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Print Media in the Cold War

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Print Media in the Cold War:

To what extent did visual print media propaganda in America during the early years of the Cold War reflect the country's anti-Communist ideologies?

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Abstract

This investigation evaluates the degree to which print media propaganda in America reflected its anti-Communist ideologies during the early years of the Cold War. Specifically, the decade following the end of World War II in 1945 is examined. The messages, mediums, and subjects addressed of four images will be analyzed in order to determine the degree to which they embody anti-Communist sentiments. These four pieces include a *Time* magazine cover from 1950, a comic book cover, a page of a *Life* magazine fashion article, and an advertisement by Radio Free Europe.

Through these images, a conclusion was reached that while anti-Communist sentiments pervaded all the works examined, they did differ in how explicitly they proclaimed this message.

[117 words]

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A. Summary of Evidence

During World War II, America saw the Soviet Union as a friendly, albeit suspicious, ally (Barson and Heller 42). However, after the war Russian-American relations cooled as their relationship quickly went from cautionary to one of hate and fear (Barson and Heller 42). Many Americans felt that their ideas of freedom and democracy were being challenged by Communism, a completely opposite set of values that appeared to be offering solutions for many of the things democracy had failed in like social justice for all (Greer). This post-war period, known as the Cold War, became a predominantly nonconfrontational war of ideologies between these two schools of thought. Both sides of this “war” wanted to convince not only their citizens but also people abroad on the virtues of their respective philosophies (Welch 5).

Thus, propaganda became an important element of domestic and foreign policy in the United States. To keep up with the latest news on the Cold War, most Americans got their information from various forms of contemporary mass media (Barson and Heller 62). Although President Truman shut down the Office of War Information after the end of World War II, private companies continued to churn out propaganda material throughout this period (“Propaganda”). And, because television was not yet a popular media format, most people got their information from print media (Conelrad).

The advertisement in Appendix D calls for donations to support Radio Free Europe, a broadcast station established by a front organization of the Central Intelligence Agency. Radio Free Europe aired radio programs to Eastern European countries in the native languages to spread Western views of the Cold War and provide information that these people would otherwise not receive in their country (Goode 44).

Coca-Cola became an important morale booster among American soldiers abroad during World War II. The company also opened numerous plants in Europe during the war (Chambers). Among them were countries with strong Communist parties like France and Italy (Zinn 438). A 1950 *Time* magazine cover recognized Coca-Cola’s global success with an illustration of an anthropomorphic Coca-Cola bottle cap cradling planet Earth in its arms while feeding it a glass of coke (Appendix B).

In the photograph above a *Life* magazine fashion article titled “Iron curtain look is here: U.S. envoy’s wife finds Moscow modes high priced, wide shouldered, not very

handsome,” a model stands with her hands on her hips wearing the latest Soviet trends. Behind her is a selection of other fashionable Soviet wardrobe items including a jacket, dress, gloves, and a purse. The rest of the text underneath the title continues to describe U.S.S.R. styles in comparison to American styles (Appendix C).

In the 1940s and 1950s, comic books were also a widely consumed form of entertainment, especially for children. Recognizing this, the Catechetical Guild Educational Society, founded by a Catholic priest named Father Louis Gales, published a comic book titled *Is This Tomorrow: America Under Communism* in 1947, shortly after the end of World War II (Conelrad). Over four million copies of this book were eventually printed and distributed (Barson and Heller 156). In the foreground of the cover, Americans are being strangled and assaulted while an American flag burns in the background (Appendix A). At the time classrooms and books that children consumed were considered “battlegrounds” in a war to prevent innocent minds from being corrupted by Communist ideas (Caughfield). Images like these also encouraged readers to go on “witch hunts” to expose any potential Soviet spies living amongst them (Conelrad).

