
THE MESSAGE AND THE MOVIES

CINEMA AS IDEOLOGY

Week 4: McCarthy and the Movies

America as Empire

'In the 21st century, the United States achieved a hegemony undreamt of by past imperial powers. Nearly 750 military bases, and hundreds of CIA black sites, are controlled by the United States around the globe. The majority of the world's country's play host to American troops and weapon's systems, 154 countries in 2020...'

Poole, W.S, 2022, p.23

The Great Depression (1929-1939)

- Hordes of individuals were compelled to leave their homes during the Great Depression (1929–1939)
- Sleeping/living in box cars or under bridges
- Some found work of farms in exchange for food etc.
- Others joined criminal gangs out of desperation

The New Deal

- President Franklyn D Roosevelt (FDR) was elected in 1932
- *"Only Thing We Have to Fear Is Fear Itself"*
- The New Deal was a series of programmes, projects and financial reforms aimed at tackling 'The Great Depression'

Left-leaning Hollywood

- Directors like Frank Capra were able to put out left leaning messages in Hollywood features like *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* and *It's a Wonderful Life* without fear of censorship

The End of the War and the Beginning of the Cold War

- The US under President Truman, much to the alarm of the Soviet Union, once again embraced Germany
- Later, West Germany became a base for American nuclear missiles aimed directly at Russia
- The shift in politics, from New Deal to anti-communism, makes this decision seemingly 'rational' at least that's the way it's sold
- In response, the Soviet Union forms alliances with several countries creating the Warsaw Pact
- The US initiates 'Operation Paperclip'
- It was one of the most shocking decisions made by the emerging American national security state
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"This initiative brought over 1,600 Nazi scientists to the United States, cleared them of all war crimes, and set them to work developing the basis for delivery systems of nuclear weapons...it's difficult to imagine that the United States would have charged so far ahead of the Soviet Union in the arms race without the help of Nazi scientists from that era."

Poole, W.S, 2022, p.102

'In the aftermath of the Second World War, the United States officially structured its imperial holdings around the policy of "containing" communism. A new leadership emerged in Washington, D.C., under the National Security Agency, the cliques of unelected national security advisors that huddle around the country's increasingly powerful executive branch.'

Poole, W.S, 2022, p.22

The Pressure to Conform

The pressure to conform included the reversal of much of the headway many women had made during the war when they had gained more financial independence by working in traditional male roles

Mainstream Resistance - *The Vampira Show* (1954-1955)

Starring Maila Nurmi as Vampira, the horror host became a subversive anti-housewife image. Her exaggerated tiny waist and her gothic look and make-up was a direct mockery of the conformist ideal. Though popular, the show was cancelled and Nurmi was effectively black-listed.

High Noon (1952)

Fred Zinnermann

- Directed by Fred Zinnermann (*From Here to Eternity/The Day of the Jackal*)
- Produced by Stanley Kramer (*The Defiant Ones/On the Beach/Inherit the Wind*)
- Based on *The Tin Star* by John W Cunningham
- Screenplay by Carl Foreman (*The Bridge on the River Kwai/The Guns of Navarone/Mackenna's Gold*)
- Cinematography by Floyd Crosby (*Attack of the Crab Monsters/House of Usher/Tales of Terror/X: The Man with X Ray Eyes*)
- Edited by Elmo Williams and Harry W Gerstad

House of Un-American Activities Committee

The HUAC was an investigative committee of the United States House of Representatives. It was created in 1938 to investigate alleged disloyalty and subversive activities on the part of private citizens, public employees, and those organizations suspected of having communist ties.

