“The Issues of Tomorrow are Befogged”: An Exploration of Travel in American Science Fiction from 1945-1965

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Abstract

This thesis takes a unique approach to the study of science fiction through its analysis of different forms of travel: international, interplanetary, and through time, respectively. Looking at a broad range of science fiction encompassing comic-books, films, television, and novels belonging to 1945-1965, this study explores the use of travel in order to ascertain the significance of the genre within the larger narratives of the Cold War and the American Century. Focusing on two films released in 1954, international travel showcases divisions in attitudes to the American Century and the interconnected questions concerning the US's place in the world. It also sparks a debate concerning issues closer to home, namely racism. Interplanetary travel serves as an extension of this commentary, using the fantastical setting of outer space to criticise or reinforce dominant attitudes within the US with a greater degree of plausible deniability. It is also used as a vehicle to more directly comment on fears relating to the Cold War such as the space race, foreign invasion, and the potential for mutually assured destruction. Lastly, analysis of time travel narratives conveys a nation pondering its place in history as it stood at the summit of the world. Broken into three sections – 1945-1950, 1950-1960, and 1960-1965 – the popularity of time travel at each of these points in time showcases a nation on a journey in considering the present, its relationship to the past, and its trajectory into the future, as it both questioned and embraced the rhetoric of the American Century. Drawing from a variety of primary and secondary sources belonging to the years from 1945-1965, this study heralds science fiction as a vessel for historical insight into popular feelings relating to both the Cold War and the often-overbearing, abstract concept of the American Century.

Introduction

> Boys, if you ever pray, pray for me now. I don't know if you fellows ever had a load of hay fall on you, but when they told me yesterday what had happened, I felt like the moon, the stars, and all the planets had fallen on me.[1]
>
> Harry S. Truman, 1945

In the wake of President Roosevelt's death on 12 April 1945, his Vice President, Harry S. Truman, was handed the monumental tasks of navigating the final stages of the Second World War and the treacherous waters that followed.[2] Highlighted above, Truman's initial reaction was clearly indicative of a man overwhelmed; a feeling that extended to the nation. His statement encapsulates the unshakable feelings of anxiety, paranoia, and uncertainty that characterised American life in the years immediately after 1945 as its people realised the need to embrace a decidedly interventionist role in global affairs. Foreseeing the choice that would face Truman in 1945, Henry Luce – the editor in chief of *Life* Magazine – called upon the American people to proudly take up their rightful position at the 'summit of the world' as Winston Churchill phrased it; to be an ambassador – a 'good Samaritan' – to the rest of the 'free' world.[3] Luce argued for this as early as February 1941, pre-dating the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and American entry into the Second World War. Standing on the precipice, Luce saw direct American involvement as only a matter of time. He not only called for the nation to get off the fence and get their hands dirty, but more so to keep their hands in the mud once all was said and done, and to build a better world from the ruins; to proudly take the burden of

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[1] Harry S. Truman, *Year of Decisions: 1945* (Bungay, Suffolk: Hodder and Stoughton, 1955), pp. 19-20.

[2] It is well-documented that Truman had been left in the dark by FDR in the few months he had been Vice-President. Upon his inauguration, Truman had very little knowledge of the path his predecessor intended to take concerning the final days of the Second World War, the advent of atomic weaponry, and America's course of action concerning Stalin and the Soviet Union once the war had concluded.

[3] David M. Kennedy, 'The Origins and Uses of American Hyperpower', in Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Short American Century: A Postmortem* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp.15-37 (p.16)

Henry Luce, 'The American Century', *Diplomatic History,* Vol. 23, No.2, (1999), pp.159-171, (p.170)

sculpting a brighter future upon their shoulders instead of repeating the mistakes of 1919.[4] He urged his people to go boldly into 'the American Century.'[5]

Published at a time when, at least for some, 'American life was good and getting better all the time' as a result of the economic boom brought about by American status as the arsenal of democracy for the war effort in Europe, 'The American Century' garnered little attention from the general public on release.[6] By April 1945, however, the situation had changed. The US was in the war with victory in sight; the atomic age was on the horizon; and Joseph Stalin was rapidly shifting from the wartime persona of Uncle Joe to the antagonistic position held by Adolf Hitler. As the most powerful nation on the planet, in the best position to shape the world going forward, the time Luce foresaw had arrived. Questions circulated as to whether the US should remain on the interventionist path it had committed to in December, 1941, or revert to isolationism with the knowledge that history might repeat itself, only this time with potentially world-ending ramifications. To quote Luce:

> The big, important point to be made here is simply that the complete opportunity of leadership is ours. Like most great creative opportunities, it is an opportunity enveloped in stupendous difficulties and dangers. If we don't want it, if we refuse to take it, the responsibility of refusal is also ours, and ours alone.[7]

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[4] For a useful consideration of the history of the term 'the American Century', see Tony Smith, 'Making the World Safe for Democracy in the American Century', *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 23, No. 2, (1999), pp. 173-188.