B. Evaluation of Sources

Is This Tomorrow: America Under Communism (Appendix A) is a comic book that was first printed and published by the Catechetical Guild Educational Society in 1947. The purpose of this book was to educate children on the evils of Communism. This source is valuable in that it presents ideas about Communism that ordinary people would have sympathized with. Also, Appendix A is valuable because it shows what American children were being taught through common forms of entertainment. However, because a Catholic publishing company published it, the insight it offers is limited because this means that only the religious community of the American population’s views is shown. Also, the purpose is limited because the issues discussed may have been overly simplified or exaggerated for children, the target audience, to understand. On the other hand, this also makes it valuable as it helps modern historians to understand the extent of Americans’ hatred and fear of Communism.

The call for “Truth Dollars” (Appendix D) is an advertisement from Radio Free Europe that appeared in a *Better Homes and Gardens* issue in 1955. The purpose of this was to persuade the American public to donate money for Radio Free Europe to continue fighting

Communism in Europe. This ad is valuable because it shows what the average reader thought about state-ruled governments. Even less politically involved people who typically read lifestyle magazines like *Better Homes and Garden* felt that Communism needed to be eliminated. However, because Radio Free Europe was, in a sense, a government-sponsored entity, the understanding its message offers about why Americans were so hateful of Communism is limited in that the ad tells more about what the government wanted people to think, rather than reflect what ordinary Americans thought about Communism. Thus, the anti-Communist cause would be painted in a more vigorous and honorable manner than a skeptic, or even average people might have. In addition, the insights into the anti-Communist perspective this advertisement has are limited because it solely relies on calls for patriotism like “crusade for freedom,” rather than giving information about why people should be against Communism. This fact can also bring value to the advertisement, however, because it shows that most of the American population were already so against the ideas festering within the Iron Curtain that they only wanted to know how they could fight Communism, rather than why they should fight it.

C. Analysis

Appendix A, published just two years after the end of World War II was clearly part of the popular movement in mainstream media of “Commie-takeover fever-dreams” that emerged after the end of the war (Barson and Heller 156). It also attempts to rationalize the mass murders of soldiers and civilians during World War II by pinning the blame on Communist countries. On the far right, the soldier in the brown cap placing another man in a long gray coat into a chokehold is wearing the uniform of a typical communist Chinese soldier; the attacker in the center is representative of any Western or European Communist. Especially in light of the rising dominance of Communism in China, this illustration shows the mounting fear in America that Communism was taking over the world. Also, the fact that a woman and a black man in addition to a white man are being attacked conveys a message that, should Communism ever take hold of the country, all Americans will be in danger regardless of race or gender. The hooded figures in the bottom right corner also liken Communists to members of some occult devil-worshipping religion. In this manner, Appendix A strongly advocates anti-Communism while also sowing seeds of fear in the

American people, especially the impressionable children who would have seen this cover, if not read the entire comic book.

Similarly, the advertisement in Appendix D calls American citizens to action to fight back against Communism with “Truth Dollars.” The bolded text in the subtext highlights that simply by donating a dollar, the average citizen could do their duty by providing the oppressed Eastern Europe with Western- and American- culture (Cull, Culbert and Welch 93). This advertisement told American citizens that they have the moral obligation tell the innocent victims of Communism in the Soviet Union about how democracy can save them.

While the images in Appendix B and Appendix C also convey messages of pro-Americanism, their methods are less explicit and more subliminal. In Appendix B, a Coca-Cola bottle cap is cradling the planet Earth delicately with one arm as if holding a baby. With the other hand, the anthropomorphized cap feeds a bottle of Coke to Earth as if feeding it milk. This imagery shows how, despite protests in some European countries like France and Italy which rejected Coca-Cola as a symbol of American and its capitalistic dominance, America would continue to nurse the Earth on Coke until Coca-Colonization spreads throughout the world (Chambers). Instead of directly attacking the Soviet Union, a subtler message that capitalism, riding on the shoulders of Coke, will win over the world is presented.

Appendix C proves American dominance over Communist Soviet Russia by writing about how Soviet fashion is “high priced, wide shouldered, [and] not very handsome.” Just like Communism, fashion in U.S.S.R. is backward and inferior in every way in comparison to America and democracy. However, while this magazine spread does convey anti-Soviet messages, it also perpetuates American conservative societal and gender views of what women should value. Appendix C promotes anti-Communism by portraying the *clothes* in a Communist country as utterly wrong instead of providing more substantial information like why Communist political ideologies were so wrong.

