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Research Paper

Film has a special place in the culture of America. No other form of media has been as greatly affected by social and political movements. Film has been used for political propaganda over the course of time. Film brings awareness to issues many people don't think of, although this has decreased over time. Films can be used to teach about our history. Overall, film has been an incredible source of knowledge for every generation, and there's more behind it than just glamor. Film is a reflection of society, it sometimes needs to catch up and sometimes it leads society. An interesting era of film was during the growing tension of communism.

During World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union(USSR) were allies against the axis powers. The two nations never got along because of the dramatically different thinking between government legislations. After the war, U.S. Diplomat, George Kennan, issued the "Long Telegram" which issued the foreign policy to contain the Soviet expansion to other countries. Also, the Truman Doctrine was passed to counter expansion of the Soviets. The United States government would aid other countries in order to prevent them from being taken over by the communists. During this time period, America was in a "arms race" with the soviets over atomic weapons. Another form of clashing with the USSR was during the great Space Race. Although there was no great battle between the two nations, they both pushed each other to make advancements in their society.

During the Cold War, the United States had growing tension with the Soviet Union. America went through the Red Scare on the homefront. The Red Scare was the fear of communism being spread through the United States and the Labor Unions. The United States formed the “House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), an on-going Congressional committee that conducted hearings concerning the Hollywood film industry in 1947 and 1951-54, as well as additional hearings concerning the entertainment industry throughout the 1950s”(Schwartz 1). HUAC sought out people in the film industry, as well as others, who could give names of potential people who were linked with communist ties.

The names of people who were associated with communism were blacklisted from the motion-picture industry. People knew that their answers could ruin their reputation and prestige, so most gave up the names and cooperated with investigators. However, there were ten men who “refused on Constitutional grounds to testify about their political activities and affiliations”(Schwartz 2). These ten men were known as the “Hollywood Ten”. They didn’t cooperate with investigators, and they labeled these meetings as a violation to their civil rights. These men were put on trial and found guilty. They had to spend a year in jail on top of a 1,000\$ fine. One man, Edward Dmytryk, eventually testified and gave up twenty names to the HUAC. The worst of their punishments came from the Hollywood Blacklist. “In November 1947, fifty members of the Motion Picture Association of America, the Association of Motion Picture Producers, and the Society of Independent Motion Picture Producers gathered at the Waldorf-Astoria hotel in New York and issued what became known as the Waldorf Statement, deploring the Ten for performing "a disservice to their employers" and impairing "their usefulness to the industry”(Schwartz 3). At the time Eric Johnston was the President of the

Motion Picture Association of America, and he stated, “We will forthwith discharge or suspend without compensation those in our employ, and we will not re-employ any of the 10 until such time as he is acquitted or has purged himself of contempt and declares under oath that he is not a Communist . . . We will not knowingly employ a Communist or a member of any party or group which advocates the overthrow of the government of the United States by force or by any illegal or unconstitutional methods”. (Schwartz 4). This kickstarted the Hollywood Blacklist, and many people had their careers ended abruptly because of this social hysteria. The MPAA made sure they had no known affiliations with communism.

On the Waterfront came out in 1954 and to this day is seen as one of the greatest motion pictures ever made. Terry Malloy, an ex fighter, struggles to stand up against a corrupt union boss who runs the docks. The movie stands out among many because of the realism portrayed in the movie. Elia Kazan was the director and shot this film in a cold New York setting, which gave it that tone. Marlon Brando delivers one of his greatest performances as Terry Malloy. The controversy surrounding the film comes from the director. Elia Kazan was asked to testify in front of the committee in 1952. “At first he answered all of the Committee's questions except those about other persons. But a few months later when he was called back to testify a second time, he gave the Committee the names of eight colleagues from the Group Theater with whom he had been in a Communist "cell" seventeen years before”(Shaman). Kazan wasn't the first person or the last to give names, but he always gets brought up and is resented heavily for it by the film community. His reputation cost *On the Waterfront* critical acclaim and awards.

On the Waterfront is an analogy for Kazan's apology and reasoning behind his actions. The movie makes the audience feel sympathy for the protagonist Terry Malloy, whose actions are

comparable to Kazan's. Kazan has made it clear he doesn't regret what he did. Kazan himself has said, "When Brando, at the end, yells at Lee Cobb, the mob boss, "I'm glad what I done--you hear me?--glad what I done!" that was me saying, with identical heat, that I was glad I'd testified as I had ... So when critics say that I put my story and my feelings on the screen, to justify my informing, they are right."(Shaman 4). This movie is Kazan's way of expressing how he thought during his testimony. The theme of good vs evil shows up in the film through a man who stands up to a mob boss running the docks labor union. Similarly, Kazan was standing up against the communists who were looking to overthrow the democracy. Father Barry, the priest, can be viewed as someone who brings out the good and truth in others. Father Barry said, "Anybody who sits around and lets it happen, keeps silent about something he knows has happened, shares the guilt of it".(Shaman 2). The character is most likely another way Kazan expressed his feelings and why he did what he did, and it's fitting these words are coming from a priest. The most memorable scene to come out of the movie is the scene where Charlie, Terry's brother, and Terry are sitting in the cab. Charlie is told to kill Terry, but he can't get around to doing that. Terry goes on to reflect how Charlie has negatively affected his life. Charlie feels guilty because Terry lets him know he ruined his life, when the best line of the movie is said by Terry, "I coulda' been a contender". These characters, as well as Kazan, confront their demons. Kazan experienced some backlash when he later went on to win an Academy Honorary Award for his achievements. Many people in the audience didn't clap or stand as he was presented the award.

Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, goes the distance in presenting the anxiety and fear of the spread of communism. The film takes place in a normal place, Santa Mira, California, but as the movie unfolds a dark mystery comes to rise. Pods are planted where people

come out and kill the person they take after. Clones are taking over and the population of clones is expanding. The best representation of the deeper meaning to the pods is the final scene when “Dr. Miles Bennell (Kevin McCarthy) shouts directly to the audience, "Look, you fools, you're in danger! Can't you see! They're after you. They're after all of us-our wives, our children. They're here already. You're next! YOU'RE NEXT!"(Mann 2). The speech is similar to a call to action, be ready, communism is here and you're going to suffer soon. The paranoia of being replaced and aliens taking over works well because the people look just like us and act like us, but they have sinister intentions. The tone fits in perfectly with the message, because the movie is dark and mysterious. The common thought is nobody knows who is really who. The fear of communism that America was experiencing on the homefront is rationalized by choosing to use aliens that take over and kill us. Also, the ending was a perfect choice because it doesn't have a happy ending. This leaves the audience with that thought of “how do we stop this”. A happy ending would've disregarded the stakes and circumstances the global takeover of the “pod people”.

Films have taken inspiration from outside sources for as long as they've existed. In this case, the era of communism has influenced filmmakers to amplify the historical context of the circumstances. The era started off with America trying to contain and prevent the Soviet Union's expansion. Here in America, the Red Scare forced the splitting of the film community with the existence of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). The government had to remove all traces of communist ties, because of the possibility of it overthrowing the democracy. Men and women have had to give up names of their compatriots or risk losing their careers. The tension between the blacklisting gave us great films such as *On the Waterfront*, which can be seen as the director's message to people for why he gave up names. Then our fears took another

form in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, communism would take over and kill people. The urgent message, inspiring people to realize, it's here, and what can we do to stop it. Films will forever be pieces for historical context, that we can learn from.

Works Cited

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