[5] Henry Luce, 'The American Century', *Diplomatic History,* Vol. 23, No.2, (1999), pp.159-171, (p.171)

[6] The lingering presence of an isolationist element in the US who were inadvertently spurred on by a dithering FDR, and the bizarre approach taken by Luce in the publication of his article also did not help matters. Bacevich notes that the article almost seems out of place, stating that 'the contents of his magazine that week offered little to support . . . [Luce's] analysis or his prescription.' Pushed to page sixty-one of that particular issue and surrounded by content that Bacevich describes as 'sunny and upbeat', it is not surprising that the American people saw no urgency in heeding Luce's advice.
The above quotations from Bacevich are taken from: Andrew J. Bacevich, 'Life at the Dawn of the American Century' in Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Short American Century: A Postmortem* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp.1-14, (p.6).
It is also worth noting that 'the American Century' was also not the only vision for post-war America, with Luce contested in 1942 by Henry A. Wallace with his 'Century of the Common Man' speech.

[7] Henry Luce, 'The American Century', *Diplomatic History,* Vol. 23, No.2, (1999), pp.159-171, (p.164)

If he had written it a century earlier, Luce might have referred to the American Century as America's Manifest Destiny; something Jason Dittmer discusses within the realm of what he terms a collective myth or public narrative.

> [These myths] are often promoted by powerful institutions, like governments, parents, corporations, etc., that aim to structure the perspectives of those within a collective identity. An example would be the narratives of American identity that help shape collective responses to new experiences. There are many of these narratives, from Manifest Destiny, to America as the culmination of human progress (i.e., a "new Jerusalem" or a "shining city on a hill"), to individualist narratives of the American Dream ("anybody can make it").[8]

Occupying this space, the American Century became a crucial part of American identity in the years after 1945; its impact on the nation both domestically and in its foreign policy should not be taken lightly. Just as Manifest Destiny had once spurred Americans on in their expansion westward and their conquest of North America, the American Century had a similar effect on the American psyche post-1945 in the perceived need to expand the reaches of democracy – defined on their terms – throughout the modern world. This was especially true once concrete policies began to take shape in the form of the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Aid in 1947 and 1948. Sealing the door shut on isolationism, the US opened another into a new age where the larger abstract question of 'where do we go from here?' lay emblazoned on the doormat. Driven by internationalist notions of 'leading the world on to democracy, freedom, and peace', as President Truman so succinctly puts it in *Captain Marvel Adventures* #110 (1950), the US set out to construct a global system on their own terms, where the whole world would be watching and scrutinising their every decision.[9] In 1945, the US would finally realise

[8] Jason Dittmer, *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, & Identity* (Plymouth, United Kingdom: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), p.71

[9] Otto Binder and C. C. Beck, *Captain Marvel Adventures* #110, Fawcett Publications, 1950

John Winthrop's desire of 1630 and become 'as a city upon a hill': the 'eyes of all people' were upon them now.[10]

In looking at the years from 1945-1965, the US was faced with challenges no other nation had previously confronted. As human nature dictates, different people responded to the landscape of this period in different ways. David M. Kennedy, for example, argues that 'the [Second World] War incubated in Americans a new national self-confidence, infused with a sense of moral rectitude, missionary zeal, and duty to lead.'[11] Alternatively, Hugh Brogan and Michael Goodrum argue that '. . . "Americans were often intensely apprehensive about the future", concerned about the return of depression, the nature of the post-war US, and its place in the new global political order.'[12] Henry Luce can be seen to support the latter in his assessment that 'we Americans are unhappy . . . we are nervous – or gloomy – or apathetic.'[13] To ascertain more clearly the mixed feelings of a nation at the heart of this atomic-age abyss, the focus here will be on the most honest, varying, wide-reaching, and yet often personal sources to hand: popular culture. To quote Ray Bradbury in *Fahrenheit 451* (1953):

> It's not books you need, it's some of the things that once were in books . . . Take it where you can find it, in old phonograph records, old motion pictures, and in old friends; look for it in nature and look for it in yourself. Books were only one type of receptacle where we stored a lot of things we were afraid we might forget. There is nothing magical in them at all. The magic is only in what books say, how they stitched the patches of the universe together into one garment for us.[14]

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[10] John Winthrop, 'City Upon A Hill', July 2, 1630. https://www.greatamericandocuments.com/speeches/winthrop-city-upon-hill/.

