenged the expected reaction a woman would have in such a situation. As the weaker sex, women were traditionally depicted in such situations as cowering in paralyzed fear.

Traditional gender constructs were reinforced in *Conspirator*. Melinda's efforts in pursuing Michael do not end well for her. You see her struggle in the opening scene with having to be a wallflower until a man decides to take notice of her. By the time she is sure she has Michael wrapped around her finger, she behaves very high-strung and not at all reserved. This was in opposition to the correct behavior that was expected at the time. It is also implied, that if

she had been patient, she would have found a much more proper mate in Hugh, who was the patriotic, loyal but plodding male.

The opposite of the acceptable female gender role would be the portrayal of the bad woman. Sometimes she was called the *femme fatale* and sometimes the *viper*. The subversive woman was depicted in anti-Communist film as the sexualized new woman, (Rogin, 12). These portrayals were well in line with a traditional story line that pitted the hero against the choices that would make him succumb or overcome the obstacles in his path. Rogin says, “anti-Communist films seem to pose the classic opposition between the free man, family and love on the one hand, female sexuality, the state and the invasion of the family on the other” (Rogin, 13). The evils were labeled slightly differently, but they were the same moral worries that filled the screen from the advent of film. However, the difference was that “Cold War films imply that domestic ideology, far from protecting America against alien ideas, generated aliens from within its bosom” (Rogin, 13). This was a new fear, bred by the post-war period and was most likely the reason for the increase in and popularity of science fiction invasion features of the period, for they lent themselves easily to the parable (Rogin, 13).

Films of the era “dramatized the need to either contain or destroy women who rebelled from the ideal home” (May, 221). In *Conspirator*, Melinda is punished for being too independent, embodied by her active pursuit of Michael. The film *Vertigo* slowly destroys Judy by replacing her personality with Madeline’s under the direction of Scottie’s authority. Likewise, Madeline is murdered by her husband to gain control of her assets, because they made her too independent. Even in *It’s a Wonderful Life*, if Mary does not become George’s wife, she will become a frightened spinster cast to the edges of society. The multitude of films through the

period basically showed women that their role was to be wife and mother and that anything less would lead to an ugly end.

Motherhood was no safe ground either. Once married and a mother, the state and culture of the United States had further instructions for its population of women. “Such discourses constantly warned against the potentially pernicious effects of motherhood” (Corber, 196-197). This invasion into the private sphere showed resentment for the power that motherhood supposedly gave women and exposed “misogynistic fears that...worked to limit their authority as mothers” (Corber, 197). Philip Wylie created the term *momism* in 1942 with the release of his misogynistic work *Generation of Vipers*. Rogin gives a description of momism:

Mom, in Wylie’s depiction, was a self-righteous, hypocritical, sexually repressed, middle-aged woman. Having lost the household functions of preindustrial women...mom got men to worship her and spend money on her instead...women of America raped the men. (6)

The Cold War linked momism with communism by suggesting that mothers could disrupt “the Oedipal structure of the middle-class nuclear family” and make “their sons susceptible to Communist propaganda” (Corber, 197). In other words, mothers made their sons sissies or gay and opened them up to the control of communists through blackmail or the promise of justice.

American society had always prescribed the proper sphere and role of women from a desire of control. “For a society anxious about maternal power, World War II [had] created a crisis” (Rogin, 6). After having served the war effort by taking on the workplace and public spheres which men of the United States had abandoned to fight the war, “women were driven back to domestic subordination in response” to the men’s return and a fear of their extensive liberation (Rogin, 6). In the face of women’s resistance, men like Wylie created his *demonic*

*motherhood* to force their compliance, (Rogin 6-9). Wylie's other writings entertained fantasies of violent revenge on mother figures, and from this it can be gathered that he had deep psychological resentments driving his writings, (Rogin, 8, 16). Setting Wylie aside, I wondered if it was at all possible to find the root of momism in the gangster image of film, where the male gangster is often depicted as worshiping his mother? Is the idea of momism older than Wylie's book? For example, both mothers in *The Public Enemy (1931)* and *Little Caesar (1931)* could be blamed for the criminal bend their sons take, because of their coddling and accommodating ways. Cold War era films such as *Psycho* display an even more sinister outcome for the victims of momism. In order to commit the numerous murders, Norman adopts another persona, that of his mother. The psychiatrist blames the mother's clinging and unbearable mothering, even suggesting that their relationship had become incestuous. (Dr. Slavoj Žižek speaks of this phenomena in [The Pervert's Guide to Cinema](#), but in regards to the film *The Birds*, describing the rage of the birds as a manifestation of Mitch's mother's sexual resentment for Melanie). When his mother took a lover, Norman destroyed them both. He cross-dresses as his mother out of guilt and a desire to still merge with her physically, raising the concept of a stunted Oedipal development. Could Norman have also done this to cleanse her memory and make her the angel of punishment for wayward immoral people? Had her failure to comply with the familial consensus, by taking a married lover, marked her for destruction? "In such movies the state steps in to restore not simply social order but sexual hierarchy as well" (Rogin, 20). They must come in and clean up the messes that these mothers make.