It is campaigns like these that strongly highlight the irony of propaganda. Mediums like posters are typically described as forms of a democratic outlet, but the general public usually has no say in their makings (Aulich 8). For example, Appendix A was published by a Catholic press, which did not represent a large portion of the American population. Also, Appendices B and C were published in major magazines. This meant that anything published

had to go through the executives, who tend to comprise primarily of society's more elite- only a small fraction of the overall population.

D. Conclusion

The years following World War II proved to be a period full of fear and hostility against Communism. Sentiments of anti-Communism appeared to pervade every corner of popular media with varying degrees of subtlety. On one hand they could be extremely zealous in declaring the concept as blasphemy. On the other, the propaganda aspect of a particular image could be more indirect, hidden behind other seemingly neutral content.

While private publishers, and not the government, primarily created print media propaganda during the Cold War, the messages conveyed stayed consistently around one basic theme- that Communism should be purged from the world.

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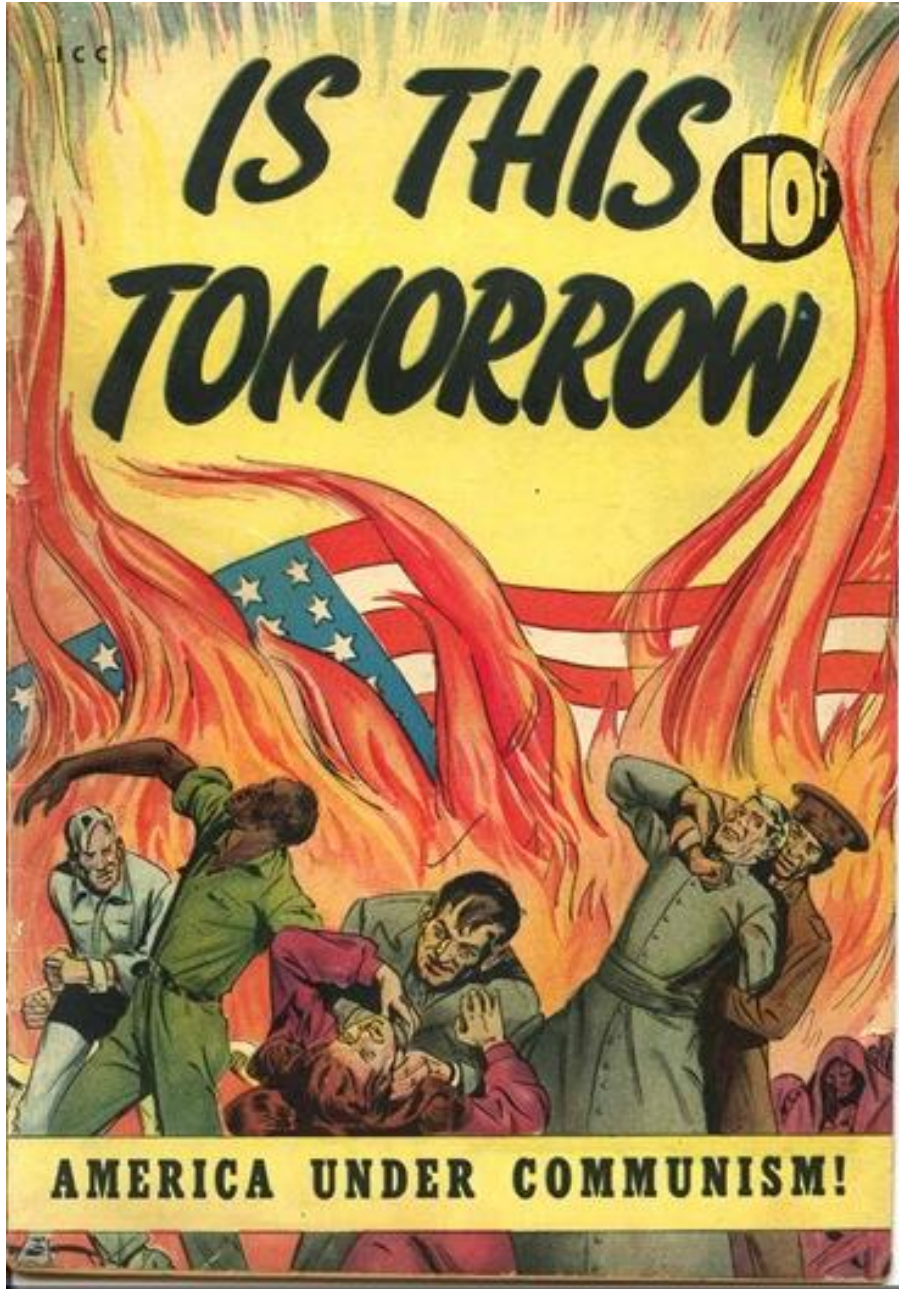
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Appendix A

