
The Cold War: an Era of Fear

An Era of Fear

Truman had just demonstrated the raw power of the nuclear bomb, in order to end World War II, in 1945. The cost of war had immediately changed; the world had seen that whole cities could be obliterated within seconds. This would send a paralyzing shock through the world. After World War II the world was split between two economic idealities, Communism and Capitalism. This would drive America and The Soviet Union into the Cold War. The Cold War was an exceptionally distinct war that manifested a fear within Americans that was beautifully captured in the literature and films made by the people that experienced the Cold War.

Many Americans were immensely pleased that their country had risen from the horrible World War, victorious. They were ready to return to a peaceful that they had once known. During this time books like *Stuart Little* and *Goodnight Moon* had become exceptionally popular among the American public. These novels were very children oriented and conservative just like society at the time. They did not have a shred of war within the pages of these books. These books captured the mindset of a typical American, wanting to get past the war and clear their minds of the atrocities that their country had just witnessed. Though the time they were trying to return to was not the same as the one that they were in just before the war. Before the war women were gaining many rights and freedoms they hadn't had before, but America was returning to a more traditional time. This meant that women's rights would be reeled back. America had started to conform.

The American middle class went through a transformation and were conforming to the guidelines set by movies like *It's A Wonderful Life*. This film had the image of a perfect family, with a beautiful house wife and a hard working man. The American public would be greatly influenced by the emergence of television. Television allowed social norms to be broadcasted to the whole nation. Television also strengthened the importance of a happy family, because a family within this time had only one television that was centered in the living room, which had not been evolved for the viewing of television. William Whyte described the working man's thoughts perfectly with 'I love my wife; I love my family; I never let them get in the way of business' in *The Organization Man*. Conformity would become abundantly important once the Cold War had begun.

The country had been left in the unexperienced hands of President Harry Truman. Though the Soviet Union had been America's trusted allies and were highly praised by the American public throughout World War II, they were still communists. An ideology that America could not live

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along side with. "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" is a great mock of the communistic ideology that was written by George Orwell in Animal Farm. The world had been split between communism and democracy. Truman established the Containment Doctrine in 1945. This doctrine attempted to contain and stop the spread of communism through Europe. The border between the democratic countries and the countries that had been infected by communism would be known as the Iron Curtain. The Cold War would be a fight between the world's two superpowers, which would take place in counties that were between revolutions. These conflicts would be known as proxy wars.

The Korean War would be the first confrontation that the United States would be involved in. In the 1950's democratic South Korea, supported by America, and communistic North Korea, supported by China and the Soviet Union went to war. The 38th parallel was the border between South and North Korea before the war. The United States provided 88% of the soldiers sent by the United Nations. Both armies drove deep into enemy territory but they were both unsuccessful of winning the war. After three hard years of war neither side was able to reach victory. The war reached a stalemate in 1953. The 38th parallel would become the border once again. Many books of the Korean War would be written long after the war. During this war something had been scaring the American public.

The Red Scare had emerged in the United States of America. Senator Joseph McCarthy was a huge catalyst for the Red Scare. During the period many people were being accused of subversion. The communist scare had gripped the country so tightly that neighbors and family members were turning against each other. The Red Scare spawned a book called I led 3 lives, Citizen, Communist, Counterspy which enticed the American public greatly; it then was converted into a 117 episode show. McCarthyism led to the Hollywood Blacklist, in which screen writers, actors, directors, musicians and other entertainers were denied employment because of their respected beliefs. The Executive 9835 was signed in March 1947 by Harry Truman. This order sparked investigations of government officials. McCarthy and many others went on a witch hunt looking for anyone who would break the norm and they would accuse them of being a spy or in support of communism. If McCarthy could have his way he would have turned America into a totalitarian government. Conformity was essential in this era , for if you neighbor saw you breaking the norms and thought you were a communist , you would be reported and probably arrested, this scare led to many types of literature, specifically espionage literature.

Throughout this time the market was being flooded with espionage literature and movies. The authors and directors were praying on the fears of the American public. The execution of the Rosenberg's made the threat of espionage very real to the American citizens. The first James Bond novel had been published during this period of fear. James Bond became so popular because it made the American people confident that their government had spies in the Soviet Union that were out smarting the Soviet Union. Ian Fleming conquered the espionage market

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with James Bond. Many of these espionage novels would have a Soviet spy defect to the American side so that the American public would feel superior to their Soviet counterparts, *The Hunt for Red October* would be a great example of this. *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* by John le Carre made the concept of a double agent very enticing. *Our Man in Havana* takes a more comedic approach but it is still one of the most popular espionage books of the time. These books reinforced America's superstitions and had citizens trying to find the communist in their neighborhood.

Espionage was not the only thing the American public had to fear. They all knew that the United States was at mercy of a nuclear strike at any time. At first the American public had no idea what a nuclear deterrent was. A nuclear deterrent ensured that if either side were to fire missiles, the opposing side would immediately fire a set of their own. This led to the mutual assured destruction theory that stated that neither side could fire a single missile because they knew that it would mean that neither side would survive the aftermath. It would be an irreversible annihilation of both parties involved. It essentially prevented a nuclear war between the Soviet Union and The United States of America. This fear of the bomb was another fear that authors of this time period used to their advantage.