Melinda's discovery of her husband's conspiracy, also echoed the sensational news filling the headlines of the day. It is important to realize that producing the American consensus would not have been as successful without support in other media outlets. Through the news,

“sensational accusations of espionage in the late 1940s and 1950s” (Rogin, 3) helped to legitimize the fears exhibited in the films and transfer them to the psyches of the viewer. With this technique of “exploiting the anti-Communist hysteria of the postwar period, the discourses of national security all but guaranteed,” his/her conformity “to the nation’s security interests” (Corber, 196). Corber is verifying the success of the propaganda machine. This success is due to the opposition by which Americans have traditionally defined themselves. During the Cold War, in order to unite against the perceived threat, “defenders of the national security state invoked their Soviet counterpart” as the force attempting to change who wielded power (Rogin, 2). Rogin asserts that this demonizing of an *other* has historical roots. For example, when he says, “the subversive in all three stages has threatened the family, property, and personal and national identity,” Rogin is invoking the history of slavery and immigration (Rogin, 2).

Out of the fear that some subversive specter of otherness was bent on destruction, there rose the national security state. “The rise of the national security state” coincided with “the production and surveillance of public opinion in the media of mass society” (Rogin, 2). This was a construct meant to keep an eye on subversive activity and prevent the destruction of the nation. “The rise of a security-oriented state bureaucracy was the most, important new factor in the modern history of countersubversion” (Rogin, 2). Here Rogin is talking about the construction of an actual agency to oversee national security interests. After all, if they were to measure public opinion, they would need a bureaucracy to coordinate all that entailed. In reality, it was just an expansion of those institutions already in existence. The duty of these offices were to make it clear despite “men and women losing control over work and public life, hostility to capitalism and foreign policy initiatives was deemed unpatriotic...freedom was now found less in work than in a new consumer democracy focused on the suburban home and classless ideals” (May,

140). This meant that they needed to shift the threat to the white Anglo patriarchy off of race, thus the attack on gender.

Both the CIA and FBI were able to insert their efforts into the American culture using the film industry to define otherness and subversion through the specter of communism (May, 203). “Cold war movies sharply distinguished subversives from countersubversives” (Rogin, 3). Basically, film during the Cold War era was employed to provide guidelines to the citizens, so they would be prepared against communist adversaries and conform to the ideology of the American consensus. Countersubversives were often portrayed as heroic policeman or secret agents, and sometimes the vigilant patriot. For instance, the character of Hugh in *Conspirator*, and the other soldier’s about Michael, is a representative of the ever watchful system who works to out the subversive and end their influence on society. Melinda, despite being an average citizen, is the vigilant patriot who demands that her husband stop his affiliation with the communist party. Though she loses that argument, she still precipitates his end just by being married to him. In this way, the family structure prevents subversion, because secrets cannot be kept within that structure. Thus, Conformity to the consensus took place over the range of a few topics, but mostly focused on family structure. Rogin explains the dual purpose: “The family is constructed in the name of privacy as a field for social control” (Rogin, 21). This is made evident in the final scene where Hugh asks Melinda to only state that she had left Michael causing his suicide and that she is to make no mention of his party affiliations. This sounds like it counters the assertion made by Rogin, but Hugh is making use of the private sphere to control the social outcome of the situation.

Anti-communist propaganda almost always made communism a criminal act. This changed film’s love affair with the gangster by returning criminal behavior to a non-heroic

sphere, and raising “the forces of law and order” as the new hero (Rogin, 11). Now, gangsters were subversives who sought to destroy the American way of life. The police, private investigators, and doctors are all shown as positive authority figures that bring balance and rightness to the world, as seen in *Psycho*.

Another factor made use of was nationalism (Rogin, 4). Propaganda (not just film, but multiple media sources) promoted the greatness of the United States, (Sbardellati, 511). “Patriotic organizations like the American Legion and the Catholic War Veterans...envisioned themselves as essential actors in the domestic Cold War” as former actors in wars and struggles against evil (Sbardellati, 511). Nationalism provided a desirable image to emulate, filling the average citizen with inflated ideas of what it meant to be an American, while also *othering* the world and creating an adversary on which to focus aggression. For instance, in *Conspirator*, Michael is specifically described as Welsh or Irish and not of British descent. For Britain, the Welsh and Irish are *others*. The constant conflict between these nations constituted long standing attempts at subverting power. Thus, making Michael a traitor to the crown is all the easier. While playing cards, Hugh and the other soldiers talk about traitors, dispensing their opinions on communists, who “somewhere along the line became twisted...well frustrated...somewhere along the line they began to feel the world owed them something.” The other men feel that “a traitor is a traitor” and has no good reason to betray his country, they are just *criminal*. Additionally, Melinda carries the memory of the rabbit hunt in which Michael easily dismissed the shattered rabbit as nothing. This is further evidence of his cruelty and criminality.

