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REFLECTIONS OF FEAR:
MASS HYSTERIA IN COLD WAR CINEMA 1946-1991

by

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MASS HYSTERIA IN COLD WAR CINEMA 1946-1991

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Dedication

To my husband Mark Ovesny for pushing me to finish and standing by me when I got discouraged. Also, many thanks to him for reading and rereading my paper so many times. To Dr. Barbara Hales who encouraged me to write a thesis and who had provided so much helpful guidance throughout this whole process.

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ABSTRACT

REFLECTIONS OF FEAR: MASS HYSTERIA IN COLD WAR CINEMA 1946-1991

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The Cold War was one of the longest and most complicated wars in American History. It lasted from 1946-1991 and was entrenched in every person's life in the United States. It was a time of great fear and suspicion. Americans were living with heightened anxiety that was reflected in the movies of the time, starting in the 1950s with the fear of communism and continuing through the 1980s with the fear of World War III and a post-apocalyptic world. This thesis will look at how these fears were reflected in the films that were being produced in each decade. I will first look at the 1950s with the film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* as a reflection of the mass fear or hysteria regarding the infiltration of communism into America stirred by the McCarthy trials of the 1950s. Next, I will look at the 1960s with the fear of Mutually Assured Destruction reflected in *Dr. Strangelove*

or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb. The 1970s were different in terms of Cold War fears: this was a time where President Richard Nixon was engaged in Détente and relations with China and the Soviet Union improved. The 1970s was also a major time of economic crisis in the United States: the energy crisis so many Americans feared replaced the Cold War in importance. The idea of mass panic picks up again with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 and his hard stance against the Soviet Union. Many people in the United States were fearful of World War III and having to live in a post-apocalyptic world; these concerns are reflected in the films *The Day After* and *WarGames*. All four of these films together paint a picture of the real fears that led to the mass hysteria regarding the Cold War.

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INTRODUCTION

The Cold War was one of the longest and most complicated wars in American History. It lasted from 1946-1991 and was infused into every person's life in the United States. It was a time of great fear and suspicion. Americans were living with a heightened fear that was reflected in the movies of the time. Starting in the 1950s with the fear of communism and continuing through the 1980s with the fear of World War III and a post-apocalyptic world. This paper will look at how these fears were reflected in the films that were being produced. I will first look at the 1950s with the film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) as a reflection of the mass fear or hysteria regarding the infiltration of communism into America stirred by the McCarthy trials. I then look at the 1960s with the fear of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) reflected in *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) (hereinafter *Dr. Strangelove*).

Starting in the 1950s Americans began to have a sense that the Cold War was going to be different than any conflict that had come before. The Cold War would be a much more internal conflict, taking place on a personal level rather than playing out on large battlefields. This war would also be reflected in emotions rather than physical battles: it would be a psychological conflict. This conflict continued through the 1950s and well into the 1960s, retreated in the 1970s, and picked up again in the 1980s. Many people felt they did not have control over the situation and that led to mass hysteria among the American public. Senator Joseph McCarthy, head of the House Un-American

Activities Committee (HUAC), in the 1950 Congressional Hearings on the Threat of Communism in America noted:

The reason why we find ourselves in a position of impotency is not because our only powerful potential enemy has sent men to invade our shores, but rather because of the traitor's actions of those who have been treated so well by this nation. It has not been less fortunate or members of minority groups who have been selling this Nation out, but rather those who have had all the benefits that the wealthiest nation on earth has to offer-the finest homes, the finest college education, and the finest jobs in Government we can give (Unger 251).

During the 1950s the American public was overwhelmingly concerned with the threats of a communist invasion and nuclear war. After World War II, relations between the United States (US) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) started to break down due to vast differences between the ideologies of these two countries. The USSR was communist, the United States capitalist/democratic, and the two nations did not see eye to eye on anything. The threat of the spread of communism into the United States became an overwhelming concern of most Americans and the "witch hunts" began in earnest with Joseph McCarthy as the ringleader of the investigations. McCarthy portrayed the communist threat as insidious and presented a case in which it was likely that the communist could take over any town in America. The American public would have to be diligent and find this communist threat. The films of the 1950s reflected this

growing fear of communism invading everyday America, and no film did it better than the 1956 classic *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. This film about alien pod people taking over the small town of Santa Mira, California could be seen as a real-life invasion of the communists in small-town America. The idea of mass hysteria that is seen in the film and the psychological effects it had on the American public mirrored the fear that McCarthy instilled in the country about the possible invasion of Communists. The first part of this chapter will look at the use of post-war psychology in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and how it was used to communicate to the audience the idea of mass hysteria as the explanation of pod people and the communist threat in small-town America.

The second film that I will investigate is *Dr. Strangelove* that focused on the 1960s and the growing accumulation of nuclear weapons. This film was released less than a year after the Cuban Missile Crisis between the Soviet Union and the United States and concerns a military officer going against orders and giving the code to drop the atomic bomb on the Soviet Union. By 1963, both countries had engaged in a massive nuclear arms race trying to outdo the other country. With this many weapons produced, it was only natural that the American people became concerned about the future relations between the Soviet Union and the United States. The real fear was nuclear annihilation or Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). This panic was realized in the black comedy of Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*. Even the name of the film points to the fear and anxiety in America: *Dr. Strangelove or: How I stopped Worrying and Learned to Love the Bomb*. America's love/hate relationship with the bomb was indeed a strange love.

I will look at Kubrick's film regarding Cold War America and Europe in the context of mass hysteria and fear of nuclear annihilation. Some saw the film as a warning about the rabidly increasing arms race between the Soviet Union and the United States that started in 1950 with the US policy paper National Security Council (NSC) NSC-68. This report called for "a rapid build-up of political, economic, and military strength in the Free world" (May 25) which gave the go-ahead to increase America's nuclear program. This report was drafted because the Soviet Union had tested its own atomic bomb in August of 1949. The decision was made to engage in a massive buildup of nuclear arms as a deterrent. The mass fear among the public was, first, that this would not deter the Soviet Union but encourage them to build up for themselves; and second, that each side would not hesitate to fire at the other leading to the destruction of all. This fear reached its peak in 1962 with the Cuban Missile Crisis. Within the next year and a half, Stanley Kubrick released *Dr. Strangelove*, which seemed to confirm these fears.

The last two films that I will investigate deal with the 1980s and the fear of World War III and its aftermath. Many people believed that the closest we ever got to nuclear war was the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, but what many did not realize is that tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States were worse during the administration of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. Tensions had increased to the point that many people in America were afraid the situation had gotten so out of control there would be no way to settle our differences peacefully, leaving only nuclear war and its aftermath. In 1983, Ronald Reagan used the phrase "Evil Empire" to identify the focus of evil in the modern world: "So, in your discussions of the nuclear freeze proposals, I urge you to beware the

temptation of pride—the temptation of blithely declaring yourselves above it all and label both sides equally at fault, to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an *evil empire*, to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil” (Broussard 203). These comments made many believe that Reagan was taking a hard line with the Soviet Union that would eventually lead to nuclear war. This feeling of fear was evident in the films of the early 1980s such as the made-for-television movie *The Day After* (1983) and *WarGames* (1983).

I will investigate the role of those two films, *The Day After* and *WarGames*, in the perception of Cold War America. *The Day After* was about what would happen if both the United States and the Soviet Union fired all their nuclear weapons at each other and the immediate aftermath of that exchange. *WarGames* is about a computer, believing it is playing a game, trying to start World War III by launching all the United States missiles at the Soviet Union. I will show that both reflected the growing tensions in America about nuclear war and how both films stood as a warning. The fact that both films were made in 1983 was very reflective of the time, showing the fear, almost to the point of mass hysteria, that World War III was on the verge. By 1988, tensions died down tremendously, thus looking at these two films provides the audience a better insight into what America was feeling and what their greatest fear was.

All four of these films taken together show how much the Cold War affected American lives and reflected their different fears regarding the Cold War. Each film points to extremely specific fears that go beyond a single person to an entire nation: mass

hysteria about communism, Mutually Assured Destruction, World War III, and a post-apocalyptic world.

CHAPTER I:

Safety in Numbers: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and the Fear of Communism during the McCarthy Era as seen through Post-War Psychology.

The 1950s constituted a difficult period in American history. America had survived the Second World War and was introduced into an atomic age with the development of the atomic bomb in 1945. America was also experiencing an economic boom thanks to the Cold War and the military-industrial complex. While on the surface things looked remarkably well; there were signs that trouble was brewing underneath. The fear of communism was beginning to enter the public consciousness. Movies of the time also started to reflect these thoughts. One of the films that dealt with the fear of communism was *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. There have been different versions of the film produced, but for this paper, I will be dealing with the 1956 version.

During the 1950s, America was experiencing a wide range of changes that were reflected in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. The United States had won World War II in 1945 but did so by dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This changed the world and warfare by introducing new weapons and the fear of nuclear annihilation. Also, at the end of World War II, the Soviet Union no longer seemed like such a good ally. When Franklin Roosevelt was President of the United States, he was able to negotiate with Joseph Stalin because the greater fear was from Germany and Japan rather than communism. When Roosevelt died in office in 1945, Harry Truman became President of the United States and did not have the rapport with Stalin that Roosevelt had.

Truman did not trust Stalin or communism in general. After the end of World War II, tensions got worse between the two nations. Truman was committed to fighting communism wherever it was trying to expand. George Keenan, the American Ambassador to the Soviet Union, wrote that America's policy should be containment. There was no way the US could directly confront the Soviet Union over communism, but it could try to prevent its spread across Europe. Truman agreed with the containment policy and Congress authorized funds for Turkey. The American people had a lot to worry about in the 1950s, as historian H.W. Brands stated, "We are facing a danger unlike any danger that has ever existed" (Brands 68), and in response groups, such as SANE (National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy), were formed to protest. Many people were very afraid of the possibility of a war between the Soviet Union and the United States over communism. Children were also growing concerned about all the news they were hearing so the government created Burt the Turtle and the Duck and Cover drills (*Atomic Café*).

The fact that the Soviet Union tested their hydrogen bomb so quickly after the United States made some wonder about whether there were Russian spies in the United States. The US tested their hydrogen bomb in November of 1952 and the Soviet Union tested theirs in August of 1953. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was charged with investigating these suspicions. Joseph McCarthy is the person most strongly associated with the HUAC; but Senator Richard Nixon was also an integral part of the early investigations. Nixon was involved in the investigation of State Department lawyer Alger Hiss. Hiss had been accused of being a spy by Whitaker Chambers, who

was also a spy. Chambers testified that he had proof, hidden in a hollowed-out pumpkin of Hiss being a spy. Chambers produced a microfilm that he said showed Hiss spying. He turned this “evidence” over to Nixon. Nixon had been working with the head of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover. Hiss denied all these charges and when Whitaker repeated the charges on the radio Hiss sued him for slander. HUAC in turn charged Hiss with perjury and sentenced him to 2 ½ years in prison. Hiss denied the charges for the rest of his life.

This fear of communists, not just in the American populous but in highly placed positions in the American government, scared America and so the “witch hunts” began. Joseph McCarthy began with his “Wheeling Speech” where he accused over 50 people in the state department of being communists. McCarthy went after everyone. Historian Richard Fried comments on the power of HUAC: “HUAC was soon to reach the pinnacle of its prominence. In 1947 it targeted Hollywood” (Fried 73). There was some evidence that there were communists in Hollywood. Fried notes, “supposedly, communist writers were urged by the party to sneak five minutes of propaganda into every film. Communist actors were allegedly told to seize every opportunity to demean capitalism and advance the communist cause” (Fried 74). The HUAC hearing called in such people as Jack Warner of Warner Brothers and Lois B. Mayer of MGM studios. HUAC did not find much evidence of communist film but was also disappointed by the lack of anti-communist films. HUAC asked Lois B. Mayer if he was working on any, to which Mayer responded, “the one we are going to start shooting promptly” (Fried 75). Ronald Reagan, head of the Screen Actors Guild at the time, even testified in front of HUAC. Several people were accused of being communist and were blacklisted from any type of work and

became known as the Hollywood Ten. The ten were "screenwriters Lester Cole, Alvah Bessie, Ring Lardner Jr., John Howard Lawson, Albert Maltz, Samuel Ortiz, Adrian Scott, and Dalton Trumbo; and directors Herbert Biberman and Edward Dmytryk" (Fried 76). These ten claimed First Amendment rights when they were testifying rather than the Fifth Amendment. Other actors, such as Danny Kaye, Frank Sinatra, Humphrey Bogart, and Lauren Bacall came to the defense of the 10 and formed the Committee for the First Amendment. Congress then questioned these stars by "[a]ttacking the Committee for the First Amendment, Congressman Rankin stressed that Danny Kaye's real name was Kamirsky, Melvyn Douglas's was Hesselberg and so on" (Fried 77). The list of 10 would grow. Even Lucille Ball, from *I Love Lucy*, testified for a HUAC investigator in September 1953. Desi Arnez, her husband and costar, would go on to say that the only thing red about Lucie Ball was her hair.

McCarthy then went after others including President Truman, Elvis Presley, and almost everyone other than fellow Republicans. The American public was told that communist spies could be anyone, including your next-door neighbor, and so the American public had to be diligent. This led to the 1950s being characterized by the search for communist spies in our communities, and it was up to us to find them. American movies started to reflect these ideas. One example of this is the film made by the Armed Forces Informational Film Service (1950) entitled "How to Spot a Communist". So, when a movie came along and showed an American town being taken over by "pod people" it was only natural to assume a parallel to the search for communists in the country (Boyer 97-115). Historian H.W. Brands commented on this

need to find communists among us. He states: “there was more than conscious self-interest behind the efforts to purge communism from American life, just as there was more than concern for the American national security. The greatest appeal of anti-communism was probably the psychological security it provided Americans during a confusing and troubling time. Despite the fact that their country was the most powerful the world has ever seen-economically, politically, militarily-Americans felt themselves on the defensive (Brands 36). This fear of communism infiltration was starting to be reflected in the films that Hollywood would produce.