- During production Foreman was called before the HUAC (he had once been a member of The Communist Party)
- As he refused to 'name names' he was labeled an 'uncooperative witness'
- When his refusal to cooperate was made public Stanley Kramer sought to dissolve their partnership, thus distancing himself from bad publicity and being 'guilty by association'
- Foreman remained with the project but sold his partnership share to Kramer and before the film's release, he moved to the UK, knowing he receive no more work in the US.
- Many years later it was acknowledged that his role in the production of High Noon had been unfairly downplayed.
- John Wayne was offered the lead but saw that the film was an 'obvious allegory' against Hollywood blacklisting
- Wayne was pro-HUAC and was a keen supporter of blacklisting

Casting

- After Wayne, Marlon Brando, Charlton Heston and Gregory Peck also turned down the role. Peck, later considered his decision the biggest mistake of his career.
- Ironically, Wayne accepted Cooper's Academy Award for him when he was away in Europe

'I'm glad to see they're giving this to a man who is not only most deserving, but has conducted himself throughout the years in our business in a manner that we can all be proud of ... Now that I'm through being such a good sport ... I'm going back and find my business manager and agent ... and find out why I didn't get High Noon instead of Cooper ...'

John Wayne

- Cooper was ill at the time, suffering from bleeding stomach ulcers and chronic back pain
- This helped to give his performance the necessary 'suffering' it required
- He took a very low fee for his role, instead taking a cut of film's profits

Plot

On the day of his marriage and retirement, a marshal learns that a man he once sent to jail has been released and is out for revenge. Though he could leave town, he stays to fight his corner, abandoned by a cowardly towns people. The story plays out in real time

Lacks many of the Western signifiers

- Frontier violence
- Panoramic landscapes
- Tribes of marauding Indians

Invasion of the Body Snatchers (Novel) Jack Finney

The story had serious shortcomings

'Too many sci-fi novels lack outstanding originality, but this one lacks it to an outstanding degree.' - Groff Conklin

In a 1967 retrospective on *Body Snatchers*, Damon Knight attacked the novel's scientific anomalies and forced plot development...and the protagonists' inability to think as separate beings from the author

Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1955) Directed by Don Siegel

- Small town setting
- Undistinguished cast
- 'Possession theme' as in *Invaders From Mars* and *It Came From Outer Space*
- But its inclusion of 'brilliantly horrific moments' really make it stand out

"For Don Siegel, this climate was like a petri dish for his brand of filmmaking. He was a character known for making low-budget pictures with a hard bite. It was under the guise of the B-movie that directors like Siegel and Samuel Fuller were able to voice their growing concern."

Dale Barham

- The production lasted less than a month
- Shot on a budget of \$380,000
- \$15,000 on special effects
- Sam Peckinpah appears as a meter reader
- "A sombre analysis of conformity"

The original ending was more hopeless – the hero being unable to convince the authorities – impending doom seemed likely for the human race. At the studios insistence – this was changed to something less pessimistic – Miles is able to persuade the authorities

- The film is often cited by liberals as being an anti-McCarthy piece
- Is the film then a more paranoid piece about the threat of communism?

Sam Fuller (1912-1997)

- Specialized in making low budget genre movies with controversial subject matter
- Marginalized characters
- Intense close-ups
- Dutch angles/off-centre framing of shots

The Naked Kiss (1964)

Just as *Shock Corridor* was, on some levels an alternative war film – dealing with the after effects of conflict, *The Naked Kiss* might be seen as an alternative crime film. Rather than concentrate on mob movements, heists or gangsters, instead *The Naked Kiss* deals with criminality in more general terms – examining the criminality of the American system, its hypocrisies and its inequalities

Shock Corridor (1963)

Sam Fuller's boldly dark glimpse into a damaged national psyche, felt like a war film, not so much in the classic sense, but one that at least examined the after-effects of Whitehouse foreign policy, in an unexpected setting.

- Not only did it suggest, both subtly and not so subtly that the following of the American dream can only ever lead to the confines of a lunatic asylum – in a literal and figurative sense, but it also gave us an ahead of its time take on the unspoken topic of PTSD.
- The deluded Boden, (James Best), a brainwashed and broken Korean War vet, cut loose by the military to rot in padded cell hell, casts an uneasy shadow.
- His deranged flip-flopping between communist and right-wing patriot, oddly seem to mimic our divided 21st-century society, which is unable to find nuance in adult discussion and lurches between fascist raving and overly sensitive liberal knee jerk reactions.
- More importantly, the film's underlying examination of warfare/American society and mental health, make it an off-kilter forerunner for many other alternative battle-torn affairs.