In the midst of the conflict, those living under this new order must have found it difficult to put a name to the feeling underlying the clash. With hindsight, it can easily be defined and it turns out that the singular descriptor of this period is *anxiety*. Many films also illustrated the

sentiment, as May states: “the vampish woman and the anti-hero dramatized a deep anxiety and identity crisis within the heart of the postwar culture” (May, 223) and also “Moviemakers whose consciousness was formed by the expectations of the thirties began to feel that this world harbored an anxiety that had no name” (May, 171). There were numerous changes and new ideas travelling the globe post World War II. Technology was booming and life was getting more fast-paced. I think the anxiety, much like that felt during the Industrial Revolution, came from the rapid progress and change of the times. More specifically, they were anxious about the uncertainty of the future and adjusting to it. “In such films as *Psycho*...the average existence of common people is disrupted by forces over which they have no control. Beneath the veneer of rationality and consensus lurk forces of uncontrollable violence” (Briley, 230). In addition, May makes an excellent point that supports anxiety for the future:

We have been taught that the turn to inner, psychic explorations in novels, paintings, and film noir reflected internal developments in each field. Artists’ and intellectuals’ perception that they lived in an age of anxiety reflected a mature response to the loss of innocence caused by the atomic bomb, fascist genocide, and a bloody war...the beginnings of the anxiety pervading the arts and the search for new forms of cultural experimentation and their roots in what many saw as a deep a profound crisis in American identity...the new order was a rupture from the past. (217)

The fear was that the future might come violently, because the past had proven it so. World War II had left larger scars than the post war world understood. Thus, a new consensus was forced into place out of panic for stability and control, even if it were only an illusion.

The words “uncontrollable violence” inspires ideas of and frightening images of monsters. That was essentially the point. However, the monsters to be feared were within the borders of the United States and went under the title of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Those four letters succeeded in striking terror in the hearts of those working inside the film industry and those who lived on the outside watching, because no one was safe from the committee’s reach. HUAC essentially undermined the idea of liberty throughout their existence, further rooting the United States in fascist rules. The committee began prior to the Second World War, but the conflict caused a pause in their proceedings (Ross, 197). HUAC was made a permanent committee in 1945, “partially in response to the publicity it and the Alliance generated investigating radicals in Hollywood,” but did not resume investigations until two years later (Ross, 197). Their reign of terror lasted until 1975, though the Cold War continued for another fifteen years (Ross, 213).

The HUAC “crusade drew its strength from both the newly re-energized fears of international communism and from more deeply rooted moralistic, nativistic, and hyperpatriotic attitudes” (Sbardellati, 530). Thus the film formula began reflecting “the preferred solution...protagonists engaged in a demonic battle to destroy, cure, or incarcerate the enemy” without compromise (May, 207). Despite this outward show of support for the new consensus, investigators still distrusted the film industry, believing it was a dangerous tool of the enemy: “those in charge of movies were emissaries of larger political and economic structures” (Rogin, 22). Therefore, they had to be watched. These attitudes would be reflected in much of the film produced during the committee’s existence. Despite Hollywood being a bastion of liberalism, confirmed by their efforts to unionize and their activist work for labor in general, the industry “openly condemned Communists, associating them with espionage and plots involving the

violent overthrow of the American government” (Ross, 204). This was due to HUAC creating an air of fear that forced many to comply with consensus rules or be investigated and lose their livelihood. (Briley, 228; May, 146). “Naming names had become a condition of employment” (Rogin, 23) along with the establishment of blacklisting procedures for those who were named or uncooperative (May, 197; Sbardellati, 501). Blacklisting was employed by studios to avoid losing money at the box office, as again they were under threat of boycott just like the days of the Hays Office (Ross, 200). The Production Code was additionally altered to “prohibit criticism of institutions” (May, 203). With the open intervention of HUAC, and the CIA and the FBI in the shadows, “the space between the state and the film industry collapsed” (May, 147). Under this second round of hearings in 1951, previously accused and blacklisted individuals decided to recant and name names hoping to exonerate themselves and get back to work, (Ross, 201-202).

In assessing the reviews of film during this period, *High Noon* (1952) was mentioned by many as the quintessential anti-HUAC film. The film starts out with an affirmation of the Nuclear Family consensus: Sherriff Kane’s wedding. The wedding is cross cut with the arrival of three men who are revealed to be Kane’s enemies. At first, Kane runs from Miller, as he’s married now and has to think of his wife. This could be construed as symbolic of how those from Hollywood felt under the approach of HUAC. The return of Miller and his men is like the ominous return of the *Hollywood Ten* and others that had been testified against. They thought they would not have to deal with them again, that they were gone for good, but certain circumstances countered that assumption and brought them back into their sphere. This is especially ironic considering that Gary Cooper, who plays the part of Kane, was a cooperative witness.