[11] David M. Kennedy, 'The Origins and Uses of American Hyperpower', in Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Short American Century: A Postmortem* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp.15-37, (p.32)

[12] Michael Goodrum, *Superheroes and American Self Image: From War to Watergate* (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2016), p.50

[13] Henry Luce, 'The American Century', *Diplomatic History,* Vol. 23, No.2, (1999), pp.159-171, (p.159)

[14] Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (Hammersmith, London: Voyager, 2004)

At times as pivotal and emotionally distressing as the years between 1945 and 1965, creative outlets became precisely that: outlets. Popular culture was often the product of a creative team comprised of individuals who belonged to different backgrounds and held their own unique opinions on events unfolding at the time. Popular culture therefore does exactly what Bradbury says: it 'stitches the patches . . . into one garment for us', a garment that remains distant yet accessible to those now looking back in an attempt to understand the era. These patches represent the vast array of differing opinions relating to the Cold War and America's new-found position of leadership post-1945, with the garment serving as a more cohesive idea of what the public mood in the US was like throughout these years.

Acknowledging that a study of the popular culture belonging to this period in its entirety would be a monolithic task given the confines of this work, the research carried out here will instead narrow its focus to the genre of science fiction; a genre that flourished in popularity on both film and television, the comic-book, and novel alike throughout the years discussed here. To reference David Seed: 'science fiction novels and films are not producing arbitrary fantasy but rather reworking key metaphors and narratives already circulating in the culture.'[15] Science fiction offers some of the most insightful commentary and critique of American society, the Cold War, and the American Century by those people living through it. In an essay drafted in 1957, renowned science fiction author Robert A. Heinlein remarked 'that an adequate definition of sf might be "realistic speculation about possible future events, based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on a thorough

[15] David Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War: Literature and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.2

understanding of the nature and significance of scientific method".[16] Whilst a definition of science fiction is a controversial and much disputed endeavour, Heinlein's interpretation serves as an excellent placeholder for the purposes of this work given the near-universal feeling of uncertainty in regards to what the future held for the nation. Working from Heinlein's definition, science fiction will ultimately be the focus of this essay because despite Truman and his people feeling 'like the moon, the stars, and all the planets had fallen on [them]', many nevertheless looked to the stars for their answers as they went forth into the American Century.[17]

Rather than focus on one specific medium, this work will look at multiple forms of popular culture as it attempts to illustrate that the issues relating to the American Century and the Cold War coloured every aspect of life during the years discussed here. Often overlooked in science fiction studies concerned with this era, the superhero subgenre of comic-books will feature heavily. This neglect can be attributed to the fact that superheroes have almost become their own genre in the years since thanks to the strides made by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby (among others) at Marvel in the 1960s – seemingly doing the impossible by making the superhero relatable – and the recent boom in popularity attributed to the mass phenomena that is the Marvel Cinematic Universe (2008-present). Nevertheless, the subgenre of the superhero still exists under the larger umbrella of science fiction – a connection perhaps more tangibly immediate during the early days of the genre when these superheroes existed predominantly in the pages of the comic-book – and will therefore be explored here. In addition to these superhero comic-books, it is important to highlight that comics co-existed in an atmosphere of inspiration and innovation whereby genres and media crossed over as

[16] Neil Easterbrook, 'Robert A. Heinlein (1907-88)', in Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts, and Sherryl Vint, *Fifty Key Figures in Science Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp.96-101, (p.97)
[17] Harry S. Truman, *Year of Decisions: 1945* (Bungay, Suffolk: Hodder and Stoughton, 1955), pp. 19-20.

creative minds were inspired by the popular culture they personally consumed. Just like their fellow Americans, these creative minds were first and foremost people who enjoyed the Friday night double features hosted by their local picture houses, watching their favourite shows at home on brand-new television sets, or being entranced by their latest comic-book or best-selling novel. Taking inspiration from their peers across media, these people told their own stories that dealt with their own anxieties by essentially feeding off others' anxieties; anxieties to which their fellow Americans could ultimately relate. Herein lies the magic of popular culture. This work, therefore, will consequently not be confined to the study of comics alone but will cut across each of the media discussed above and will do so when similar themes crop up to convey just how widespread the concerns affiliated with the period from 1945-1965 were.