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Appendix B

"Coca-Colonization." *The Cold War*. Ed. Walter Hixson. Woodbridge, CT: Primary Source Media, 2000. American Journey. *U.S. History in Context*. Web. 24 Jan. 2016.



Appendix C

Kirk, Lydia. "Iron Curtain Look Is Here." *Life* 10 Mar. 1952: 119. Print.



ON THIS AMERICAN MODEL AND HANGING ALONGSIDE HER IS A COMPLETE AND STYLISH SOVIET WARDROBE. THE TOTAL COST, EXCLUDING HAT, IS \$461.40

IRON CURTAIN LOOK IS HERE

U.S. ENVOY'S WIFE FINDS MOSCOW MODES HIGH PRICED, WIDE SHOULDERED, NOT VERY HANDSOME

The slender gams of the girl above give her away as American. The clothes are not. They are new Soviet styles brought home by Mrs. Alan G. Kirk, wife of the recent U.S. ambassador. Here is almost the entire wardrobe for an Iron Curtain look as decreed by Soviet designers. Displayed in Bonwit Teller's, New York, the Moscow modes excited most interest by their cost, translated from rubles: suit \$126, dress \$128, coat \$155, shoes \$14.50, bag \$19.80, gloves \$18.10.

To an American the handsomest garment was the traditional fur hat, which is not considered particularly chic in the U.S.S.R. The rest, drab and stiff, did not do much for the model. They might have done even less had she also worn the other two staples of the wardrobe, an anatomically unique bra, shaped like a double-barrelled shotgun, and knitted bloomers of a shade one observer calls "MVD blue" because it is the color of a Russian secret policeman's cap.

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Appendix D

Radio Free Europe. *Better Homes and Gardens* July 1955: 123. Print.



**Sure I want
to fight
Communism
-but how?**

With "TRUTH DOLLARS"—that's how!
Your "Truth Dollars" fight Communism in its own back yard—behind the
Iron Curtain. Give "Truth Dollars" and get in the fight!

"Truth Dollars" send words of truth and hope to the 70 million freedom-loving people behind the Iron Curtain.

These words broadcast over Radio Free Europe's 39 transmitters reach Poles, Czechoslovakians, Hungarians, Rumanians and Bulgarians. RFE is supported by the voluntary, cooperative action of millions of Americans engaged in this fight of good against evil.

How do "Truth Dollars" fight Communism? By exposing Red lies . . . revealing news suppressed by Moscow and by unmasking Communist collaborators. The broadcasts are by voices in the native

languages of the people to whom they are beamed.

Radio Free Europe is hurting Communism in its own back yard. We know by Red efforts to "jam" our programs (so far without success). To successfully continue these broadcasts, even more transmitters are needed.

Every dollar buys 100 words of truth. That's how hard "Truth Dollars" work. Your dollars will help 70 million people resist the Kremlin. Keep the truth turned on. Send as many "Truth Dollars" as you can (if possible, a dollar for each member of your family). The need is now.



**FIGHT
COMMUNISM**

with
"TRUTH DOLLARS"

Support Radio Free Europe

Send your "Truth Dollars" to **CRUSADE FOR FREEDOM** c/o your Postmaster

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