“If we don’t do what’s right we’re gonna have plenty more trouble,” one of the church members says. The scene in the church where Kane asks for help in meeting the threat of Miller is a metaphorical representation of the trials. The town can thus be seen as Hollywood, the Millers are the supposed subversives, and Kane is the informant to the absent but ever present force of the law. So when Kane warns against undoing all the work they have done in the town, he is justifying his naming of names. The mayor and townspeople are those cowed by the committee into submission or silence. They neither wish to neither help Kane, nor abandon him, torn between a confusion of what is right. There are still those who are clear in their desire to not get involved or not to speak a word. The line the church member speaks also describes the level of the threat. If they did not name names, the committee was determined to make matters much worse. Hence, there must have been a hope that if they gave names that the committee would be satisfied. This of course disregards any personal agendas, assuming that all cooperative witnesses were simply under duress. It also shows the successful demonizing of those who were blacklisted, and explains why it took so long for those who could to come back.

Kane represents the men and women who spoke up thinking they were doing the right thing at the time. Those who caved to the committee’s pressure were also *blacklisted* in a way, shunned by those in Hollywood who stood against the witch hunt. Those who sympathized with Kane were fearful of helping him because they knew it would hurt them no matter their choice. As the character Chaney says, “If you’re honest, you end up poor your whole life.” Naming names before the committee, or refusing to do so would end the same for both sets of players. They lost connections and were separated into two groups, those deemed guilty of subversion and those guilty of betraying their friends. There was no good choice for either camp. The films overall message seems to say that certain situations make one give up their closely held beliefs

and loyalties, because under fire panic forces a gut reaction in the moment. This does not justify aiding HUAC who essentially established fascism inside the United States, and violated the rights of the men and women they tormented. After all, the effect of the inquisition permanently ended many careers through intimidation and criminal search and seizures of suspects' documents, (Sbardellati, 505).

The FBI terminated the HUAC investigations of Hollywood in January 1956 (Sbardellati, 529). In the end, "the hearings produced very little evidence of Communist influence" (Ross, 203). "Ironically, Hollywood produced more films with *subversive* messages after HUAC began its investigation than it did before them" (Ross, 204). I don't find it ironic that this happened, but reactionary. Having been treated unfairly by the committee, it was only natural for filmmakers to speak against it in their art. Although, the film industry still produced anti-communist tales:

The hysterical anti-communism of the 1950s quickly gave way to a cooler more calculated manipulation of Cold War fears for dramatic effect rather than for political propaganda...Communists began to function more as traditional villains than as real-life threats to our national security. (Ross, 210-211)

Because of this, some insist that the McCarthy Era, as the HUAC period came to be known, had little effect on the film industry. Lary May argues that the McCarthy Era did have a profound effect on Hollywood to the point of "national significance" (May, 196).

What elevated the local battle to national significance and ultimately made it successful was that Hollywood anticommunists yoked their wagon to mass politics and governmental power. The agent of that fusion was the arrival of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1947 and 1948, for it

solidified alliances between government, big business, and conservative union leaders that first emerged in World War II. (May, 196)

That abuse of power was in itself significant, but the lasting effects of it are still visible in current film. For instance, the remake of *Red Dawn* (1984 and now 2012) where the origin of the communists is all that has changed, is still a hypermasculine and hyperpatriotic pubescent day dream.

I found it unsettling that the origins of HUAC are still in question to this day. “Exactly what internal issues led HUAC to investigate the movie capital will probably never be fully known” (May, 196). I suggest that May and any other curious bodies look at the connection between Reagan and the FBI. It would not be at all surprising to find that he helped spur on this witch hunt. Fascism, it appears, was the creed of the communist *witch-hunts*. Fascism is a result of radical conservatism, and with figures like Hoover, the author Ayn Rand, the then senator and future president Nixon, senator McCarthy and the former SAG President and future US President Ronald Reagan, theories of a conspiracy can abound (Ross, 195-201). I have included a brief examination of this theory in the footnote below.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The United States government was not the only group affecting the politics during these periods. Worker’s unions also had political influence on the film industry. However, there was a palpable distrust for them throughout the nation. The distrust for Unions can also be traced back to the shift in rhetoric at this time. For example, there was a growing belief that unions led to communism through its inherent socialism. This belief was challenged by Herbert Sorrell, the leader of the CSU, “No true communist can be a successful labor leader, because Communists thrive on poor working conditions...they don’t want their workers to progress” and grow out of communism (May, 182). Sorrell then reminded anyone who thought otherwise that when the Great Crash came, monopolists fired employees, subjected them to the *tyranny* of foremen, and paid workers less for more labor” (May, 184), all things that were clearly communist, and that unions sought to protect workers from these abuses. The pro-union supporters of Hollywood cited that “the Actors Guild updated the Republican tradition to include women and minorities,” they also eradicated crime (gangsters), made work conditions safer and raised wages (May, 183-184). These were all things they felt were synonymous with the ideology of a democratic state. Out of this mix, and “with big business delegitimized, Hollywood artists had not only placed on the screen characters who equated social reform with realizing a consumer culture and republican aspirations, but brought that endeavor directly into grassroots politics” (May, 189).