One point to be addressed is that the choice of these sources was not pre-ordained. The texts chosen for this study, regardless of medium, were dictated by the research undertaken in preparation for this task and its desired outcome. An unfortunate by-product of this is the lack of representation on display in the sense that the works of heterosexual, white, male Americans make up the creative demographic for this study. The absence of women, people of colour, and people who subscribe to differing sexual identities was not a conscious decision. It is rather an outcome that mediates the preponderance of straight, white men in American popular culture at this point in history. Moreover, while this study is most concerned with the depiction of anxieties relating to the American Century and the Cold War, it should be noted that many of these anxieties were unique to the straight, white American man as the demands of the American Century, the American woman, and the atomic bomb threatened to strip him of his masculinity. Popular culture is therefore positioned as a space where white men

exercised a great deal of creative control, and as such where anxieties related to white male subjectivity were worked through in cultural terms.

This work intends to place a unique spin on the study of popular culture by approaching these sources through an investigation of travel: international, interplanetary, and time travel, respectively, for which the latter two lend themselves perfectly to the fantastical nature of science fiction. The American Century was a journey, after all, as the nation and its inhabitants both literally and geopolitically boldly went where no (American) man had gone before. 'Travel' inevitably refers to the travel narrative in its most immediate definition of a character attempting to go from one place to another and the time spent with these characters as they do so. In science fiction, this is depicted in the space expedition genre, most notably in films belonging to the 1950s such as *Rocketship X-M* (1950), *Destination Moon* (1950), and *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* (1958). Travel here, however, will more often refer to the personal journey undergone by characters across the multiple destinations in which they find themselves throughout the progression of their story. The character of Mitch Courtenay in Frederik Pohl and Cyril M. Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants* (1953) is a good example, as are the superhero comic-books of this era. Here, little focus is given to the act of travelling, with the audience simply being informed by a passing remark or transitioning scene that the character is in a different location. While little attention is paid to the act of travelling itself, unlike in the space expedition narrative which might more rigidly be considered a 'travel narrative', this is still nevertheless an example of travel and is equally significant because it often illustrates a more personal journey of growth and acceptance – a journey of abundant significance within the parameters of the American Century, and of symbols of the US entering new territory.

More cynically, the inclusion of travel across borders provides invaluable geopolitical commentary. Often, the American depicted in these narratives finds him or herself in another country; in a different time; or on another planet surrounded by people in need of defeating because they pose a threat to the 'little guy', the US directly or, just as often, require guidance due to their apparent intellectual inferiority. Such plot structures take on even greater significance when it is understood that the US took on economically, politically, and militarily active roles overseas throughout this period. It also allows for the concept of the frontier to be invoked, and for parallels to be drawn between America's history of conquering earlier frontiers in their westward expansion under the spell of Manifest Destiny, and their international actions post-1945 in their attempts to expand the reaches of their influence in response to the equally powerful myth of the American Century.

Just as important, the act of travel in these narratives often sees the American protagonist encounter 'aliens', which opens a dialogue concerning American superiority, the presence and nature of racism in the US at the time, and the question of what it means to be an American at a time hailed as the American Century. This essay will look at travel through the lens of being 'visited' by 'aliens', placing emphasis on the notion that these aliens are violating American borders by visiting Earth; a concept that puts the US in a more vulnerable position than it is used to, and lends a sense of irony given their own history (and contemporary practice) of violating borders. These invaders have often been labelled by early contributors to the field, such as Mark Jancovich and Peter Biskind, as metaphors for Soviet spies and the threat of communism more generally. To sum up the vast majority of the work done on the invasion narrative up until this point, Jancovich states that 'the most common claim is that these texts are examples of Cold War ideology in which the fear of alien invasion is

seen as merely a code for Soviet aggression.'[18] This is certainly one reading of these texts and one that will be explored here, but this is merely a surface-level observation. By acknowledging these texts as an overdetermined space, the invasion narrative should also be interpreted as a commentary on the prominent issues of migration and race relations at the time – an analysis rarely given much thought within this context. Aliens, after all, can refer both to the other-worldly and those belonging to a foreign nation. In invasion narratives belonging to the period from 1945-1965, the two were often interchangeable. The works of Andrew M. Butler, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Donna R. Gabaccia, and Angela Onwuachi-Willig to name just a few, will be key here. Occasionally, these invaders are portrayed in a positive light, having travelled with a message of wisdom critical of current US approaches to foreign policy, as depicted in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) and the novel, *Echo X* (1960). Travel, therefore, can refer to the act of being visited or invaded on both an international and interplanetary scale, something science fiction revelled in as a vehicle for commentary on the social issues that arose out of the years discussed here.