Films of the 1950s ranged from *I was a Communist for the FBI*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Thing*, *THEM*, *The Blob*, *Thing from Another Planet*, and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. These films reflected in different ways the fear of communism, radiation, nuclear war, and assimilation. The film that explored communism in its totality was *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. This film reflected the fears of McCarthyism and the fear of communists taking over the country. According to Rick Worland in *The Horror Film: An Introduction* “Kevin McCarthy’s characterization of Miles anchors the film’s definition of the normal” (Worland 197). Psychology is used in this film to a great effect. Rick Worland suggests that there is an “emphasis on psychological terror” in the film (Worland 79). Psychology is also used to explain the phenomenon of mass hysteria in the film as well as in the country; by looking at specific scenes from the film, we can see the importance of the explanation. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is best looked at as a commentary on the psychology of mass hysteria in the 1950s. There are many other interpretations of the film, but this chapter will focus on the psychological aspect.

Scholars have written extensively about the impact of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and how it is an allegory for different topics. J.P. Telotte, in his article “Human Artifice and the Science Fiction Film”, points out that *Invasion* can be seen as looking for humanity or the fear of humanity being taken over and not being able to tell the difference. He looked at the effect of doubling, or that something or someone is taking over in the humans' place, Telotte states: “Probably the landmark treatment of this doubling motif occurs in the original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, which focuses precisely upon a threatening possibility for perfectly duplicating the human body” (Telotte 44). Telotte postulates that secretly society wants this transformation “the security and tranquility which the sameness of duplication promises” (Telotte 45). He uses the scene when Dr. Kauffman explains to Miles that we are “born into an untroubled world” to justify this observation. Telotte offers an interesting interpretation of the film yet does not look into any of the psychological implications.

Katrina Mann, in her article ““You’re Next!”: Postwar Hegemony Besieged in ‘*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*’”, discusses the film in terms of “potential disruptions of the gender, racial, and sexual status quo such phenomena threatened to bring about” (Mann 49). Mann suggested that the film has less to do with communism than with gender and racial problems: “this analysis will show that the film’s invasion discourse was less specifically concerned with bureaucrats, autocrats, Reds, and radiation than with the potential disruptions of the gender, racial, and sexual status quo such phenomena threatened to bring about” (Mann 49). She uses the idea that the film is more about the homogenous white society’s fear of the infiltration of their suburbs by the “other,” such

as Hispanic or African American families. This sense of others was what the “pod people” were to represent, not the communist threat. Again, Mann focused on the gender aspect of the film, and post-war psychology is only a side note.

Jennifer Jenkins, in her article “Lovelier the Second Time Around: Divorce, Desire, and Gothic Domesticity in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*”, also looked at the film in terms of female roles in society, especially divorce and sexuality. Jenkins showed that “Although commonly read as a fable about McCarthyism, *Invasion* also expresses profound fears and distrust of the dehumanizing and debilitating force of the 1950s middle-class marriage and domesticity” (Jenkins 478). Erika Nelson investigated gender and sexuality in her article, “*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*: Gender and Sexuality in Four Adaptive Adaptations.” She points out that in the film, “male anxiety about women persists throughout the various adaptations of Jack Finney’s original story” (Nelson 52). Nelson looks specifically at the character of Becky Driscoll and how she is clothed as an indication of her sexuality; “Becky’s fitted bodice metaphorically contains her barely-managed sexuality” (Nelson 56). She also indicated that *Invasion* is about the “problematic male-female and family relations that recall social changes taking place at the time the films were released” (Nelson 52). Again, there is no discussion of post-war psychology and its impact on the film or society as a whole.

Nancy Steffen-Fluhr continues the trend of looking at women’s roles in her article “Women and the Inner Game of Don Siegel’s *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*”. She contends that the film is not an allegory for the Cold War or search for communists but a love story, “However, Siegel’s own statements make it clear that love, not Cold War, was

his primary subject in *Invasion*. Although he tried to capture the mood of the 1950s, its nervousness and buttoned-down repression, he was not making a political allegory but, rather, a defense of passion, risk-taking, and active engagement.” (Steffen-Fluhr 140-141).

Others have looked at the implications of the nuclear threat, such as Cyndy Hendershot in her article, “The Invaded Body: Paranoia and Radiation anxiety in *Invaders from Mars*, *It Came from Outer Space*, and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.” She argues that the film can be seen as a “manifestation of paranoiac structures that reveal postwar anxieties regarding radiation, gender, and sexuality” (Hendershot 26). She ties the opening sequence to the fear of radiation by looking at the clouds and saying they are already suspect; are they radioactive or not. When Miles hears Dr. Kauffman’s explanation, he immediately says that is how it all began, out of the sky. Again, she mentions Dr. Kauffman’s explanation for the mass hysteria; everyone is worried about what is going on in the world. This is meant to imply that in the 1950s America was genuinely concerned with the fears of nuclear war and communism. Miles even tells Becky that so much has been discovered in the past few years that it is no surprise that something like this could have happened. While this article talks about paranoia and post-war anxieties, it is not the focus and is almost an afterthought.

Yet another interpretation of the film is by Neil Badmington in his article, “Pod Almighty!; or humanism, posthumanism, and the strange case of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*”. Badmington looked at the film in terms of a humanism or posthumanism case. He states that “Don Siegel’s *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), a film that

appears at first glance to uphold the fundamental principles of humanist thought” (Badmington 6). He points out that this film is different than many of the other alien films of the time because there is no visible alien invasion; no monster that explicitly says alien.

There have been a few scholars who have looked at the film in terms of the Cold War. Among them is Ronald Briley in his article, “Reel History and the Cold War” and Arthur LeGacy’s “*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*: A Metaphor for the Fifties”. Briley says *Invasion* is the most interesting of the films of this era, stating “the allegorical message of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is that we must be ever vigilant. Anyone- a teacher, politician, friend or minister could be part of the communist conspiracy” (Briley 21). This is exactly what Joseph McCarthy had warned about. This is an example of the post-war psychology in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. LeGacy’s article goes into much more detail on the Cold War fears of the film. He points out that he interviewed Jack Finney, the author who wrote *Invasion of the Body Snatches*, which the film was based on. He asked Finney about the implications in the film about the Cold War and Finney responded, “The book isn’t a cold war novel or a metaphor for anything. I wrote it to entertain the reader, nothing more” (LeGacy 287). LeGacy reminds us that even though the author may have not meant any other meaning to it, the audience often will add in their own interpretation based upon the times. People of the 1950s saw it one way and those in the 1970s saw the remake in a completely different way. He says, “the context of the fifties has so many striking parallels in *Body Snatchers* that the historian of the period would be remiss in not pointing them out” (LeGacy 288). He goes on to say “[t]he mid-

fifties was a period of enormous anxiety about this very legitimacy [imposter vs. real], an anxiety which the false prophet, Senator Joseph McCarthy, did much to exacerbate” (LeGacy 288). Another author who saw the psychological nature of the film was Rick Worland, who wrote the book *The Horror Film: An Introduction*. He suggests, “about as many regard the movie as an endorsement of McCarthy era paranoia as believe it attacks the anticommunist witch hunts and resists pressures for social obedience” (Worland 195). He goes on to say that “*Body Snatchers* has become a Rorschach pattern that reveals contradictory American fears of communist attack or subversion, and/or of a passive decline into conformity and suppression of individuality” (Worland 195). Looking through the lens of post-war psychology, the film illustrates the paranoia and fear that dominated the American state of mind in the 1950s.

Not everyone agreed with these various interpretations of the film, including the makers of the film. Walter Mirisch, who oversaw production of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, said, “People began to read meaning into pictures that were never intended. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is an example of that. I remember reading a magazine article arguing that the picture was intended as an allegory about the communism infiltration of America. From personal knowledge neither Walter Wanger, nor Don Siegel, who directed it, nor Dan Mainwaring, who wrote the script, nor the original author, Jack Finney, nor myself saw it as anything more than a thriller, plain and simple” (Mirisch 39-40).

Probably the best work on the film and the Cold War interpretation is Stuart Samuels’s “The Age of Conspiracy and Conformity: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*

(1956).” Samuels begins by discussing how films relate to ideological position. First is that they reflect current ideology in both the film's message and its style, and produce their own ideology in the viewers’ minds. He then mentions films such as *I was a Communist for the FBI* and *My Son John*, which reflect the concern with the communist threat in the United States. These films were produced well before the *Invasion* film and thus show how long the fear of communist in America has been a concern. Samuels notes, “*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is not about McCarthyism. It is about giant seed pods taking over people’s bodies. Indirectly, however, it is a statement about the collective paranoia and the issue of conformity widely discussed in the period” (Samuels 205). Samuels goes on to discuss that the responses to these threats were conformity, paranoia, and alienation. All of these responses can be seen in the *Invasion* film and tie into this the fear of nuclear destruction; conformity became the norm in the 1950s.

What appears to be missing from all these articles is a detailed discussion of the use of psychology in the film to exploit the fear of the communist threat. Post-war psychology was a noticeably big topic in the 1950s in the United States. Psychology is used in the film to explain why Miles and some of the other townspeople believe that their loved ones are not their loved ones. This same psychology can be used to explain the fear that communists had invaded America in the 1950s and the McCarthy “witch hunts”. There was a “mass hysteria” that swept America in its search for communists, no one was the same, not even the girl scouts. The few people who do suspect something is going on in Santa Mira are diagnosed with mass hysteria by the town psychologist, Dr. Kauffman (Larry Gates). It all appears normal and well. There are two other

psychologists, Dr. Bassett and Dr. Hill, in the movie and they both have a different take on what is occurring with the townspeople in Santa Mira. Neither one believed about the pod people at the beginning, and the town doctor only believed in the end when there is proof of the overturned pod truck coming from Santa Mira. This was just what Joseph McCarthy was warning about; all could seem normal but there is an underlining threat that is present if we are not diligent and careful (Fried).

The film references this paranoia early on with the scene of the little boy, Jimmy Grimaldi, running away from his grandmother because he thinks his mother is not his mother. Miles (Kevin McCarthy) notices the fruit stand is no longer operating and comments that this is strange because it used to be the best in town. Others see this scene differently, Worland writes: “Mr. Grimaldi’s sudden disinterest in hard work and individual initiative lends the tale a subtle economic undercurrent” (Worland 198). This can be seen as a communist measure against individual capitalism. This idea is displayed again when Becky goes to Miles about her cousin Wilma (Virginia Christine) who says Uncle Ira (Tom Fadden) is not Uncle Ira. Becky asks Miles to stop by and check on Wilma because something must be wrong as she has seen Uncle Ira and is assured that he is in fact Uncle Ira. When Miles stops by to see Wilma, the automatic assumption is that there must be something wrong with Wilma not Uncle Ira. He convinces Wilma to see the local psychiatrist, Dr. Kauffman. Later that night Miles and Becky run into Dr. Kauffman at the local dining club and Miles tells Dr. Kauffman he needs a witch doctor, i.e., a psychologist, because he has a troubled child and women. Dr. Kauffman asks if people are saying their husbands are not their husbands or their relatives are not their

relatives. Miles seems surprised that he has heard of the problem. Dr. Kauffman replies that there seems to be a mass hysteria affecting the town.

This idea of psychiatry being a women's problem is also presented by Mann and Badmington. Mann points out that when Miles first encounters Dr. Dan Kauffman he says that he needs his help because he has a "mixed-up kid and a woman who needs a witch doctor." Mann says this implied that psychiatric problems were only for women and children and the mass hysteria was confined to them. Badmington does make an interesting point about the character of Teddy Bellicec (Carolyn Jones), he says that "the film warns that an excess of emotion leads to hysteria. Teddy does little but exhibit her emotions, a condition that renders her dependent upon her husband and unable to truly contribute to the resistance. Yet, while unchecked felling is problematic, Danny Kauffman would appear to represent the perils of abandoning emotion in the name of scientific reason" (Badmington 18). Other researchers have offered the explanation that psychology was for women and children after World War II. This is explored in the film with the idea that it is the woman, Teddy, who is suffering from some sort of psychological problem. Mary Williams commented on this belief of only women suffering psychiatric issues in her 1956 study, "A Study of Hysteria in Women", which references Jung's definition of hysteria "as the affliction of the extraverted feeling type. He first describes the type as pertaining mainly to women who function through felling judgements of things, these judgements being largely controlled by custom and tradition" (Williams 178). This is reinforced in the film because the first people who believe

something is wrong are Wilma and Teddy (both women), and the other person who witnesses this is a child, Jimmy Grimaldi, and all three are dismissed.

Mann commented on this idea of psychology and mass hysteria, “Because of cultural developments in the postwar era, there was a growing belief that psychic contagion could spread from women to man, etc. The malady in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, if approached as psychological, closely approximates Capgras Syndrome” (Mann 59). This was a disease, diagnosed as early as 1923, used to describe people who believed that the people they knew were not truly themselves. This use of psychology is what Jack Finney described as inspiring his novel (Mann 59).

Some of this mass hysteria may also be explained by the returning Korean War veterans and the stories of brainwashing by the enemy, “to audiences both familiar and unfamiliar with Capgras Syndrome, its expression in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* most likely resonated with the reports of communist brainwashing during the Korean War that resulted in the expatriation of 150 of 3,600 U.S. war prisoners” (Mann 59). LeGacy also commented, “There are so many other issues in this period which have parallels in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*: the Korean War and the return of the brainwashed” (LeGacy 290). This scene with Dr. Kauffman is the first of many between him and Miles that tried to explain the behavior of the pod people and thereby explain the behavior of the American people and McCarthy’s search for communists in the United States.