Unions were not the only groups attempting to affect politics and create the new American consensus. Eric Johnston, president of the Producers’ Association, “prophesied as early as 1944 that a commitment to military defense and worldwide economic arrangements would create a *utopia* of production that would enable the United States to destroy the threat of global communism” (May, 191). Mr. Johnston is also the author of an article I cited in my previous installment who supported the film industry as educational tool (Johnston, 98-102). In light of further information on him, this piece becomes a little more sinister. In speaking about film and the film industry, Johnston’s rhetoric spurred a battle over the meaning of national myths and symbols” (May, 191). Here, May is speaking about the ideological history that Americans believed versus the actual history that may contain perspectives the national consensus at the time did not support. Despite the controversy over his opinions, Johnston won many converts. “Johnston’s most influential convert was the president of the postwar [Actor’s] Guild and the future

It appears that the general anxiety about general uncertainty was used by those in power who wished to wage the Cold War for purposes of wealth and power. Their assertion was that after WWII, citizens of the United States must:

Avoid returning to the former *dark days*, the populace must continue the politics of consensus and moral rebirth. By thwarting communism, the miracle of economic growth would provide prosperity and a moral domestic life. To lead the people to that utopia...Hollywood had a great role to play. (May, 176)

The statement recalls the fear of Progressive sympathies with far left organizations, and their call to tolerance. This both gave them leverage to manipulate public opinion, but also a way not to have to make good on the promises they made during the war.

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president of the United States, Ronald Reagan” (May, 191). It simply makes sense, because Reagan “spent the worst parts of the depression years in high school and in college, removed from the hardship of his father’s home” (May, 191). This effectively made him incapable of relating to those who did suffer economic hardship in the Depression years. Reagan also “missed the unionizing drives,” joining only once it was mandatory (May, 192). On his ascension to Guild president, he also served as liaison to the FBI, “to require Guild members to prove their citizenship” (May, 192). “Informed by his Guild activities, these years provided the context in which Reagan began to see that class unity against an external enemy provided the bonds for a new consensus” (May, 192). “Reagan’s newfound success, his disengagement from New Deal radicalism, his promotion of class consensus in hierarchical organizations, and the identification of his star persona with the consumer democracy—led him easily to see the strikes of the war and postwar years as the acts of unpatriotic enemies. To solidify the alliance with the producers and the pro-business IA, Reagan wrote to a congressional investigator that the charge of conspiracy and collusion between producers and Guild leaders was *groundless and ridiculous*” (May, 192-193). Thus, it only makes sense that Johnston’s words would carry weight with him. “Reagan recalled... ‘the bulk of communist work is done by people who are sucked into carrying out red policy without knowing what they are doing’” (May, 194). I find this statement highly ironic, considering he was working from a perspective of ignorance, based on his privilege to be exempt from the sufferings and absent from the work of the actors who made his workday better. Despite his lack of experience in the movement, as president of the Screen Actors’ Guild, Ronald Reagan led the fight to drive subversives out of Hollywood” (Rogin, 24). One is left wondering if he had an axe to grind, perhaps over being denied a role? Whatever the cause, it is obvious that Johnston and those who thought like them counted on ignorance and fear in those they proposed to convert to the new American consensus.

In this way, “fears of propaganda moved center stage during the early postwar years” (Sbardellati, 500-501). This was fear of the wrong kind of propaganda. Anything that supported communism or leftist ideology, or spoke out about racial and class conflict, fell into the category of the wrong sort of subject. It was believed that these subjects would undermine America. The fear developed during the war. As the government turned attention to gaining the support of the citizens for intervention, “FBI officials considered Hollywood among the most important [institution], for they understood the film industry to be ‘one of the greatest, if not the greatest, influence upon the minds and culture’ of people the world over” (Sbardellati, 500.) This belief was shared by Johnston and his compatriots like Reagan. Though they saw the good that film could be put to, they also understood film could be just as easily used by clearly leftist groups. The latter was more likely as the film industry had a long involvement in labor organizing and social programs that also had wide support with the American people. The fear was compounded by the realization that Hollywood was able to reach beyond American borders and garner the affections of people all over the world. “This peacetime outcome of the war’s propaganda of liberalism helped create a taste-culture that drew its sense of advocacy from formerly stodgy Hollywood. This is not to argue that Hollywood was innocent of the charge leveled by the Frankfurt school of social critics that it acted as a form of state apparatus that spoke as the voice of the ruling class” (Ross, 182). Here Ross is citing the constraints put on Hollywood by the Production Code which controlled the final products put on screen. Films in the Production Code Era had to conform to the ideologies of conservative groups that threatened the ruin of any studio, filmmaker or individual who refused to comply. The ideology of this period was influenced by “the seemingly endless task of *saving the world for democracy*” which was a notion “built on assumptions of America’s historic destiny and inherent virtue which had served as justifications of the forceful expropriation of the *wilderness*, or conquest of whatever threatens its national identity, and for...*regeneration through violence* throughout its history” (Williams, 33). Whatever ugly instance a dissenter may point to, the nationalistically faithful would return to Doug Williams’ point in defense.