International and interplanetary travel are intertwined by the issues they raise about the Cold War and the American Century more widely, particularly regarding geopolitical commentary. Time travel, however, is unique in its ability to tap into the contemporary mood in the US, and does so through the differing interpretations on offer concerning the past and the future and the relationship of these destinations with the present. The superhero comic-books of this era engaged with this most prominently. Travel to the past is suggestive of a desire to escape the present; to return to a better, or rather, simpler time before American interventionism and the destructive potential of science.

[18] Mark Jancovich, *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.15

It can also be seen as a means of going back in search of inspiration from those belonging to the great civilizations that came before them in an attempt to navigate the perils of the American Century. Ursula K. Le Guin notes a similar theme in an essay on utopian fiction (and its relationship to history), the notion of going backward, yet looking forward.[19] Likewise, travel to the future offered the opportunity to envision both a brighter future that lived up to the grand rhetoric of Luce, or a dystopia inspired by the worst aspects of the Cold War and the atomic age. Mapped onto the period from 1945-1965, time travel highlights a journey of uncertainty and confusion concerning the American Century in the immediate years after 1945, optimism throughout the 1950s, and a return to uncertainty bolstered by pessimism at the start of the 1960s.

The formative years of the American Century are defined by movement and travel; by foreign policy and progression. Science fiction provides insights into the mixed feelings of a nation at a tumultuous time in American history, but it is the depiction of travel within these sources that truly engages with the transformation the US was undergoing. From a desire to escape the present and return to the golden days of isolationism, or to seek guidance from the past in order to shape the future via time travel; to attempts made at navigating the current geopolitical position of America through international adventures; to commentary on contemporary issues such as race, migration, espionage, and fear of Soviet aggression through the fantastical and other-worldly setting of outer space: the depiction of travel in these sources tells stories of a nation trying to find its place in the world, and among the stars.

[19] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be', retrieved from https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/382-spring-2010/non-euclidean-view-california-cold-place-1982/ last accessed 20 September 2019.

Race, Women, and the Geopolitical Narrative in *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* and *The Snow Creature*: A Snapshot of International Travel

In the representation of international travel in the 1950s, two case studies, *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954) and *The Snow Creature* (1954), offer abundant opportunities for investigation. Analysis of them will be two-fold. Geopolitical commentary on the shared theme of the US scientific expedition overseas is inherent, but analysis will also attempt to associate this commentary with a larger source of fear plaguing particular audiences on the domestic front: racism. Taking thematic inspiration from, and capitalising on the renewed popularity of *King Kong* (1933) which was 'revived with great box office success in 1952', both films follow US expeditions to lands unexplored by man.[1] *The Snow Creature* follows renowned American botanist, Frank Parrish, as he embarks on a mission to the Himalayas in search of undiscovered plant life, but returns with a yeti instead. Likewise, *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* follows a team of scientists as they travel to the Amazon in search of the legendary Gill-man, a potential missing link in the evolutionary chain. While on a surface level, both films appear to share similar narrative structures and themes, they could not be further apart in their respective approaches. While the former waves the banner for American superiority, serving as a vessel for the grand rhetoric of the American Century, the latter boldly strays from the pressures of conformity the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) tried to enforce, and instead critiques the US's superiority complex and perceived right to intervene overseas by creating a dialogue between its two male leads. Moreover, channelling Andrew Butler's assessment that 'horror and sf could

[1] Cynthia Erb, *Tracking King Kong: A Hollywood Icon in World Culture*, Second Edition (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009), p.17

work by metaphor, projecting the other onto aliens, robots and monsters', both titular creatures can be interpreted as allegories for minority identities in the US.[2]