Two documented cases of mass hysteria provide further context for this theme within *Invasion*. The 1945 case of the “phantom Anesthetist of Mattoon Illinois”, and the 1956 case of the “phantom slasher of Taipei”. The first was a documented case where

much of the town of Mattoon, Illinois was convinced there were a series of attacks by a serial anesthetist, mirroring feelings presented in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. The report reviewed newspaper accounts of people claiming to have been gassed in their own homes who woke up with paralysis or nausea. The authors postulate that there were two explanations: one is a person purposely gassing people with a specific gas with no other intent or motive, or a more logical second option was mass hysteria. An investigation found no evidence of a perpetrator. The report stated “all cases recovered rapidly, hence there was little possibility for outside check on the symptoms. Four cases were seen by physicians, who diagnosed all cases as hysteria” (Johnson 176). One other interesting finding was who was affected, “to begin with, the sample had a greater proportion of women than the general population of the city” (Johnson 184). He provided a chart that shows women were 52% of the population of the town but were 93% of the people who reported being affected by the gas (Johnson 183).

The second example, the “phantom slasher of Taipei”, was a study of mass hysteria in a non-western society by Norman Jacobs using newspaper articles from Taipei. One article described how “on the morning of May 3 the police found a ‘hysterical’ woman with a knife in hand wandering about the city” (Jacobs 320). He cites a report filed by the Taipei Commissioner which tried to explain the situation, “people were being unnecessarily frightened by baseless stories and he cautioned them about spreading false rumors that might add to the hysteria. He hinted that certain mysterious rascals might be behind all these happenings, perhaps even Communist agents who might be trying to create an atmosphere of confusion and uneasiness in connection with the

(Communist) May Day season” (Jacobs 323). This report also analyzed those most affected by this specific mass hysteria, stating “The Taipei affair exhibited most of the salient characteristics which have been noted in mass hysteria case studies in western society...The major participants were drawn from those elements in the society most susceptible to hyper-suggestibility, namely, the lower income, lower educational stratum, and within that stratum, women and children” (Jacob 326). Both real-life cases of mass hysteria reinforced the idea that mass hysteria affected women and children more, just like Wilma, Teddy, and Jimmy in *Invasion*.

This idea of mass hysteria forms the major underlying context of *Invasion*. Unlike in real life, nothing good comes from the basement throughout the movie. When there is a noise from Miles’ basement, the music cues the audience that something is not as it should be: it was the gasman or was it the gasman putting four pods in the basement. This is reinforced when Miles goes to rescue Becky from her house and decides to break in through the basement, because when he had dropped her off earlier her father was suspiciously coming up from the basement. The audience knew something was not right with her father because of the dark nature of the shot and the fact that all bad things come from the basement. When Miles enters Becky’s basement, he finds the pod replica of Becky, runs up the stairs, tries to wake up Becky, and finally picks her up and carries her out of the house. He takes Becky back to his house and calls Dr. Kauffman trying to explain what is going on. Miles takes Dr. Kauffman to Jack Bellicec’s (King Donovan) house, where the first pod was found. While there, Dr. Kauffman tries to rationally explain the situation by looking at the pool table and pointing out the blood and saying

that yes there was a dead body here. The psychiatrist asks Miles if he examined the body, Miles says yes but that it was not ordinary and that it had no marks on the body. Dr. Kauffman explains that an icepick in the back of the brain makes a puncture so small that the human eye cannot see. Jack and Miles mention that the body did not have any fingerprints. Dr. Kauffman explains this by saying that someone did not want the body to have any fingerprints and removed them with acid. Jack yells at the doctor to stop rationalizing everything and that this is a mystery. Dr. Kauffman also says that “yes this is a mystery but a normal mystery all well within the bounds of human experience... I do not think that you ought to make any more out of it”. If you look at the scene and the calm nature of Dr. Kauffman, you can see that he is saying this fear is nothing and do not worry about it. He may as well have been looking directly at the audience saying that this “mass hysteria” of McCarthyism can be rationally explained, that it is all well within the bounds of the human experience.

This scene continues in Becky’s basement when Miles, Jack, and Dr. Kauffman go to look at the “pod body”. Dr. Kauffman tells Miles that he does not believe that Miles has seen a body and will go to Becky’s house to prove this and show that Miles is suffering from the same “mass hysteria”. The idea of mass hysteria was noted in the Millard Tydings Committee, stating about the McCarthy hearings “We have seen an effort to inflame the American people with a wave of hysteria and fear on an unbelievable scale in this free nation” (Unger 259). Dr. Kauffman talking about mass hysteria regarding the “pod people” taking over parallels what we can see as a wave of mass hysteria taking over in America when communists were seen everywhere. A 1978

study guide put out by Audio Brandon Films also acknowledges the role of Dr.

Kauffman, “the psychiatrist in the film, Dan Kauffman (Larry Gates) is implicitly talking about the general mood of America when he speaks of an epidemic of ‘mass hysteria’ brought on by anxiety about ‘what is going on in the world’” (Audio Brandon Films 1).

The issue of mass hysteria is further seen when Dr. Kauffman expands on his ideas to Miles and Jack once in Becky’s basement. When Dr. Kauffman arrives in the basement, he investigates the storage area and says there is a body. Miles is quick to agree, but when Dr. Kauffman shows that it is just a pile of blankets Miles is unsure about what he saw. Dr. Kauffman then questions Miles about what he really saw the first time by himself in the basement. If you look at the lighting of this scene, it is very dark and mysterious with only the flashlight providing any illumination. It is easy to mistake something in this low level of light and that is what the psychiatrist is trying to point out, “you said you saw the body just now and it was not there”. He goes on to ask Miles why he came to Becky’s house this night. Dr. Kauffman then offers his own theory:

You saw a dead man with a blank expression which often happens, what you have is an epidemic of mass hysteria. Men, women, and children convinced that their relatives are not their relatives at all, so your mind starts playing tricks, reality becomes unreality; hard to believe but these things happen, even to witch doctors like me. You saw these vivid details as real but only in your mind. (Siegal)

Jack jumps in and tells the doctor that “you can talk all night but can’t convince me.” Just then Becky’s father walks in and demands to know what is going on. Dr.

Kauffman responds very calmly saying that they are “using his basement for an office and that these men are badly in need of psychiatric care.” Becky’s dad replies, “Stop talking nonsense”. Dr. Kauffman says he is not “talking nonsense, they have been having real nightmares”. Dr. Kauffman is the voice of reason in the film trying to provide a logical explanation into what Miles and Jack believe is going on, and that it is not some otherworldly plot of pod people taking over the small town of Santa Mira, California, it is just in your head, epidemic mass hysteria, mirroring the McCarthy scare when everyone was looking for communists.

This scene also has a parallel in the “Phantom Anesthetist of Mattoon”. Johnson offers an explanation about how mass hysteria spreads so fast. He says, “hysterical symptoms usually are dramatic-arousing the interest of the press, with the result that an exciting uncritical story of the case appeared in the evening paper. As the news spread, other people reported similar symptoms, more exciting stories were written, and so the affair snowballed” (Johnson 186). He goes on to explain how the mass hysteria died down, “[b]ut such acute outbursts are necessarily self-limiting. The bizarre details which captured the public imagination at the beginning of the episode became rather ridiculous when studied more leisurely. The drama of the story lost its tang with time and the absurdities showed through” (Johnson 186). While this does not fully explain the pod people, it does lend itself to the explanation about why the McCarthy witch hunts eventually ended. As for *Invasion*, there is more in the film related to the psychological effect of mass hysteria.

The basement scene continues with the arrival of police officer Nick Grivett (Ralph Dumke), whose job is to reinforce the opinions and views of Dr. Kauffman. Of the people in town, the ones with the most authority are Dr. Kauffman, Miles, and Nick. If you have a psychiatrist and the police both saying that there is mass hysteria and all of these events can be rationally explained, you are left with nothing to do but question yourself, which is what Miles ends this scene doing. When the government, especially Joseph McCarthy is telling you there are communists in America taking over small towns, it is only rational to believe them. Nick then demands to know what is going on and Dr. Kauffman tells Nick that he has saved ‘these two characters a trip to the station, they want to report finding a body and then losing it’. Nick asks Miles if the dead body was a “thin man, 5 feet tall with fingerprints burned off with acid?” Miles seems shocked that the police officer knows this and starts to doubt what he has seen. The last words that Miles says to Dr. Kauffman in this scene are “Well you win, pick up the marbles”, implying that Miles is suffering from this epidemic mass hysteria and there was a rational explanation for everything. This scene reinforces the idea of a psychological explanation for the events going on in the town as well as explaining to the audience about the events going on in their own lives.

Managing public perception was very important to the Cold War; it was imperative to make the communists a dangerous threat. The government wanted to make sure that everyone knew who the enemy was in order to fight against them. This is one of the reasons that Joseph McCarthy would always refer to communists as atheistic communists; he wanted to make sure that the American people saw the communists not

only as a political enemy but also as a dangerous and immoral enemy. His fear became their fear, leading to “mass hysteria” in the quest to find the imposters (communists) in American towns. This is seen in the movie as the search for the imposters who are taking over the town. The idea of mass hysteria also explains why Joseph McCarthy was able to continue for so long. A study done in 1948 sheds an interesting light on this era, stating, “the most important mental stigma of hysteria is suggestibility” and goes on to quote Psychologist McDougall, “a high degree of suggestibility is a leading factor of hysteria” (Petrie 445). This study tied the idea of mass hysteria and suggestibility together. While not specifically looking at the McCarthy era and the Cold War, it showed that a relationship between mass hysteria and suggestibility existed. If enough people believed that there were communists in America, or pod people in Santa Mira, California, eventually it could turn to mass hysteria.

The original ending of the film was supposed to be Miles yelling into the screen “You’re next”, according to Don Siegel, but the studios made him add a prologue and change the ending. Siegel remarks in his autobiography that “Danny and I knew that many of our associates, acquaintances, and family were already pods” (Siegel 178). Siegel also tells a story that occurred during the making of the film that demonstrates how much the pods had seeped into the crews’ psychological conscience, “one night I broke into Dana Wynter’s house and slipped a pod under her bed. By this time, the pods had become a scary realistic, believable possibility to cast and crew. The next morning when Dana found the pod she was in a state of near hysteria” (Siegel 184). Although this is a humorous story, it does show the psychological impact of the film and the fear of the

Pods. The original ending would have heightened the psychological fear of the nation (Siegel 185). The revised ending instead finds it is the psychiatrist that finally believes Miles and calls the FBI. Again, two of the entities that are authority figures provide the answer.

That *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* was an important film that reflected the mood of the country in 1956 was presaged in a 1950 article in the *Journal of Educational Sociology* that stated, “America today faces the challenge of providing a world leadership to defeat totalitarianism of the Stalinist Russia variety.” It also goes on to emphasize the importance of education in this fight, “educators today have a yeoman’s part to play in saving America from mass hysteria that could well cause her to lose everything she’s fighting for in this new type of ideological warfare” (Dodson 57-58). Americans were having to face a series of new challenges such as the Cold War, the arms race, the space race, the threat of nuclear annihilation, and the fear of communist invaders in their communities and the film reflects all of these. There are many different interpretations of this film by the makers themselves as well as other scholars, ranging from supporting McCarthy to condemning him; a film about marriage and the changing roles of women; the fear of immigration, nuclear war, radiation anxiety; and a simple love story. The psychological aspect of the film provided the interpretation analyzed in this thesis, especially because it gives the audience a sense of the fear in the community, but it also gives it an acceptable conclusion. There is evidence of paranoia and mass hysteria in the film, reflecting the paranoia and mass hysteria in the country. The hope is that there is a reasonable explanation for these events. In the film, the explanation is that yes pod people

are taking over the small town and Miles was right to be worried about the invaders. The film offers an explanation for the communist witch hunts of McCarthy and fears of the day, and it is the FBI that in the end will save the country from the invaders whether they be “pod people” or communists among our midst.

Invasion of the Body Snatchers provides a real-life outlet for the fears of the American people regarding the overwhelming accusations of Joseph McCarthy and the search for communists in their neighborhoods. These fears can all be explained through the psychological studies of mass hysteria such as the phantom slasher of Taipei. The fact that most reported cases of mass hysteria often involve women is seen in the characters of Wilma and Teddy. The mass media and newspapers can also be seen as being an influence to spread fear and remarkable stories. The more remarkable the more it can be explained by the person suffering from mass hysteria. What more remarkable story can there be than an entire town being taken over by pod people from outer space. But remember that the film was not really about the pod people.

CHAPTER II:

It's a MAD MAD World:

Mutually Assured Destruction and Mass Hysteria in *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964)

Turgidson:

Mr. President, we are rapidly approaching a moment of truth both for ourselves as human beings and for the life of our nation. Now, the truth is not always a pleasant thing, but it is necessary now make a choice, to choose between two admittedly regrettable, but nevertheless, distinguishable post-war environments: one where you got twenty million people killed, and the other where you got a hundred and fifty million people killed.

Muffley:

You're talking about mass murder, General, not war.

Turgidson:

Mr. President, I'm not saying we wouldn't get our hair mussed. But I do say... no more than ten to twenty million killed, tops. Uh... depended on the breaks.