The bomb threat was becoming an immense fear in the American public, and the literature and films didn't help that. Many books portrayed an accidental nuclear strike that could end both nations if the president couldn't convince the Soviet premier. A great example of one of these books would have to be *Fail-Safe* written by Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler. This book made it a point to try and convince the American public that the bombs were incredibly dangerous and that both governments should try and dismantle their nuclear stockpiles. It was an incredibly engrossing novel that had many citizens looking in the sky, making sure that there weren't any Soviet planes in the sky. The film *Dr. Strangelove* took a comedic look at the same situation that *Fail-Safe* put the American audience in. "Gentleman you can't fight here, this is a War Room" has to be one of the funniest lines in any movie. On the other hand there were books like *When the Wind Blows* which takes a totally unique approach to the nuclear war. It is presented in a comic book style and it supplies loads of dark humor. It follows an elderly couple that is oblivious of the nuclear strike that has hit Britain. They then suffer from radiation sickness, a fairly new concept to many people at the time. These books and films implanted the certainty of annihilation because of these nuclear bombs. There is one other type of books regarding the Red Scare.

Americans were afraid of the Soviet Union marching in and destroying everything that was American. These types of books were the most irrational types and were likely not going to happen unlike the previous types of literature. There hadn't been anything that actually happened to spark these types of books and movies, yet they became very popular because no one wants their country to be invaded. One of the most popular books would have to be the

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Manchurian Candidate written by Richard Condon. A famous politician becomes brainwashed during his tour in Korea. For periods of time he is wiped from anything that makes him American and listens to the orders that were given to him and then forgets it after. A popular film arouse called The Thing from Another World the movie is about an alien that crashes on Earth and needs to drain blood from its victims to survive. At first the symbolism can be lost but if looked at closely the Thing is a representation of the Soviets that are going to invade America and drain it of itself. The film The Russians are coming the Russians are coming is a comedy but it is the most obvious in pointing out that American citizens were very afraid of a Russian invasion.

The most famous of all proxy wars would undoubtedly be the Vietnam War. The United States of America believed that if one state were to fall to communism than the rest would be infected with it. The Vietnam War would span from the 1950s to 1982. The war would span through four separate presidents' terms. The war was between the democratic south, against the communistic north. At first the French were in and they were trying to contain the communism but they later pulled out in 1954. The United States supplied money and military advice to the South Vietnamese Forces. When Lyndon B. Johnson replaced Kennedy he sent US forces in 1965. America was confident that their Marines would have the firepower to take Vietnam. The amount of American troops would sky rocket to half a million by 1968. Many of the casualties weren't reported so that the US citizens would still back the war. There had been a truce that both sides mutually agreed on during the month of January, but in 1968 the Viet Cong broke it and launched the largest attack of the war on several different cities. Though the American forces came out victorious from the Tet Offensive it would be a turning point in America's involvement in Vietnam. Richard Nixon would come to office soon after. Nixon installed a policy known as "Vietnamization". Nixon would fly B-52s loaded with nuclear weapons to the Russian border as a part of his mad man theory. He would try and make himself look like a mad man, therefor unpredictable so that other countries would not provoke the United States. These events would launch a huge amount of Vietnam related literature.

Vietnam provided so much writing material for authors; some of them actually were enlisted in Vietnam. The most popular first-hand account of Vietnam would be Dispatches written by Michael Herr. Many of the popular Cold War authors sung the praises of this book like John le Carre. Dispatches revealed the experience of a soldier in Vietnam that many Americans had not had a clue about. Many Vietnam veterans have come out and said that it is one of the most realistic accounts of Vietnam. Another popular book written during the Vietnam war would be the The Quiet American by Graham Greene. It follows the story of a British journalist that is in love with a Vietnamese woman. This book is considered an anti-war book. This book discusses the atrocities that some American troops took a part of, therefor the American public labeled it as un-American. Most of the books written during this time were documentaries or first-hand experiences unlike the earlier Cold war literature that sold books with the fear that certain annihilation in Americans. Most of the books during this period of time were very grim and anti-

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war because on the homestead the many Americans were opposed to the Vietnam War. Hippies were defiantly breaking the norms that were set at the beginning of the Cold War.

There were two types of counter-culture books. One of them had futuristic views of the world that were bleak and confirmative. These books would give the counter culture something to try and prevent. George Orwell's 1984 is a great example of this. 1984 gave a future where the government kept an eye on you at all times. The government would launch attacks on their own citizens and blame it on a made up country. The other type of book was one that described it like The Electric Kool-Aid Test by Tom Wolf. Tom Wolf would go on and describe orgies that women would have with men. These books described the freedom that these people had. Vietnam and Counter Culture literature would be the last of the Cold War related literature.

The Cold war was a war unlike any war anyone had ever experienced. Cold War literature was unlike any literature anyone had ever experienced before. The Cold War brought many heterogeneous ideas that no author before had because the ideas weren't possible before. The fear was unlike any other yet the authors of this time period were able to capture it within the pages of their books perfectly. The pages within these books are a time machine into the past. When learning about history, people aren't very excited because they know the result but the Cold War is a whole different time because before everyone knew that win or loss you would still live, maybe not the same way as before but alive nonetheless, but if even one warhead were to be launched, the enemy would launch all of theirs, ending both countries and probably the Earth.

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