The information previous to this point gives a brief synopsis of how “the subversive image was constructed,” prior to and in the early part of the Cold War (Sbardellati, 497). It also gives clues as to what would come during the height of the conflict and beyond. “The dialogical techniques that had informed moviemaking in the thirties remained a way to undermine the closed worldview informing public and personal life in the Cold War” (May, 238). May is stating that acts of history are built upon the acts that come before them. This is to say that the techniques that were used during the Cold War had their origins in other historical acts of similar fashion. For instance, the social problem plays that had been in existence since *Oedipus Rex* (429, BCE) and most likely even before that. The only difference has been the technology on which they were delivered to the masses and the skills and schemes of those doing the delivering. As such, filmmakers and those who wished to control the media understood that certain subjects and images needed to be cleansed from the screen, while others should saturate it:

The early years of the Cold War undeniably witnessed numerous attempts to purge the culture of anything that could be deemed subversive, including abstract modern art and the story of Robin Hood. (Sbardellati, 496)

This was because conflicting messages would dilute the anti-communist rhetoric, making it one more voice in the auditorium. By silencing the other voices “the anticommunist crusade assaulted republican values,” chipping away at the freedoms and rights that the United States had been built upon (May, 234). It was successful in doing so because it offered counter-history. The loss of the studio system in the 1950s, and with it the end of outright censorship, also provided a veil of seeming truth (May, 223-240). By this I mean, that they could say censorship was no longer used, and that what was produced was not amended by interested parties.

Corber discusses the idea of counter-history in his review of the film *Vertigo* (1958) (Corber, 155). The film questions what real history is through scenes where Scottie searches for Carlotta's past not in San Francisco's "official archives" but with "unpublished memoirs of local families" and "private letters" (Corber, 155). Corber also points to the example of when there is a "discrepancy between the actual experiences of real historical" people "and the representation...in official histories of the United States" (Corber, 156). Thus, Corber feels that, much like the government of the 1950s, "film too engages in the repression of historical knowledge" (Corber, 156-157). This is evident in their cooperation in consensus building since film began. *Vertigo* also reimagines history by ignoring or undercutting the counterculture of San Francisco, and avoiding the seamier side of its history through carefully constructed perspectives that reinforce white male patriarchal power (155-157).

At this time, there was an engagement in groups that called such histories and ideologies into question, often summed up under the title of counterculture. The counterculture is a subgroup that goes against the encompassing dominant culture of a people. The counterculture often questions the values of the dominant culture undercutting its authority. In order to avoid a weakening of the consensus by subversive subgroups created by countercultures, the arbiters of the dominant group resort to repression:

The repression of historical knowledge encourages a nostalgic relation to the past in which the part of the past that is object of nostalgic desire...is removed from its historical context and inserted into a kind of mythic, timeless present; consequently, it can never be properly understood. ( Corber 158).

People are much less likely to question something that gives them pride and happiness. However, a counterculture still grew despite attempts to prevent it.

“Because American society had become so affluent in the 1950s, it was *settling for the first time in its history into a rigid class system*” (Corber, 170). However, the nation had been built upon the notion of freedom and equality and this caused resistance in many areas. For instance, according to Corber, “resistance to middle-class values” emerged from “a disturbance in the Oedipal structures of the middle-class nuclear family” (Corber, 171). Corber cites the film *Psycho* as an example of how resistance to conformity gave rise to “the dispersal of power across the social field...in the 1950s” (Corber, 192). By this Corber suggests that not everyone agreed with the American consensus, and wasn’t necessarily manifested at the day to day level of society. The battle for consensus might be a battle that took place in the media, only randomly and limitedly spilling over into the public sphere. He also notes, “*Psycho* called attention to the mobility, or lack of fixity, of power relations...and suggested” they were reversible (Corber, 192). Hitchcock’s film questioned the authority of the consensus makers and also posed the possibility of a different path for the viewing audience. Thus, “*Psycho* indicated the possibility of constructing an alternative representation of social reality” (Corber, 217). This alternate representation had the power to provide a vehicle for questioning the consensus and marking out an alternative way of life. This makes greater sense when aligned with Corber’s statement that

*Psycho* stresses the limited ability of the state to determine the individual’s subjective engagement with the signifying practices that regulate and control the production of meaning at a given historical moment. (192)