The preceding quote is from the Stanley Kubrick masterpiece on the Cold War, *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), and shows the fear of losing the Cold War to the Soviet Union. This film was released less than a year after the Cuban Missile Crisis between the Soviet Union and the United States. Also, in 1961 the construction of the Berlin Wall was started as the Soviet Union wanted to stop the increasing number of people crossing over from East Berlin to West Berlin. Lori Maguire shows “crossing from East to West Berlin was easy, and the attraction of the economic miracle of West Germany meant that a massive migration took place. By 1961, over two and a half million East Germans had escaped to West Berlin”

(Maguire 959). By 1963, both countries had engaged in a massive nuclear arms race, leading to concerns among the American people about the future relations between the Soviet Union and the United States. The real fear was nuclear annihilation, or Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). This fear was realized in the black comedy of Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*. Even the name of the film points to the fear and anxiety in America: *Dr. Strangelove: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Learned to Love the Bomb*. Indeed, America's love/hate relationship with the bomb is a strange love.

In this chapter, I will investigate the role of Stanley Kubrick's film *Dr. Strangelove or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) in Cold War America, with a focus on the concepts of mass hysteria and fear of nuclear annihilation. Some saw the film as a warning about the rabidly increasing arms race between the Soviet Union and the United States. The decision by the United States to engage in an arms race with the Soviet Union followed events in 1949 and 1950. In 1949, the Soviet Union detonated their first atomic bomb, and in 1950 the US National Security Council (NSC) released NSC 68, a policy paper that called for "a rapid build-up of political, economic, and military strength in the Free world" (May 25) and gave the go-ahead to increase America's nuclear program. The decision to engage in a massive buildup of nuclear arms was presented as a deterrent against the Soviet Union, but the public was fearful this would encourage, rather than discourage, a similar buildup by the Soviet Union, leading not to peace but instead the destruction of all. This anxiety reached its peak in 1962 with the Cuban Missile Crisis. Within the next year and a half, *Dr. Strangelove* would be released.

Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* is probably one of the most discussed movies of the Cold War, with a simple internet search providing hundreds of discussions on the film and a quick search on academic databases producing over a hundred articles on the subject. It is considered one of the top 50 films by the American Film Institute (AFI), and is standard viewing for anyone interested in the mass hysteria or fear of MAD of the Cold War. The history of MAD started with the origins of the Cold War. When he became President of the United States in 1945, Harry Truman was clear on his dislike of Joseph Stalin, leader of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). At the Potsdam Conference, Truman, having just learned about the Manhattan Project and the atomic bomb, seemed dismissive of Stalin. Truman thought that with the atomic bomb America would not need Stalin to defeat the Japanese; and if America did not need the Soviets it would not have to help the Soviets in any way. The main cause of tension between the US and the USSR was because the USSR was communist, and their ideology was interpreted as a spreading threat. George Keenan, the United States Ambassador to the Soviet Union wrote the Long Telegram in 1946 and expanded on the ideas presented therein in *Foreign Affairs* magazine in April 1947. Keenan was asked about the state of the Soviet Union and responded that the "USSR still lives in antagonistic 'capitalist encirclement' with which in the long run there can be no permanent peaceful coexistence" (May 24). Keenan goes on to state that it was recognized by both sides as dangerous to have an all-out war against the Soviet Union, and that Soviet propaganda noted that "Intervention against USSR, while it would be disastrous to those who undertook it, would cause renewed delay in progress of Soviet socialism and must

therefore be forestalled at all costs” (Hofstadter 413). Keenen recommended a policy of containment to keep communism from spreading outside the USSR, suggesting that the US be active in halting all advances of the USSR starting in Greece. President Truman followed Keenen’s recommendation and codified official American policy on how to deal with this rising communist threat via the Truman Doctrine enunciated between 1947 and 1948, which states:

To ensure the peaceful development of nations, free from coercion, the United States has taken a leading part in establishing the United Nations. The United Nations is designed to make possible lasting freedom and independence for all its members. We shall not realize our objectives, however, unless we are willing to help free peoples to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes. This is no more than a frank recognition that totalitarian regimes imposed on free peoples, by direct or indirect aggression, undermine the foundations of international peace and hence the security of the United States. (Hofstadter 406)

The publication of this doctrine is considered the starting point of the Cold War tensions between the US and the USSR.

After American spy planes detected radioactivity in the Russian atmosphere, the American government realized that the playing field had changed. The American government started to pursue a policy of rapid escalation of weapons. NSC 68 was issued in 1950, around the same time that Joseph McCarthy was investigating the threat of

communists in the State Department. NSC 68 requested “a build-up of military strength by the United States and her allies to the point at which the combined strengths will be superior” (May 9). Truman was at first reluctant to agree to NSC 68; but Dean Acheson, Secretary of State, had built up such support that Truman knew he would have a hard time opposing it and gave the green light to implementation of NSC 68. Out of NSC 68 also came the call for more advanced weapons such as the development of the hydrogen bomb, which is 700 times more powerful than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Robert Jameson states, “The Korean War and the revised National Security Council Document NSC 68/4, especially the floodgate of military spending they opened, played a major role in stimulating nuclear weapons technology” (Jameson 45). The hydrogen bomb testing gap would be much closer than that for the atomic bomb. The US tested their hydrogen bomb in November 1952 and the USSR tested theirs less than a year later in August of 1953. The USSR was catching up to American technology and America was fearful of falling behind the Soviets. Americans were concerned about how many bombs the Soviet Union was producing compared to their production rates. The military was concerned about the Soviets getting the upper hand and set out to make sure there were no so-called “gaps” between the Soviets and the United States.

Kubrick’s was not an original idea for *Dr. Strangelove*, but rather he based the film primarily on two written works, Peter George’s *Red Alert* (1958), and elements of *Fail Safe* by Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler. The latter has a profoundly serious tone to it, quite different from *Strangelove*, with a more dramatic and fact-based view of what could happen in a nuclear strike. The main difference between *Red Alert* and

Strangelove is in the film the problem is a human malfunction, a rogue army general, while in the book it is a mechanical failure. Both represent the dangers of nuclear war with modern technology. Both show how well trained the men are to carry out their orders no matter the circumstances.

Kubrick read widely about the subject of nuclear war including Herman Kahn's *On Thermonuclear War* and *Thinking About the Unthinkable*, and Henry Kissinger's *Nuclear War and Foreign Policy* (Maland 192). Even Dr. Strangelove himself can be traced back to Edward Teller, one of the leading Manhattan Project scientists, whom many believe the character of Strangelove is based on. The character of President Muffley is thought to be based on Adlai Stevenson, and the notion of the Soviet Ambassador learning everything from the New York Times came from an article in *Time* Magazine (Stillman 488). Kubrick at first wanted to make a realistic dramatic film about the events but eventually changed his mind and changed it to a black comedy. Charles Maland stated, "the only way to tell the story was as a black comedy, or better a nightmare comedy, where things you laugh at most are really the heart of the paradoxical postures that make nuclear war possible (Maland 196-197). Margot Henriksen also noted why the film worked as a black comedy; "Black humor, which combines the darkness associated with the film noir sensibility of the earlier years of dissent with the rambunctious and iconoclastic laughter associated with the fearless rebelliousness of the sixties protest. Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* was emblematic of the new openness in the cultural dissent and its spirit of black humor" (Henriksen xxiii). For instance, Kubrick changes the name of the very real RAND Corporation that was involved in the

American arms race to the BLAND Corporation. This is just one of the ways that Kubrick will make the mass hysteria of MAD into a black comedy. The subject of nuclear war is hard enough to comprehend without acknowledging a certain level of absurdity inherent in it.

To this point, one of the more interesting parts of the film is the issue of “gaps”, which Kubrick was also interested in. Maland notes, “in his mature work Kubrick has returned constantly to one of the gravest dilemmas of modern industrial society: the gap between man’s scientific and technological skill and his social, political, and moral ineptitude. In Kubrick’s world view, modern man has made scientific and technological advances inconceivable to previous generations but lacks the wisdom wither to perceive how the new gadgetry might be used in constructive ways or more fundamental, to ask whether the ‘advance’ might not cause more harm than good” (Maland 194). *Dr. Strangelove* is on the surface a film about the build-up of arms on both sides, with the focus of concern being who has the advantage in the number of arms. In the film, the Soviets were so concerned that they built a doomsday machine to try and counter American superiority, and Ambassador DeSadeski addresses this fear of being left behind by the Americans thusly:

Muffley: But this is absolute madness, ambassador. Why should you build such a thing?

DeSadeski: There are those of us who fought against it, but in the end we could not keep up with the expense involved in the arms race, the space race, and the peace race. And at the same time our people grumbled for

more nylons and washing machines. Our doomsday scheme cost us just a small fraction of what we'd been spending on defense in a single year. But the deciding factor was when we learned that your country was working along similar lines, and we were afraid of a doomsday gap. (Kubrick)

One of the more humorous parts of *Strangelove* is in the ending discussing the possibility of a “mine shaft gap” by which the title character, Dr. Strangelove (Peter Sellers), offers a solution to the Soviet’s doomsday device. He suggests that Americans can hide in mine shafts to await the half-life of Cobalt Thorium G. This leads to the discussion of whether the Soviets also had this idea,

I agree, Mr. President. In fact, they might even try an immediate sneak attack so they could take over our mineshaft space. (Turgidson) Yeah. I think it would be extremely naive of us, Mr. President, to imagine that these new developments are going to cause any change in Soviet expansionist policy. I mean, we must be... increasingly on the alert to prevent them from taking over other mineshaft space, in order to breed more prodigiously than we do, thus, knocking us out in superior numbers when we emerge! Mr. President, we must not allow... a mine shaft gap! (Kubrick)

This exchange is Kubrick’s way of showing the audience the absurdity of the arms race that focused the goal of both America and the Soviet Union on outdoing the other.

This discussion of hiding in mine shafts also emphasized the mass hysteria felt by the American public regarding tensions between the two countries. The idea that both

countries were producing as many warheads as they did in an ever-increasing attempt to catch up to the other found its way into the American consciousness as the population focused on building bomb shelters and children were being taught “duck and cover drills”. Americans were beginning to fear the future: “In the latter half of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, nuclear conflagration hung like the sword of Damocles above the world. Over approximately four and a half decades of standoff, the United States alone produced some 70,000 nuclear weapons for various purposes. Exploded simultaneously as its 1960 peak, this vast arsenal would have yielded the explosive equivalent of 1.37 million atomic bombs of the sort dropped on Hiroshima, Japan on August 6, 1945” (Jameson 42). At the time, the United States was not certain of the Soviet’s capacity, thus creating a “revolution in planning for nuclear war that imagined parallel Soviet advances, grew paranoid about American vulnerability to a first strike, and increasingly stressed rapid response system and massive retaliation” (Jamison 42).

Kubrick’s use of black comedy worked so well in the film that some viewers’ ideas of the Cold War were shaped by the film: “nor is it just fictional presidents for whom the distinction between fiction and reality has occasionally become blurred. The well-known story of the newly inaugurated Ronald Reagan’s request to be shown the War Room, ‘Big Board’, and all, with his own reference to *Dr. Strangelove* as evidence on being told there is no such room existed, is further indication of how thoroughly the imagery and invention of Kubrick’s film sank into and shaped ideas about Cold War and the nuclear dilemma, even for those who were themselves on the point of shaping the

events of that period” (Morrison 377). This was further reinforced during the development of the documentary *Making of Dr. Strangelove*, when Kubrick asked his art director, Ken Adams, if he could prove the source from which he got the schematics for the instrument panel in the cockpit of the B-52. It was so realistic it caused him concern because the Army had not given their permission to use any military sources, and as noted by Broderick “at the time of *Dr. Strangelove*’s release there was serious speculation over the technological accuracy of the plot, production design, and dialogue, especially in view of the grave secrecy and national security measures protecting disclosure of classified technologies and emergency war-fighting procedures” (Broderick 115). Adams stated that he had to rely on magazines and books for the information (Broderick 115), but Kubrick and Adams’ attention to detail is what gives the film some of its power and influence.

While the fear of thermonuclear war was an overwhelming concern of most American citizens in Cold War society it was not the only psychological impact. Indeed, psychology in the Cold War had its hands full with the fear of nuclear annihilation, infiltration of communists, psychotic leaders, and Soviet conspiracies: “An understanding of madness as illness dominated mainstream accounts during the Cold War...With [George] Keenan’s Log Telegram sent from Moscow during his stint at the US embassy, and the psychological assessment of negotiations in Korea, Cold War madness influenced decision making at the highest level and entered the world stage. Communist leaders found themselves diagnosed as schizoid, paranoid, hysterical, or plain crazy-often all at once” (Dunst 2-3). This is reinforced in *Dr. Strangelove* when President Muffley

describes Ripper by saying, “There’s nothing to figure out General Turgidson. This man is obviously a psychotic” (Kubrick 1964). Richard Hofstadter wrote about this paranoia and politics in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, published in 1964. He discussed the idea of conspiracy theory and paranoia in American politics following Lyndon Johnson’s election. This ties into the film with the character of Ripper acting paranoid for most of the film.

As part of the fight against communism, the United States made efforts to portray the Soviet system as wretchedly as it could. In Joseph McCarthy’s Wheeling, West Virginia speech on February 9, 1950, he describes the conflict as

The great difference between our western Christian world and the atheistic Communist world is not political, gentlemen, it is moral... Today we are engaged in a final, all-out battle between communistic atheism and Christianity... The real, basic difference, however, lies in the religion of immoralism . . . invented by Marx, preached feverishly by Lenin, and carried to unimaginable extremes by Stalin (Henrietta 306)

Dr. Strangelove also addressed this question of immoralism and religion. Turgidson comments on the Soviets “as I said, Premier Kissev is a degenerate atheist commie! That's what I said” (Kubrick 1964). Also, when Turgidson talks to his secretary he tells her to say her prayers. Mandrake also mentions religion just to make sure the audience knows what side he is on, “I'm a religious man, myself, you know, Jack. I believe in all that sort of thing” (Kubrick 1964), and there are other instances sprinkled throughout of

this subtle reminder of the fight not only between capitalism and communism but also between Christianity and atheism.

In addition to what type of weapon, the other discussion within the military planning efforts at the time was the delivery method. In *Dr. Strangelove*, Kubrick uses the B-52 bomber to deliver the bomb. The Strategic Air Command (SAC) was in charge of these bombing runs, which are also portrayed throughout the film. Within the military, especially the Air Force, there was some discussion about a better way to deliver the bomb. The government started to research using missiles such as the Atlas and the Titan, but this technology was years away and thus conventional wisdom said using airplanes was the only way to counter a Soviet attack. The mass fear of an impending strike would cause the United States government to be prepared at all costs, including “to ensure prompt readiness SAC frequently kept bombers aloft, equipped with nuclear warheads and skirting the Arctic Circle near Greenland and northern Europe close to the Soviet Union (Jacobs 46).

This fear of attack and the American response is also seen in *Dr. Strangelove*’s opening scene of a B-52 bomber refueling in the air so it can continue its skirting of the Soviet coast. In the first scene with General Ripper, he calls Mandrake and asks if the planes are holding at their failsafe position, then the narrator says “In order to guard against surprise nuclear attack, America's Strategic Air Command maintains a large force of B-52 bombers airborne 24 hours a day. Each B-52 can deliver a nuclear bomb load of 50 megatons, equal to 16 times the total explosive force of all the bombs and shells used by all the armies in World War Two. Based in America, the Airborne alert force is

deployed from the Persian Gulf to the Arctic Ocean, but they have one geographical factor in common: they are all two hours from their targets inside Russia” (Kubrick 1964). Thus, Kubrick stressed to the audience how prepared America was in case of a Soviet attack.

The policy of keeping bombers airborne would change as time went on and both countries would make technological advancements to replace the bombers with Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs). As the technology matured, President Kennedy and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, who was previously a RAND employee, wanted to place the burden on the missiles and not the airplanes for a faster response. McNamara and other officials decided to have a strong, unified policy regarding mutually assured destruction and nuclear annihilation, with McNamara noting that “it became increasingly clear to defense planners moreover, that Soviet air defenses made it potentially far more costly to rely on bombers to penetrate their targets deep within Eurasia. They felt that small, precisely, targeted ICBMs, unstoppable by Soviet air defenses were a safer choice of deterrent” (Jameson 48). Rather than have the bombers be continuously in the air as seen in *Dr. Strangelove*, Kennedy and McNamara wanted to rely on these new missiles that could be launched from Europe and Turkey. The USSR responded in 1962 by placing their own missiles in Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

In 1959 Fidel Castro seized power in Cuba. After seizing power Castro removed all American business from the island and in turn the US began an embargo. Historian H.W. Brands explains, “the two sides first traded shots in an economic war, with Castro expropriating American holdings in Cuba, and Eisenhower canceling Cuba’s access to

American sugar markets and embargoing most exports to the island. When Castro turned to the Soviet Union for aid and comfort, American officials decided to take more drastic measures” (Brands 62). Those more drastic measures would happen under President Kennedy, beginning with Kennedy ordering the attack at the Bay of Pigs in 1961. This plan was created under the Eisenhower administration, and included the assassination of Castro. Castro was not the only head of state that the US was trying to get rid of; the Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba was also targeted. The administration claimed it was justified in its decision; as Brands explains, “they did so by claiming that the communist threat was so great as to justify almost any countermeasure. In other words, they tried to kill Castro and Lumumba because Castro and Lumumba appeared to be playing into the communist threat” (Brands 65). The Bay of Pigs was a disaster, and Castro was not removed from Cuba. Tension between the two nations grew worse, and Castro turned to the Soviet Union for protection. As part of this agreement Castro agreed to let the Soviet Union place missiles on the island, supposedly for defense, leading to the Cuban Missile Crises.

Dr. Strangelove’s portrayal of America’s fear of the nuclear situation getting out of control parallels the feeling of the Cuban Missile Crisis. The American public was very confused and concerned about the events playing out in Cuba in 1962. The situation in Cuba was so bad that for 13 days citizens of both the United States and the Soviet Union were not sure if we would engage in nuclear war and truly achieve Mutually Assured Destruction. President Kennedy was made aware of the situation by U2 surveillance photos revealing the new bases in Cuba. He then decided to place a

quarantine around the island, “To halt this offensive buildup, a strict quarantine on all offensive military equipment under shipment to Cuba is being initiated. All ships of any kind bound for Cuba, from whatever nation or port, will, if found to contain cargoes of offensive weapons, be turned back. This quarantine will be extended, if needed, to other types of cargo and carriers. We are not at this time, however, denying the necessities of life as the Soviets attempted to do in their Berlin blockade of 1948” (Hofstadter 551-552). The Soviets respond with:

Mr. President, we and you ought not now to pull on the ends of the rope in which you have tied the knot of war, because the more the two of us pull, the tighter that knot will be tied. And a moment may come when that knot will be tied so tight that even he who tied it will not have the strength to untie it, and then it will be necessary to cut that knot, and what that would mean is not for me to explain to you, because you yourself understand perfectly of what terrible forces our countries dispose. Consequently, if there is no intention to tighten that knot and thereby to doom the world to the catastrophe of thermonuclear war, then let us not only relax the forces pulling on the ends of the rope, let us take measures to untie that knot. We are ready for this. (Khrushchev 1962)

This speech by Khrushchev closely mirrors that of President Muffley of the film, both wanting to avoid a war if possible because they know the possible consequences of this action.

If the people in charge of the two nations are fearful of what could happen, how does the everyday American public feel and react but with fear? Margot Henricksen's book, *Dr. Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age*, recognized this fear as "the language and forms of madness, alienation, and anxiety suffused the youth culture of the 1950s, revealing not only the nervous uncertainty and excited discontent of the young but also the insecurity and disorder exhibited by an entire culture of anxiety in post-war America" (Henricksen 82). Thus, the fear of annihilation caused another mass hysteria in the American public. Two of the biggest manifestations of this fear were the widespread construction of bomb shelters and the duck and cover drills.

The bomb shelters were an attempt to protect oneself from a Soviet nuclear attack or a doomsday machine: "A few months before the Berlin crisis and the bomb shelter craze burst upon the panicked American public, a March 1961 editorial in the *Nation* declared that 'the strangest psychological phenomenon of the twentieth century, transcending the frenzies and manias of the Dark Ages, is civil defense-a notion that a H bomb war could be conducted, on the home front, like World War II'" (Henricksen 193). Newspaper reports that a war was eminent, and that the H bomb could end all life on Earth were enough to cause mass hysteria, panic, and anxiety among the populous. Even Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy prepared for an attack: "Eisenhower gave approval for SAC to build hardened underground defense bunkers for the communications, Similarly the Kennedy administration instituted a nation-wide strategy of communal fall-out shelters, announced publicly in *Life* magazine, but it failed dismally. JFK did lead by example, building a personal fallout shelter, at public expense in Palm Beach Florida"

(Broderick 152). If the presidents were preparing bomb shelters, was the populations' fear unreasonable? As a result of this rising fear and events like the Cuban Missile Crises, some American citizens began to form groups to protest the rising nuclear arsenal, such as SANE, National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy. H. W Brands wrote, "We are facing a danger unlike any danger that has ever existed" (Brands 68). Many people were very afraid of the possibility of a war between the Soviet Union and the United States over communism.

At the same time, children were getting genuinely concerned about the news they were hearing so the government created Burt the Turtle and the Duck and Cover drills (*Atomic Café*). Burt the Turtle was used in the *Duck and Cover* film and pamphlet created by the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA). This film was created to combat childhood fears about nuclear annihilation and featured Burt offering ways for children to survive a nuclear attack by the Soviets. This is how pervasive the fear of mutually assured destruction was; we were teaching our children how to survive a nuclear attack by hiding under their desks. That technique would probably not have worked, but it did give the children of America something proactive to do in response to the growing nuclear threat. Sibylle Escalona, a Professor of Psychology at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, did an investigation into the fears of children of the Cold War. She found some very interesting answers to the question of how these children saw the future in ten years: "seventy percent of the youngsters spontaneously raised the issue of war, and most of the 219 respondents Escalona claimed were pessimistic. One fourteen-year-old said 'the people of the world never change, but the atomic powers will still be expanding, and the

threat of war and complete destruction will hang as a cloud of fear over the world”

(Jacobs 37). These fears appear to be validated by the ending of *Dr. Strangelove*.

While the adults were building bomb shelters, children were learning how to survive if the Soviets ever did launch their weapons, “while adults perceived a threat to the American way of life-to their health and wellbeing and the those of their families-their children learned to fear the loss of a future they could grow into and inhabit. These kids of the Atomic Age wondered if they might be the last children on Earth” (Jacobs 25). While some early reading books used “A is for Atom” to teach children their ABC’s (Jacobs 26), *Dr. Strangelove* addressed the fear of being the last living generation in the film’s closing scene of a large atomic blast as Vera Lynn’s song *We’ll Meet Again* played. Newspapers and magazines published articles about the buildup of weapons and the possible consequences of such buildups: “hysteria over the threat posed by Soviet weapons served to justify both increased stockpiling of nuclear weapons by the United States and also an expanding series of weapons tests in Nevada and the Pacific” (Jacobs 26-27). As illustrated in the last scene of *Dr. Strangelove*, “*Duck and Cover* was part of the massive, often hysterical response on the part of the people and the government of the United States to the Soviet Union’s acquisition of nuclear weapons” (Jacobs 28).

Another point in the film is about the Soviet plot to use fluoride in the water supply. General Ripper locks Captain Mandrake in his office and explains his belief that the Soviets are trying to take the US over using fluoride. Scarlett Higgins, in her article “Purity of essence in the Cold War: *Dr. Strangelove*, paranoia, and bodily boundaries”, addresses this plot point. She describes the point of her paper as “[t]his article produces a

new understanding of ‘Cold War paranoia’ via a psychoanalytic reading of these texts (alongside earlier Cold War films *My Son John* and *The Manchurian Candidate*) through which paranoia becomes a peculiarly bodily mental disturbance” (Higgins 799). While she only deals with the issue of fluoride as part of the paranoia, the idea can be applied to the greater film and the fear or paranoia of MAD. Higgins compares the use of fluoride to the communist threat. She says, “According to these sources, Communism, like fluoride, is silent, deadly, and almost impossible to distinguish from the medium through which it enters the body” (Higgins 810). She also refers to how different the communists are being portrayed in films in the 1960’s. She observed, “[a]pparent in Cold War popular culture is a transition from films of the early Cold War in which Communists are figured as extraterrestrials or monsters, and those in which they are ‘average’ Americans” (Higgins 809). The overall theme is that of the fears of the American people being represented.

Dr. Strangelove ends with the doomsday machine detonation, accompanied by an iconic mushroom cloud in the sky, but this was not the original ending that Kubrick had planned. His original ending featured a pie fight in the War Room with all the members: “Kubrick’s original intention was to have *Dr. Strangelove* end, not with the doctor’s “Mein Fuhrer” but with an extended pie fight taking place in the war room. One of the legendary lost sequences of modern cinema, this ending was certainly filmed, but then abandoned for reasons that are not entirely clear” (Morrison 381). There are several speculations as to why this scene was not kept, including that Peter Sellers could not keep a straight face and the whole cast ending up laughing throughout the scene. Another theory is that it was too close to the Kennedy assassination to include one of the pies

hitting President Muffley and Turgidson yelling “he’s been hit”. In the end, the pie fight would not have been the appropriate ending. The mass hysteria over the bomb and nuclear annihilation were quite real and the current ending makes that point much better than the pie fight ending would have.

Dr. Strangelove appears to have been well received and controversial at the same time, as noted by several *New York Times* articles that addressed the reception of the film. Bosley Crowther of the *Times* stated, “for what Mr. Kubrick is doing in this wildly speculative account of what might happen if a crazy Air Force general were to order an attack with nuclear bombs is to give vicarious fulfillment to the gravest fears that anyone might have about the imminence of nuclear disaster because of reckless and insufficient control of the bomb” (Crowther X1). He goes on to say “You may laugh at his speculations, if you are in that frame of mind, but there is also a good chance you will find them hysterical and grim. This is why many people come out from seeing the film with a feeling of mixed amusement and uncomfortable bafflement” (Crowther X1). Crowther was not a big fan of the movie and often wrote bad reviews so much so that the viewers would write into the editor expressing their love of the film. Other *New York Times* articles, such as one from May 1, 1964, commented on the reception overseas, “Box office reports from Scandinavia, Italy, and France, in particular, indicated it was the most popular film attraction in several years” (NYT May 1964). The controversy over the film only seemed to add to the number of people who went to see it, “Britons are still arguing the political meaning of the film *Dr. Strangelove*” and each new barb or accolade seems to increase the length of box office queues” (NYT Feb 1964). Even 50 years later

we are discussing the meaning of *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*.

Overall *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* is an important cultural work reflecting the political tensions and public anxiety about the Cold War, and more specifically about Mutually Assured Destruction. This film shows, through the use of black humor, the real fears and anxiety the public had about nuclear war and Mutually Assured Destruction and reflected the pathos of the 1960s. *Dr. Strangelove*, being made one year after the Cuban Missile Crisis, was a perfect reflection of the escalating fear of MAD that had gripped the United States in the 1960s.

CHAPTER III:

On the Brink:

The Day After and *WarGames*:

A Look at America's Fear of Nuclear War in the 1980s

Many people believe that the closest the world ever got to nuclear war was the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, but what many may not realize is that tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States were worse during the Ronald Reagan administration of the 1980s. Tensions had increased such that people in the United States were convinced there would be no way to peacefully settle our differences leaving only nuclear war and its aftermath, and creating a new fear of a post-apocalyptic world. In 1983, Ronald Reagan used the phrase “Evil Empire” to identify the focus of evil in the modern world: “So, in your discussions of the nuclear freeze proposals, I urge you to beware the temptation of pride—the temptation of blithely declaring yourselves above it all and label both sides equally at fault, to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an *evil empire*, to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil” (Broussard 203). These comments made many believe that Reagan was going to take a hard line with the Soviet Union and eventually lead to nuclear war. This new feeling of the inevitability of nuclear war was evident in the films of the early 1980s such as the made-for-television movie *The Day After* (1983) and *WarGames* (1983).