For example, through frames of a subculture, “the Left began to find a new market for a dark *film noir*,” a genre that questioned consensus ideology from the outset of the Cold War (May, 213). Many of these films appear to be in support of the consensus but it is only a thin veneer that is easily scraped away. For example, May states that filmmakers “reshaped the *dark* crime film...to

keep alive a critique of capitalism and repressive social roles” (May, 218). Having worked for years under the Production Code, these artists were very aware of the ways in which they could get their messages across without being so blunt as to gain the attention of those who wanted to suppress their material. The main quest of these films “was not to simply critique the new order” but to affect change by gaining cultural freedom (May, 230). Out of that drive, artists pointed the way to a more vital community and public life to juxtapose against the excesses of capitalism and repressive sexual and social roles” (May, 215). The writer Arthur Miller had hoped to continue the protest against the excesses of capitalism in his work with Hollywood:

the political drift of the country had a direct bearing on the movies one could expect make, so there was more than academic interest in what was really going on in the headlines. (May, 216)

Still, as Miller’s statement suggests, there were other artists who through “the *dark* conversion story informed major anticommunist films” (May, 220). For this group, film noir “served as a cautionary tale that showed that one’s former beliefs could be subversive or aid an enemy” (May, 221). The formula was directly taken from the propaganda films of the Second World War. *High Noon* is considered a noir by many critics. *Conspirator* and the Hitchcock films all make use of its visual elements.

The use of dark images in anti-communist film helped to reinforce the negativity being associated with the communist nations as media exposed their crimes (Rogin, 4). The continued battle focused on the “threat as an invasive, invisible, deceptive, enslaving conspiracy” (Rogin, 9). Instead of a chicken in every pot, America now had a communist in every closet. “Cold war films play out the threat” by “expos[ing] the ravages suffered by families whose members were accused of subversion” (Rogin, 23). Some portrayals showed characters who “alienate their

families by pretending still to be themselves” (Rogin, 31). Prior to this they had been obvious and the clear other in the room. “They moved inside our minds and bodies in the 1950s” (Rogin, 31). Because of this suspected widespread invasion, “anti-Communist films demand eternal vigilance to protect self and country from invasion” (Rogin, 29). Science fiction provided the perfect format for this allusion.

Returning to the idea of the closet, “in the age of McCarthyism, political subversion and moral perversion were often believed to go hand in hand” (Sbardellati, 506-7). “In the 1950s, several factors combined to make homosexuality the exploitable subject it had not been before” (Noriega, 25). Noriega is not suggesting that homosexuality was not maligned prior to the Cold War. Instead, the statement suggests that it was not used to the same effect. As always, if homosexual themes were shown on film, they enjoyed two determined stereotypes: that it was a mental disorder, or the result and cause of tragedy (Noriega, 24-25). Because of this, they were deemed susceptible to the manipulations of subversives (Sbardellati, 506-7). Corber writes:

By invoking the homophobic...construction of the *homosexual* and the *lesbian* as security risks, Hitchcock’s films virtually guaranteed that gender and nationality functioned as mutually reinforcing categories of identity. (6)

within his films, highlighting *Psycho*. However, Corber suggests that this is not quite in the way one might first assume. Sam’s engagement “in pre-marital sex with Marion intensifies his desire for her because it defies the government’s authority to determine the organization of his sexuality” (Corber, 211). In fact, “the characters in *Psycho* derive pleasure from occupying a position outside the law” because this lets them defy government intervention in their sexuality (Corber, 210). However, these are merely psychological rebellions, because they’re not public displays. Sam and Marion always meet in seamy hotels out of the sight of any judgment. In this

same way, Norman's cross-dressing isn't expressly homosexual. It is a psychological rebellion though. He does not cross-dress outside of committing murder. Either of these rebellions are equated with mental illness and defect, as was homosexuality at the time, described so by the Doctor who analyzes Norman in the final scenes. This doctor also blames the breakdown of the expected nuclear family structure for precipitating the entire event. Because Hitchcock is constantly working with doubles, and pitting the mirror image of something against itself, it is difficult to entirely agree with Corber. Sam and Marion do challenge the ability of the government to decide gender roles and expectations, but the ending also suggests that they will prevail by destroying those who defy them. The government may not directly destroy Marion and the others for their transgressions, but they make use of the shattered Norman to restore the consensus. In the end, Norman must also be contained, helping them to rid of all subversions.

*Vertigo* also explores the notion of homosexual tendencies and psychological rebellion. Critiques of *Vertigo* "suggest that in the 1950s the only way Americans could rebel was psychologically" (Corber, 172). Scottie's fear arises out of the deeper psychological struggle he endures in the face of the events on screen: wanting to quit the police force and the emasculation that suggests (Corber, 173-178). Thus he fears he is becoming homosexual. Scottie's vertigo becomes a direct result of "his hesitation in the performance of his duties" which have "feminized him" (Corber 175). Furthermore, when the men trade Madeline between them, "the exchange of women was frequently identified as a homosexual practice men engaged in because they could not touch each other directly" (Corber 175-176). The vertigo represents his sexual uncertainty, and the fear that ambiguity causes. Scottie's examination of his sexuality also makes him engage in the parameters of gender inequalities as he attempts to alleviate his anxieties. Corber states that this "was a prime component of the official construction of masculinity in the

1950s” (Corber, 180-181). This detail exhibits the historical construction of male gender roles, especially when compared to Hitchcock’s earlier films *Rope* (1948) and *Strangers on a Train* (1951), in which the homosexual is made out to be mentally defective, through their desire to conspire and commit murder. Scottie does not desire to kill Madeline or Judy, but finds himself in collusion none-the-less.