I will show how the films *The Day After* and *WarGames* perceived the new state of Cold War fear and reflected the growing tensions in America about a nuclear war and how both stand as a warning. The fact that both films were released in 1983 was very reflective of the time, both showed the fear, almost to the point of mass hysteria, about people believing that World War III was on the verge. By 1988, tensions had died down tremendously, thus by looking at these two films the audience finds a better insight into what Americans felt and what their greatest fear was.

I will be looking at both films, critical reviews, and newspaper articles during their respective releases, as well as scholarly articles about the films. I will also be investigating government documents of the Cold War, especially speeches by Ronald Reagan and Gorbachev. There is more information on *The Day After* than *WarGames*, but enough to make a case for both films as having shown the mass hysteria of the 1980s and the fear of nuclear annihilation and living in a post-apocalyptic world. *WarGames* showed the fear of what would happen if the computers malfunctioned and launched the nuclear missiles, something of a then-modern telling of *Dr. Strangelove*, instead of human error it would be our reliance on computers. *The Day After* shows the fear of living in a world after the bombs went off. Both were a warning to the American people about what could happen in the dangerous times of the 1980s.

The Day After was one of the most-watched programs of its time. Deron Overpeck, in his article “Remember it’s only a movie: Expectations and receptions of *The Day After*”, discussed its impact on the American viewing public, “on November 20, 1983, during a sweeps week and a tense period in the Cold War, the American

Broadcasting Company (ABC) aired *The Day After*, a television movie dramatizing the effects of a nuclear attack on the United States. The broadcast attracted approximately 100 million viewers, which translated into a 46 rating and 62 shares for the time period, making it the most watched television film in the medium's history" (Overpeck 267). I was 11 years old when this film came out and I remember watching it together with my family in our living room and being afraid. My father was in the US Air Force and worked for the Strategic Air Command (SAC) and had worked in the Minutemen silos, so the possibility hit home with me. Of course, I also remember watching *WarGames* and wondering if it was possible for the computers to start a nuclear war. Both films, one for television and one for the big screen, reflected the tension in the United States about nuclear war and its aftermath and served as a potential warning of things to come if the United States and the Soviet Union stayed on the same course.

The Day After was talked about even before the movie aired on television. A *Newsweek* article from October 24, 1983, discussed the potential impact of the movie, "We see blistered and blinded human gargoyles suffer slow death from radiation sickness. We see the crumbling of a society's restraints; the most law-abiding citizens emerge from the rubble of ground zero to loot, rape, and pillage. As firing squads add to the mass graves, a few valiant survivors struggle to reconnect" (Walters 126). There were discussions of whether children should watch this program, "Some psychiatrists even suggested that no one should watch the film alone...while one group of education specialists suggested that pre-teens not be allowed to see the film and that children between the ages of 12 and 15 should be closely monitored if they did watch it. To cope

with the expected deluge of bereft viewers, PSR (Physicians for Social Responsibility) members cleared their schedules on the day following the film's broadcast" (Overpeck 280). *WarGames*, while powerful, did not have this level of intense debate; maybe because it was a movie at the local theatre and thus not as easily accessible as a made-for-TV movie.

The question is what was going on in the world in 1983 that drove two films depicting an America on the verge of mass hysteria? *WarGames* showed the fear of launching a nuclear war and *The Day After* shows the fear of trying to live in a post-nuclear-war world. One of the main issues that coincide with the movies is that relations with the Soviet Union appeared to be deteriorating. President Ronald Reagan had announced his plan for the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI or Star Wars) in March 1983. Many people did not believe in this program, "[m]any Liberals, as well as some of his own administration, thought Star Wars was simply an expensive folly, but there is no question that the leadership of the USSR was terrified of it, as some later admitted" (Broussard 130). Some of that fear may be tied to another movie of the era. The plot of the film *Raise the Titanic* (1980) was about trying to obtain Byzantium; a mineral that would be needed to power a new defense system. In the film, the Byzantium had been placed on the Titanic. The new defense system was a laser technology that would destroy any incoming missiles and make war obsolete. That sounded a lot like Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative. *Raise the Titanic* also stars Jason Robards, the lead actor in *The Day After*.

Adding to those tensions, Reagan began plans to deploy Pershing II missiles in West Germany. Overpeck states, “Richard Pipes, an assistant on the National Security Council, asserted that unless the USSR abandoned communism, war was all but inevitable. More provocatively, in April 1983, US fighter jets had flown deliberately into Soviet airspace during a training exercise, and in early November, the Soviet military had nearly confused the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s Able Archer exercise for a nuclear first strike” (Overpeck 270). Adrian Hanni’s article “A Chance for a Propaganda Coup? The Reagan Administration and the *Day After*” also addressed this, “The ABC movie was a symptom of a renaissance of fear about thermonuclear war in the early 1980s” (Hanni 416). He goes on to point out “[t]he Strategic Defense Initiative, to use ground and space-based systems to protect the United States from attack by strategic nuclear ballistic missiles, which the President announced on 23 March 1983, was criticized as further encouraging an offensive arms race. By May 1983, Congress had approved the funding for the production and deployment of MX intercontinental ballistic missiles” (Hanni 416). The MX missiles had a larger payload capacity than the Minutemen missiles although they were designed to fit into the same missile silo. Tension and fear in the United States were growing that nuclear war was not only likely but almost inevitable which made the timing of these two movies perfect to reflect the tension and fears that many if not most Americans were feeling in 1983.

Hanni showed just how concerned the White House was about the broadcast of *The Day After*, noting there were many meetings held within the United States government regarding the premiere of this film. The makers of the film had not requested

official help from the United States government but did offer them a screening before the official airing: “the producers of *The Day After*, however, had declined government cooperation on the production, because the Pentagon had insisted that the script blame the Soviet Union for the nuclear war” (Hanni 417). The White House was also given the opportunity to see the film early and President Reagan, after seeing the film, wrote in his diary “[i]t is powerfully done...all \$7 million worth. It’s very effective and left me greatly depressed.... whether it will be of help to the anti-nukes or not, I can’t say. My own reaction was one of our having to do all we can to have a deterrent and to see there is never a nuclear war” (Hanni 418). Reagan’s Chief of Staff, James Baker, also agreed that the White House should preview the film and many in the White House saw an opportunity to use the film to support Reagan’s deterrence policy. Some felt that Reagan should make a television appearance, either before the broadcast or immediately after. Juozas Kazlas, Executive Director of the International Video Institute said Reagan should appear after the broadcast “to transform the film into an argument for his defense policies” (Hanni 418). Hanni also noted that “a comprehensive propaganda strategy for *The Day After*, whose implementation was to be led by the White House and the NSC (National Security Council), had been developed by the White House until early November” (Hanni 418). All of these meetings showed how much importance the President and the White House placed on putting this film in their narrative. One biographer says that Reagan’s viewing of the film was the only time that he had ever seen the President depressed, as for the most part, Reagan always tried to have a happy and upbeat demeanor.

These meetings with government officials were not limited to just the screening with the President. Many meetings were held about how to address the film with the public and to lessen the public's fear of nuclear war. And it was not just the White House that got involved with these meetings: "On the afternoon of Friday, 4 November, representatives of the White House, the NSC, the State Department, the Pentagon, FEMA, USIA (United States Information Agency), and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) met in the Executive Office Building for *The Day After* meeting to coordinate the administration's campaign" (Hanni 420). In an interview, Nicolas Meyer, director of *The Day After*, said FEMA wanted a speech included in the movie that showed how things were going to work out after the nuclear attack. Meyer put in the speech that FEMA wrote almost in its entirety, but it was audio-only playing in the background of the scene where Stephen Klein (Steve Guttenberg) is working in the hospital and the camera pans out to show all the people sick and dying and then shows the massive graves that are being prepared (*The Day After*, special feature DVD).

The Day After was not the only movie in 1983 affected by real events. Declassified documents from the National Security Agency show that on June 3, 1980, there was a warning about a Soviet launch of nuclear missiles toward the United States that turned out to be false. There were also reports that this may have happened in 1979 as well: "Reports that the mistaken use of a nuclear exercise tape on a NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command) computer had produced a U.S. false warning and alert actions prompted Soviet Communist Party General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev to write secretly to President Carter that the erroneous alert was "fraught with a

tremendous danger." Further, "I think you will agree with me that there should be no errors in such matters." (National Security Archive). Other documents show "[m]onths later, in May and June 1980, 3 more false alerts occurred. The dates of two of them, 3 and 6 June 1980, have been in the public record for years, but the existence of a third event, cited in a memorandum from Secretary of Defense Brown to President Carter on 7 June 1980, has hitherto been unknown, although the details are classified" (ibid). The blame for the malfunction was placed on a cheap piece of equipment: "[s]upposedly causing the incidents in June 1980 was the failure of a 46¢ integrated circuit ("chip") in a NORAD computer, but Secretary of Defense Brown reported to a surprised President Carter that NORAD 'has been unable to get the suspected circuit to fail again under tests.'" (ibid). In the liner notes for the DVD of *WarGames*, director John Badham talks about these mishaps: "the brass at NORAD, for their part, were not entirely thrilled with the premise of the film, insisting that such a scenario could never actually have taken place. However, an unfortunate incident in 1980 reveals that a similar event can-and did take place. On June 3rd of that year a computer terminal alerted the watch officer that hundreds of Soviet missiles were already in the air, targeting the US with their fatal payloads and that Armageddon was a mere eight minutes away" (*WarGames*). In this interview with the director, he relayed an interesting point about the films production. He said that they tried to get the Pentagon's help to recreate NORAD but were stalled many times until they contacted Duncan Wilmore, the Air Force's TV liaison officer, who was able to get them a tour of NORAD. Wilmore would later go on to be the movie's technical director and would also have a role in the movie as Major Lem.

One other interesting aspect about the film *WarGames* was how it resembled a modern-day telling of *Dr. Strangelove*, which came out in 1964. One of the iconic parts of *Dr. Strangelove* is the “big board” and *WarGames* has a similar board that shows all the targets on multiple screens. John Badham stated that the actual board at NORAD was 1/10 the size of what they created in the film and was everything that NORAD wished they had. (*WarGames*). In addition to efforts to get NORAD to look right, they studied the war scenarios from the RAND Corporation in the 1980s. Badham says he got the idea for the computer in the movie from real life SIOP (Single Integrated Operation Plan) but changed it to WOPR (War Operations Planned Response) because he said it was more fun to say WOPPER. (ibid). In the interview with Badham, he also said the idea for the character of Stephen Falken (John Wood) was to get Stephen Hawking to play the part. They went so far as to contact him, but later changed their mind because they were afraid it would draw too many comparisons of Dr. Strangelove in his wheelchair. General Berringer (Barry Corbin) similarly harkens to the *Strangelove* Slim Pickens character Major T.J. Kong, as both are highly trained military men that happen to have similar accents.

Both films reflect the events going on in the United States in 1983 and the fear of nuclear destruction. The fear or mass hysteria of the time was that there could be a nuclear war, whether intentional as in *The Day After* or by accident as seen in *WarGames*, and this was on the mind of Americans in 1983 with the increased deployment of Pershing and MX missiles. The message of each film is similar: that nuclear war was not winnable, Badham said “the idea of winning or even fighting a

nuclear war is insane. The piling up of nuclear weapons is ridiculous because we can never use them” (Fayard 44-45). *The Day After* is also framed by both sides as a statement on the nuclear deterrence policy of the Reagan administration. Many groups said the movie was in favor of nuclear disarmament, while others said it was a reason to continue nuclear deterrence. The official policy of the film was that it had no political message, “the film’s producers at ABC and director Nicolas Meyer insisted at least initially, that *The Day After* was not a political statement and thus denied any propaganda purpose of the production” (Hanni 416). They said that they wanted to reach everyone in America especially “the who’s waiting for the Flying Nun to come on...we’re going after those who have not formed an opinion” (Hanni 416). They were not targeting the anti-war movement or the pro-war movement but those in the middle which is why it had such a profound effect on people when it aired.

This fear of nuclear war during the early 1980s led many more people to join the disarmament movement: “in line with the renewed fear and rising Cold War tensions, the early 1980’s witnessed a rapidly growing anti-nuclear/ peace movement, which received broad support throughout society but was fragmented into numerous groups that sometimes pursued very different goals and strategies” (Hanni 417). One of the most powerful groups was the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign, often referred to as just the Freeze. In May 1983, the Kennedy-Hatfield resolution was introduced into the House of Representatives. This resolution called for a freeze on nuclear forces and then a reduction in arms. The fact that so many people joined the nuclear freeze movement was an indication of just how fearful the American public had become about nuclear war, “by

1982, public opinion polls showed no less than 80 percent supported a nuclear arms freeze, and in June 1982, several hundreds of thousands of people marched in New York to support the anti-nuke case. In November 1982, almost 11 million Americans in eight states led freeze initiatives” (Hanni 417). In an interview included in the DVD release, Meyer stated that, at first, he was reluctant to make a nuclear war film, it was just too hard, but then he was talking to his psychiatrist and the psychiatrist said this is where we find out who you are, “You need to put your work in the service of your beliefs” (*The Day After*). That is, if Meyer was truly in favor of disarmament then he had a responsibility to make the movie. Meyer went on to say that he used that line on most of the actors to get them involved in the movie. The one that he specifically points to is Jason Robards, whose character is Dr. Russel Oakes. They were on a plane together when Meyer told Robards about the film and asked if he wanted to be in the film, to which Robards responded with “it beats signing petitions”. This is the landscape in which these two films arrived, a time of mass fear about not only having a nuclear war but if it was survivable, which both films answered in the negative. It is interesting to note that in *The Day After* it is not clear who started the war, there is a vague radio broadcast that says something about the Russians in West Germany but never outright says it was the Soviet Union; and in *WarGames* it is the American computer that malfunctions. With all the Reagan rhetoric about the “evil empire,” the Soviets are not the main antagonist of either film.

When Meyer decided to helm the project, originally titled *Silence in Heaven*, the one thing that he was worried about was the television censors. He was used to working

in motion pictures, having just completed *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*. The studio assured him that it was not a problem, then a few months into the project he was called into a meeting with the Standard and Practices department, the censors. They wanted several parts to be cut out including the scene with a diaphragm and Meyers refused. Several times he said he had to fight for the vision that he had. When it was done, he screened it for the movie executives and Meyers said they cried and then told him he needed to tone it down and cut out major parts, so Meyers walked off the set. Others recut the film and took out about 70% of what Meyers had done, but it did not have the same impact. Eventually, they would ask him to return, and he would put all of it back and release the film that he wanted. He did concede that this was an optimistic view of nuclear war, because in the worst-case scenario everyone would be dead, and it would have been a short movie (*The Day After*).

It is interesting to note that Meyers would make two more movies involving the Cold War and related themes. He directed *Star Trek V: The Voyage Home* (1986), which was partially set in 1986 and made many references to the Cold War tension. In one scene Pavel Chekov (Walter Keonig) is captured aboard a nuclear carrier and interrogated by the military and FBI because of his Russian accent. Meyers also directed *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country* (1991), a film about two powerful adversaries that had been at war with each other for centuries trying to find peace. In the film, the Klingon moon is destroyed, and they seek help from the Federation. In 1991, the Soviet Union was falling apart, and the Cold War was ending. The destruction of the Klingon moon could be viewed as symbolic of the destruction of the Berlin Wall or the freedom movement in

Poland led by Lech Walesa . Meyer used the film to offer a view of how two nations could come together in peace; the Klingons and the Federation were just a stand in for the United States and the Soviet Union.

The Day After takes place in Lawrence, Nebraska, in the middle of the United States. Lawrence was chosen for many reasons, including its location, a college town with a large university hospital, and its proximity to the Minutemen missiles bases. In one of the early scenes in the movie, a student asks John Lithgow's character, Joe Huxley, a scientist at the university, what is happening, and he responds, "Those are Minuteman missiles!" and the student asks, "Like a test, sort of... like a warning?" Huxley then points out, "They're on their way to Russia. They take about 30 minutes to reach their target." Another student, Bruce Gallatin, comments, "What do you really think the chances are of something like that happening way the hell out here in the middle of nowhere?" and Huxley says, "You're sitting next to the Whiteman Air Force Base right now. That is about... 150 Minuteman missile silos spread halfway down the State of Missouri. That's... an awful lot of bullseyes". This again tells the audience that nowhere in America is safe, not even the heartland of America.

WarGames begins with Mathew Broadrick's teenage character, David Lightman, working on a computer and hacking into the high school computer to change Jennifer Mack's (Ally Sheedy) grade. He then shows her how he can hack into tougher places like the government and ends up playing a game called thermonuclear war with the computer. Reinforcing the idea that no place in America is safe, part of the movie's setting is NORAD at the Cheyenne Mountain Complex in Colorado, deep in the heart of America.

Neither of these films is set in densely populated metropolitan cities, instead, they are set in middle America to show how these issues affect all of America not just New York or Los Angeles.

WarGames' early scenes heighten this focus on middle America as it shows two Air Force soldiers driving to a house in the middle of nowhere but surrounded by a gate. This same type of house is also seen in *The Day After*, and in both cases this innocent-looking house is a cover for the Air Force Minutemen silos that are underground. In *WarGames*, the soldiers sign in, have a normal conversation, then relieve the other two soldiers currently on duty. During the next few minutes, the soldiers are called on to launch the weapons and one of them is unable and unwilling to cause World War III and his fellow soldier must point a gun at him to try and make him launch. One slightly ironic note is the label above the key slot reading "gently". You are about to launch World War III but turn the key gently. The audience is not told what happened, but we see the WOPR machine that is created to take the decision out of human hands, and the next time we see the missile silo toward the end there are no people inside because it is completely computerized. In *The Day After*, we again see the missile silo and the three soldiers that are coming to relieve the previous crew, they are also joking and talking about mundane things. Then the siren goes off and not all the soldiers want to try to get into the silo. "*The Day After* begins with a series of shots showing the actions of the military at a Strategic Air Command post. These shots function to quickly foreground an important line in the narrative which sets the events in motion" (Perrine 158). One soldier tries to crawl into the missile shaft to protect himself from the incoming missiles, while Airman First Class

Billy McCoy (William Allan Young) leaves the base against orders to find his wife. This scene points out that the fear of nuclear war and losing loved ones is greater than all the military training that some soldiers have. They are willing to sacrifice honor and duty to protect family.

In *The Day After*, the opening scene is like *WarGames* only it is aboard a SAC airplane where there is a shift change. Both are very mundane activities. In the background, you can hear that the President is at Camp David, then where other officials are located for the day, making the viewer aware that the military always knows where the leaders are at any given point. They also say that the officer should pay attention to nuclear submarines off the coast and then the plane takes off, reminding the audience of the tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union in the first minute and a half of the movie. This was shot almost in a documentary style; there is no attempt to make it flashy or stylized just to offer a realistic picture of the military: “these shots function to quickly foreground one important line in the narrative which sets the events in motion. Throughout the film, the military is represented in one of two ways. The first sequence typifies the first way. It shows the military, especially the command personnel, as automatic in their actions and apparently devoid of human hesitation or feeling. These sections are differentiated from most of the film...the visuals are accompanied by aural information about the presence of Soviet nuclear submarines” (Perrine 158-159).

The movie then cuts to an ariel view of Kansas, presumably taken from the SAC plane, but there is patriotic music playing. The wide-angle view first shows vast amounts of farmland and then goes into more populated areas with schools and then factories

producing milk, a wholesome product like Middle America: “All of the scenes of daily life, what the screenwriter called ‘the usual love and labor of life on the month of September’ are overlaid with various news reports (radio and television) of political events which are escalating toward war” (Perrin 159). The next images are a baseball field followed by a football field, then views of the city focusing on war memorials and parks, all these images intended to remind the viewer of the good things about being an American and providing a subtle reminder of what could be lost in a nuclear war. After the credits, the scene is of the Kansas Board of Trade and the stock market ticker, in the background the news is commenting on unanimously condemning Soviet action and calling for economic sanctions, but they never say what for, again a subtle reminder of the tensions and putting in the viewers subconscious that it was the Soviets fault for the upcoming attack. The news report goes on to talk about the massive Soviet buildup of troops along the East German border, again setting up future events, but it is not at the forefront of the scene, it is almost background noise. If you were not paying attention, you would miss the television broadcast mention that the US called these actions provocative. The Soviet Ambassador on the television broadcast points out that the United States has 260,000 soldiers and 7,000 nuclear weapons poised on the other side of the border. Within the first 6 minutes, the director has summarized the tensions existing between the countries in 1983 and can spend the rest of the film exploring the consequences of nuclear war. Nicolas Meyer pointed out that there is no clear indicator in the movie who fired first as it was irrelevant to the story: it did not matter who fired first, the result was the same, nuclear war. (*The Day After*). Meyer said in the same interview

that he viewed the film as a Public Service Announcement about the dangers of both sides building up nuclear weapons, “the film’s director admits to wanting to make a movie that would sneak in the back door of everyone’s consciousness” (Banco 104).

The next indication that there might be a problem is the scene with the four Air Force soldiers in the helicopter as they ask if any of them have heard about an alert. They then joke with each other as the helicopter lands at a house in the middle of a field, the house is remarkably similar to the one in *WarGames*. We see the soldiers talking about the weather topside while changing out shifts. The film then follows several different characters about their routine lives. In one of these, you see the Dahlbergs at night watching the news and a special report comes on about the Soviets in East Germany and NATO condemning them for a violation of international law. The audience then sees the Oakes hearing the same broadcast and talking about how they felt during the Cuban Missile Crisis and how, having survived that, they could survive this. Between these two families, the mood reflected what most of the country was feeling, the fear that nuclear war was not only a possibility but a likelihood and how to survive it.

There is a quick scene in the barbershop where several characters discuss nuclear politics and the whole deterrence argument is dismissed. One of the characters, the barber, says “crazy is not staying out of other people’s business, we shouldn’t be over there in the first place”. To which Joe Huxley laughingly says, “[m]aybe they will contain it”, a reference to the United States policy of containment. This scene is important because it shows the different discussions the American people were having about nuclear war: “as a discourse about this problem, *The Day After* includes both information

and spectacle: information in the form of emotional, common-sense condemnations of nuclear war and the factual explanation of fallout, radiation sickness, and electromagnetic pulse” (Waller 6).

The next important scene is when Dr. Oakes is in his car listening to the radio and a reporter says there were rumors of a nuclear warhead going off and destroying Wiesbaden, German. This is followed by an emergency broadcast signal from FEMA advising everyone to get inside in case of a possible attack. Then we see physical examples of mass hysteria: a massive line at the payphones which some people shoving to get to the phone; the grocery store where everyone is buying whatever they can find and the manager on the overhead is saying “Don’t panic” yet people are fighting over what little meat is left, people grabbing multiple cartons of milk, batteries and toilet paper (it is interesting to see this while living in the COVID-19 lockdown. This scene looked very much like what the grocery stores in March 2020 looked like). This scene is the definition of mass hysteria.

The film then switches between the families at home watching the events on television to the SAC getting ready to launch. There are a few frames that have no people or sound in them just to emphasize what is about to happen. We then switch to the inside of the missile silo, which again is shot very differently as “without exception, the documentary conventions are utilized in sequences which show the military. For example, in the shots inside the missile silo where the codes are entered and keys turned that launch the missiles, the film stock is grainy, and the camera work is jumpy” (Perrine 164). Right before the explosions, the film depicts an EMP (electromagnetic pulse).

According to director Meyer, this was also something that the censors wanted to take out of the film, but he said he talked to scientists and insisted that it stay in for accuracy. We then see the bombs go off, with some of the footage that Meyer used being from the documentary/film *Atomic Café* to add to its accuracy once again. The rest of the film deals with the fallout of nuclear war. The last scene is also especially important, serving as a warning “The catastrophic events you have just witnessed are in all likelihood less severe than the destruction that would actually occur in the event of a full nuclear strike against the United States. It is hoped that the images of this film will inspire the nations of this earth, their peoples and leaders to find the means to avert the fateful day” (Meyer)

On the weekend the film premiered, the government set up several meetings to discuss the situation, including President Reagan and Secretary of State George Schultz “on the same day, Casper Weinberger and General John Veasey, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, briefed the President in the situation room on the ultra-secret Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP), the government’s plan in the event of a nuclear attack” (Hanni 425). This is interesting because SIOP was the basis for the WOPR computer in *WarGames*. Several days after the film aired Reagan said, “it didn’t say anything we didn’t know, that is that nuclear war would be horrible, which is why we’re doing what we’re doing” (Hanni 426). ABC also aired a panel discussion after the broadcast which featured William Buckley to address issues the film might have raised. Harry Walter of *Newsweek* commented on the premiere of the film October 24, 1983, in Lawrence, Kansas, “hundreds of local residents who served as extras in the film packed a University of Kansas auditorium for a special screening. They came away looking like

mourners filing out of a mortuary. Yet while the celluloid sight of their hometown's devastation left them deeply shaken, it also illuminated their own divisions over the nuclear arms conundrum" (Walters 126).

Many felt that the controversy over the film, ABC lost most of its sponsors for the film, led to its high ratings. People called their local authorities, as well as the White House, after the movie: "Thousands made phone calls after the watching the film: the White House received so many calls that its switchboard operators required days to tally them all, while the ABC switchboard reported receiving 1000 calls, mostly in support of the film" (Hanni 280). The film was reshowed in 1988 and was not met with any controversy: "by 1988, the cycle of widespread nuclear activism had ended and the prospect of a prime time representative of nuclear war did not elicit much debate. By this time, too, the film had been dismissed as unrealistic by both nuclear disarmament activists and nuclear weapons strategists; it was held to be either too positive or too negative in its portrayal of nuclear weapons policy and the outcome of a full-scale nuclear war" (Perrine 163). *The Day After* was truly a representation of the mass fear in 1983.

WarGames also played on that fear but in a different way. Where *The Day After* showed what would happen after a nuclear attack but never showed the audience exactly how it happened, *WarGames* showed the audience just how easy it could be to start a nuclear war. So easy a teenager could do it by accident. The character of David Lightman hacks into a government computer called WOPR to play a game, only he does not know that the computer belongs to the military and tried to play a game of thermonuclear war.

The computer offers a nice game of chess, but David is determined to play thermonuclear war. It is interesting to note that when given the chance to play he must pick a side and chooses to be the Russians and gets to go first, thereby making the Russians the ones who started the war, and the United States defending itself. David believes it is just a game until he sees the news that night and the reporter is talking about a missile attack by the Soviets. The image the news uses is a mushroom cloud, forcing him at this point to realize that this is not just a game. At Cheyenne Mountain, the General calls for the board to go to DEFCON 3, but just before the board changes it flashes to a picture of President Reagan, implying that he is the one who got us into this predicament with his deterrence policy. In the audio commentary of the DVD, the director, John Badham, says they got the order of the DEFCON wrong but that the Pentagon did not make a big deal about it because they did not want the audience to know the true sequences of the DEFCON levels.