Despite attempts to seriously engage the new ordered consensus and make American citizens realize the importance of adopting it, many found humor in the construct. The film *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) is “a movie entirely faithful to the film tradition it brings to an end,” and does so with the utmost humor (Rogin, 18). *Dr. Strangelove* is a complete parody of the red scare (Rogin, 18). The film derives “anti-Communism and nuclear holocaust from the free man’s fear of female sexuality,” while exposing the latent fears of nuclear annihilation and “the freeman’s displacement by the technological state” (Rogin, 18). It points out the illusion of safety that people were told would be found in capitalism and the nuclear family, by pointing to the futile chain of command that supposedly safeguards the United States, and hence the free world, from assault. For instance, Ripper’s takeover of command and also when the president of the United States invites the Russian ambassador into the war room, against protocol and the advice of General Turgidson: “He’ll see everything...he’ll see the big board!” Also the suggestion of absurdity in protocol, such as the President’s response to an altercation between the General and the Russian Ambassador: “This is outrageous! I’ve never heard of such behavior in the war room.”

*Dr. Strangelove* also employs satire to question the rhetoric of the era. Taking the Cold War sentiment on vigilance against the enemy out of context, General Ripper’s lecture to the base troops becomes wholly absurd. Satire was also employed in the use of harsh stereotyping:

the cowboy figure played by Slim Pickens, (Maj.) 'King' Kong, General Ripper the paranoid soldier and the other military leaders present the hyper-masculinity of the era. Mandrake, the British voice of reason, appears ineffectual, wishy-washy and effeminate. Miss Scott, Turgidson's mistress, is the homebound sex kitten who cannot be controlled by her man. Lastly, Dr. Strangelove is a parody of the Nazi scientist, a symbol of the root of the Red Scare, America's interest and compliance with fascism and perversion. Through these satirical gender and ethnic stereotypes, the film deconstructs the national consensus by making it a farce and therefore challenging its validity. The more modern film *Clue* (1985), makes similar use of satire, though by this time the Red Scare and the FBI of the period had become a common joke with the American film audience.

Attendance at the cinema had sharply declined in the postwar years, attesting to the fact that "audiences could not care less about the supposed *red menace* threatening us from without and from within" (May, 223; Ross, 212). The fact was people were not buying what the Red Scare was selling, at least not on the level that Hollywood or the Government attempted to make apparent. Lary May states that an underlying reason, one that answers the question as to why this happened far better than the collapsing Paramount Consent Decrees or the advent of television, was "the impact of the domestic Cold War and vice crusading" (May, 224). To put it simply, Americans did not want to be told how to live their lives. Here, May's statement supports just that idea: "the remaining audiences wanted a product that did not so much reinforce as undermine official values" (May, 224). The success of films like *Psycho* and *Dr. Strangelove*, which question the cleansed image of America, can attest to that. Therefore, it can be determined that the American consensus was a notion derived by the few to control the many. To do so, the many had to be convinced that they wanted to take part in the consensus to begin with. Several

factors were employed as scare tactics. For instance, “communism not only threatened public stability in cold war films; it also turned family members against one another and endangered private life” (Rogin, 11). Though the Cold War soldiers created converts, it was obvious that “certainly not everyone in the 1950s adhered to this consensus” (Briley, 229). This is evident in the subtle challenges “during this apparently conformist decade, [as] Hollywood hinted at the subversive elements waiting to burst through the veneer and propel America into the 1960s,” (Briley, 229). The counterculture has stood as proof of an alternate ideology throughout many eras.

Despite the lack of success with the American populace, the American government was successful in setting up a broad based and invasive “national security apparatus. That apparatus survived the breakdown of the consensus and dominated the 1960s” (Rogin, 18). I would argue that this apparatus is in effect to this day. Though officials in the United States claim that America won the Cold War, it “is more likely that both the United States and the USSR *lost* it” in long lasting economic repercussions (Ross, 212). Proof of this can be found in the multiple economic problems that United States has been struggling through since the 1990s, and also the breakdown of the Soviet Union through economic collapse.

“The most pressing issue of postwar public life... [was] the demands of racial minorities to participate in the affluent society,” which would come in civil rights gains and better portrayal on screen (May, 208). May forgets to mention the advances made in gender politics. The construction of the feminine mystique and women’s difficulty in accepting that helped spur on the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. This revolution also brought homosexuality to the fore of topics. Both groups latched onto the Civil Rights Movement, and all three made major gains. It is arguable that the thrust to de-class and de-color America assisted in this movement,

despite conservative hold outs who struggled to keep race and gender constructs a dividing power structure.

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