WarGames fits into the anti-nuclear movement just as *The Day After* does. This film points out the dangers of an ever-increasing nuclear arsenal. When David finally tracks down Dr. Stephen Falken, Falken explains to David and Jennifer about the dinosaurs. This scene points out the destructive nature of nuclear war. Falken said it is part of the natural order, as “humanity is planning its own destruction” and will be extinct just like the dinosaurs, and nature will just start again. He also says that his home is located near a target so when the war does happen, he will be in the blast zone and be spared the “horror of survival”. He envisions a quite different mode of survival than shown in *The Day After*. When the group finally gets to NORAD, we are closer to war

than ever before as there is a report that 100,000 Russian troops are marching toward Germany, and 52 subs have launched weapons and they would have 23 minutes before the land-based missiles would hit them and just 6 minutes from the submarine missiles. David and Dr. Falken try to convince General Berringer that this is a game, with Dr. Falken telling him “General you are listening to a machine, don’t act like one”. The general must be convinced that this is not real and the only way to test that is to contact the places that would be first strikes for the missiles. The three places that the General contacts are Elmendorf, Loring, and Grand Rapids Air Force bases. This scene is very reminiscent of *Fail Safe* (1962) when the President is on the phone to confirm New York City’s destruction but turns out differently as after a dramatic pause all three of the bases come back and reply that there has been no airstrike.

The movie was thought to end there but the computer takes over further and tries to launch the missiles, the scene then shows the empty missile silos where the humans were taken out. At this point, the General orders the bombers to their failsafe position, again reminiscent of both *Fail Safe* and *Dr. Strangelove*. Davis is then able to get the computer to listen by playing a game of tic-tac-toe. He gets the computer to play itself and learn. The end is where the computer shuts everything down and then says: “No one in global thermonuclear war wins, the only move is not to play”. Fayard states that “this ending encapsulates the message of the film-the idea that nuclear war is never to be contemplated” (Fayard 44). This scene could also be seen as an indictment of Reagan’s nuclear deterrence policy. This was a crisis that was averted this time but showed how dangerously close to World War III we were in 1983.

The receptions of these films were quite different. *The Day After* received much attention when it came out but quickly faded away. There was some question of whether this film should be given to the Soviet Union to show its people, “the USIA prepared Russian subtitles to the movie, renamed it ‘*The Final Day*’ for the Soviet audience, and planned to offer it via the US Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Arthur Hartman, to the Soviet Union on behalf of ABC, together with a request that it be shown on Soviet TV” (Hanni 423). Eventually, the film was shown in the Soviet Union “[a]lmost four years later, in late May 1987, after had already been shown throughout much of the world—even in Poland, which was the first Eastern bloc country to air it” (Hanni 424). Even though it was not aired until 1987 the Soviet Union did use parts of the movie in its propaganda efforts and reported that Reagan tried to stop the showing of the film. The film was shown in Great Britain 3 weeks after it aired in the United States. According to Susan Boyd-Bowman, in her article “*The Day After*: Representatives of the Nuclear Holocaust”, the reception was not as great as in the United States; she said, “17 million Britons say they say at least part of the film but only 5.4 million saw the whole 2-hour production” (Boyd-Bowman 72). She goes on to say that the reviews of the film were also not as good as in the US, calling it a “particularly tasteless example of American penchant for soap operas” and the BBC planned to produce its own production (Boyd-Bowman 73). Overall, this was truly an American film for American audiences. *WarGames* was generally reviewed favorably, although many of the critics said that it could never happen. Many reviewers also did not talk about the anti-nuclear war aspect and instead “most reviewers regarded the movie as a commentary on computer security in an age

when computers gained increasing popularity and infiltrated almost all aspects of daily life” (Fayard 44). One reporter did ask director John Badham if “*WarGames* constituted a new wave of Hollywood anti-nuclear war picture” and he responded, “I certainly hope nobody uses that in the publicity. It is a sure way to keep people out of the theater” (Fayard 45). He never goes on record and says it is not an anti-nuclear war movie, but if you look at it from the point of view of the events of 1983 it is clearly an anti-nuclear war movie disguised as a computer security movie.

1983 was a time of rapidly growing tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, one could almost say it was the most dangerous time in the Cold War. It saw the greatest accumulation and production of nuclear weapons on both sides. This led to a mass fear in the American public regarding the threat and the very real possibility of nuclear war. These fears are expressed in both *The Day After* and *WarGames* and both films serve as a warning of the potentially deadly outcome of President Ronald Reagan’s deterrence policy.

CONCLUSION

In the 1950s, the American people were fearful of the spread of communism, which was reflected in the film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. In the 1960s, the American people were anxious about Mutually Assured Destruction, as seen in *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. And in the 1980s, the American people were concerned with the ease of starting a nuclear war as seen in *WarGames*; and living in a post-apocalyptic world, as represented in *The Day After*. All four of these films taken together show how much the Cold War affected lives in the United States and reflected their different fears regarding the Cold War.

Each film taken in its own decade points to the public fears that go beyond the individual concerns to show an entire nation bordering on mass hysteria. These concerns were fear of communism, Mutually Assured Destruction, the ease of nuclear war, and living in a post-apocalyptic world. Each film has multiple interpretations, based on the amount of scholarship available, but the one thing that they have in common is all four films showcase the fears of their times.

In the 1950s, the US was fearful of the infiltration of communists into our society. Joseph McCarthy had made it his mission to find all the communist laying in plain sight. The film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* showed America how this could happen. The film, in the guise of pod people, explained how easy it would be for someone to be taken over. Just as McCarthy had warned. The film showed just how much this fear of infiltration was on the minds of many American. The fear of communism and its

influence was all consuming. This film is a snapshot into the fears and beliefs of 1950 society. It shows future generations how serious the communist threat was at the time. Today's generation does not have the same memory of communism and the Soviet Union. A 2017 *Washington Post* article stated that a majority of millennials would rather live under a socialist or communist rule, "58 percent of the up-and-coming generation opted for one of the three systems, compared to 42 percent who said they were in favor of capitalism" (Richardson). The article goes on to say that many millennials did not have a negative view of communism and "only 44 percent said they would be insulted if described as a communist" (Richardson). The author of the study, Marion Smith, commented on the outcome of the study: "[t]his troubling turn highlights widespread historical illiteracy in American society regarding socialism and the systemic failure of our education system to teach students about the genocide, destruction, and misery caused by communism since the Bolshevik Revolution one hundred years ago" (Richardson). This is a quite different view of those who were raised in the 1950s. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* provides a historical record of the overarching fear of communist infiltration in the 1950. Without the historical context of the events taking place in the 1950s *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is just a science fiction film.

The 1960s were also a time of great concern. This time it was the fear of Mutually Assured Destruction. The Cuban Missile Crisis had occurred in 1962 and the public was growing more concerned about the possibility of both countries firing their weapons. The film *Dr. Strangelove* reflected these fears. *Dr. Strangelove* showed what could happen if someone wanted to launch the weapons; and how the other side could retaliate. The film

was made as a black comedy rather than a drama. This was done so that the film would be better received by the public; yet still show the danger of the mounting arsenal. Films like *Dr. Strangelove* serve as a historical piece that documents the growing fears of the American public in the 1960s. This film was made over 50 years ago; and scholars are still writing about the film, evidenced via a quick search that will turn up new scholarship, but today we still have a significant arsenal at our disposal and the fear of those weapons getting out of control is no longer there. The very term Dr. Strangelove has become part of the American lexicon. The lasting effect of *Dr. Strangelove* is that it provided an insight into the very real fears of MAD during the 1960s.

The 1970s were a relatively calmer period for Cold War fears. Many Americans were more worried about the economy than invasion from or war with the Soviet Union. President Nixon was focused on reducing tensions with China and the Soviet Union. Following Nixon's resignation, President Ford was more concerned with trying to repair the damage of the Watergate scandal than on increasing animosity and tensions between the US and the USSR; while President Carter's was absorbed with the faltering US economy and peace in the Middle East than the Soviet threat. The 1970s did have its share of films being made; everything from disaster movies such as *The Towering Inferno*, *Earthquake*, *Meteor*, and *The Poseidon Adventure*; to the disco movies *Saturday Night Fever*. America's fascination with space was at a zenith following the successful Apollo missions of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and hence many movies were set in outer space such as *2001: A Space Odyssey*. There were still films made about Cold War fears in the 1970s such as *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (1970). This film was about a

supercomputer that could control the US nuclear weapons arsenal. In the film the computer requests to be linked to its counterpart in the Soviet Union, and when the link is broken the Colossus machine destroys a city in Russia in retaliation. The fear of living in a post-apocalyptic world was explored in 1977's *Doomsday Alley* that followed a group of people who had survived a nuclear exchange between the US and USSR. For the most part however, these 1970s movies did not reflect the mass hysteria about the Cold War that the other decades did, but focused more on the disaster like aspects of the situations, much as their contemporaries did.

Cold War tension returned with the election of Ronald Reagan. The films of the 1980s reflected the growing fears of a post-apocalyptic world and the rise of computers. *The Day After* and *WarGames* came out at the height of this fear. These films showed a potential future that no one wanted. As with *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Dr. Strangelove*, these two films stand as a historical record of the mood and fears of the country. Today, computers are an even bigger part of our world, yet the films being made are not warning us of a potential nuclear war between countries. Today's films now show how computers will take over everyday life; or how they will eliminate the human race. These films such as *Terminator* or *I, Robot* show this future. Other films today warn us about the effects of climate change, but not a world destroyed by nuclear weapons. Just as the films described here stand as a historical record of the varying fears of the Cold War; films of today will be looked at to judge what the public was worried about in the 2020s.

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Curriculum Vita

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Education

M.A., History, University of Houston-Clear Lake, Houston TX
December 2009

B.A., History, University of Houston-Clear Lake, Houston TX
May 2004

Teaching Experience

College of the Mainland, Texas City, TX-Adjunct Instructor

US History 1301 and 1302 (2010-2011)

College of the Mainland, Texas City, TX-Assistant Professor of History

US History 1301, 1302 and 2301 (2011-2015)

College of the Mainland, Texas City, TX Associate Professor of History

US History 1301, 1302, and 2301 (2015-present)

Alvin Community College, Alvin, TX-Adjunct Instructor

US History 1301 and 1302 (2019-present)

Professional Affiliations

National Society of Leadership and Success

Southwest Social Science Association

Southwest Social Science Association History Affiliate program chair 2019-2021

National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP)

Service to the College of the Mainland (ongoing and continuing)

COM Honors Committee (2013-2014)

COM ILC Committee (2014-present)

COM Professional Development Academy (2011-2019)

COM Student Success Council Subcommittee #4 (2013-2015)

Dual Credit Academic Advisor (2012-present)

Walter Prescott Webb Historical Society History Club-Advisor (2013-2020)

Service to the College of the Mainland (time-specific)

COM Planning Council Administrative Review and Organizational Effectiveness-Recorder (2011-2012)

COM Faculty Senate (2012-2014)

COM Faculty Senate Elections Committee (2012-2014)

COM Family Day (2013)

Recruited adjunct faculty at Adjunct Fair (2013)

COM Veteran's Day Committee (2013-2014)

Hiring Committee for COM Assistant Professor of Government (2013)

Hiring Committee for COM Social and Behavioral Sciences Administrative Assistant V (2013)

Hiring Committee for COM Assistant Professor of History (2014)

Hiring Committee for COM Dual Credit Advisor (2014)

Hiring Committee for COM Assistant Professor of Government (2014)

Moderator- COM Gulf Coast Symposium (2014 and 2015)

Professional Development- Discipline Specific

Walter Prescott Webb Historical Association Fall Meeting, Victoria Texas (November 2013)

Southwestern Social Sciences Association Conference, San Antonio, Texas (April 2014)

Southwestern Social Sciences Association Conference, Las Vegas, NV Session Chair (March 2016)

Southwestern Social Sciences Association Conference, Austin, TX Session Chair (March 2017)

Southwestern Social Sciences Association Conference, Orlando, FL, Presenter "It's a MAD MAD MAD World: Dr. Strangelove and the fear of Mutually Assured Destruction" (November 2018)

Southwest Social Science Association Conference, San Diego, CA, Session Chair, Panel discussant "Battleship Potemkin: Nearly a Century Later and Still as Influential as Ever" (November 2019).

21 graduate hours at UHCL in Humanities (2014-present)

Professional Development in Service of College Responsibilities

Center for Community College Student Engagement, San Antonio, Texas (April 2013)
NACEP (Dual Credit) Conference, Chicago, IL (Oct 2014)
NACEP (Dual Credit) Conference, Denver, Co (Oct 2015)
NACEP (Dual Credit) Conference, Louisville, KY (Oct 2016)
NACEP (Dual Credit) Conference, Washington Dc, Presenter (2017)
NACEP (Dual Credit) Conference, San Antonio TX (2018)
NACEP (Dual Credit) Creating Powerful Partnerships Workshop, Providence RI, (2018)
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Field of Study-History (2018)
NACEP (Dual Credit) Conference, Salt Lake City, UT (Oct 2019)

Service to the College

Faculty Senate (2012-2014)
Discussion of the Civil War Events, 1862 (April 19, 2012)
Dual Credit presentation at Adjunct Faculty Orientation (August 21, 2012-August 2017)
Panel Discussion on Constitution Day (September 17, 2012 and September 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020)
Panel Discussion for African American Heritage Month, 2019
Dual Credit Workshop for Faculty Who Teach Dual Credit (Convocation Fall 2014-present)
Dual Credit Presentation for Social and Behavioral Sciences at Adjunct Fair (August 17, 2014,2015)
Dual Credit Summer Seminars (Summer 2015-2017)