Cynthia Erb argues that *King Kong* is 'one of the definitive mass cultural texts depicting contact between a Western explorer and a native "other."[3] Placing Kong into the post-war context through a discussion of *Mighty Joe Young* (1949) and *Godzilla* (1954), she writes: 'I am more interested in considering how the King Kong story operated against a field of social discourses defined by what might be described as tensions between notions of the domestic and the foreign.'[4] Both *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* and *The Snow Creature* embody a space defined by these tensions, particularly in relation to 1954 and the racial strife that came to define this year, but both go about commenting on this tension very differently. Casting its respective creature as a monstrous being who preys on young women, *The Snow Creature* presents a particularly southern view of race in line with the Jim Crow laws and shines a light on contemporary fears concerning both the Second Great Migration – the movement of more than five million African Americans in the US from the South to the West, North East and Midwest beginning in 1940 and lasting until roughly 1970 – and immigration. The Gill-man, alternatively, is a sympathetic and often misunderstood character comparable to Frankenstein's Monster and Kong who speaks to the longstanding problem of racism in the US through his persecution. Erb says *King Kong* 'encourages identification with Kong as a rather mysterious animal figure, whose domain is violated by an arrogant white male.'[5] The same analysis applies to *Lagoon*.

[2] Andrew M. Butler, *Solar Flares: Science Fiction in the 1970s* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), p.2
[3] Cynthia Erb, *Tracking King Kong: A Hollywood Icon in World Culture*, Second Edition (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009), p.11
[4] ibid., p.17
[5] ibid., p.2

A lot of the scholarly work concerning *Lagoon* has focused on the issues of gender and sexuality – and rightly so – but very little has been written about its commentary on race, which seems just as apparent. Given that both films were released in 1954 when the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision stirred the nation into a frenzy by ruling that the racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional, this is surprising. *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* is the more interesting of the two not only because it makes the creature a sympathetic character, but because it associates the plights of its creature with those faced by its female character, Kay. By doing so, it brings the issues of race and gender into the same discussion. In the age of the American suburb and the Organisation Man, the American male and the structures that supported him and his subject position were trying to reassert dominance over the public sphere through the removal of threats posed to the existing social order; women faced discursive and more concrete practices to remove them to the domestic sphere, while people of colour were largely excluded from the safe, white spaces being constructed for white families away from the increasingly black cities in the suburbs. Connections between these factors were therefore resonant in contemporary culture, and the commentary found in these films is of great significance. In the case of both films, international travel offers invaluable geopolitical commentary concerning US attitudes towards the world at large. Ironically, by travelling overseas, these films tell a more interesting story involving troubles at home. While the Civil Rights Movement per se is not the focus of this study, it is important to acknowledge its existence and, more so, its influence on, and prominence in, the years discussed here; hence the emphasis that has and will continue to be placed on the significance of the *Brown* decision in 1954. It can be argued that the Civil Rights Movement and the Cold War were parallel issues but for the purposes of this study – particularly this chapter – the two should be viewed as

interconnected. Both were undeniably products of the tensions belonging to this era, and both directly affected and were caused by issues of movement. Regardless of the veracity of accusations levelled at Hollywood with regard to its political perspective, its status as a producer of globally consumed and critiqued texts is not in question. Characters in films move, whether consciously or not dramatizing contemporary concerns in the process, but the films themselves also move, given their status as global commodities. That movement itself is political, as part of a project of cultural imperialism, and as such the films as objects and the events they depict draw on an interconnected range of contemporary Cold War discussions, refracted through lenses of race and gender, both domestically and in Cold War battlegrounds overseas.

A Geopolitical Reading of *The Snow Creature* (1954)

Analysis of *The Snow Creature* can be used to demonstrate the existence of a certain world view. As a film that takes place almost in two halves – the first in the Himalayas, and the second in the US – this motion picture is ideally positioned to discuss the geopolitical stance some Americans were taking in 1954. The international setting of the Himalayas provides an interesting look into American attitudes towards its un-American neighbours (defined as both 'not of the US' and more ideologically, in keeping with the un-American definitions pursued by HUAC); the often overt emphasis placed on the primitive nature of these 'locals' allowing for parallels to be drawn between the Native American experience during the days of the American Frontier, and the fictional treatment of the Sherpas at the hands of Parrish as the American Century became a defining attribute of American identity.

As W. Lee Wilder's film begins, the narrator informs his audience that 'this is the story of an expedition to a rugged barrier . . . of how a small group of people found

themselves in pursuit of a crude and primitive civilisation.'[6] This description conjures imagery of the frontiersman in his expansion westward during the days of the American Frontier, and recalling images of Alaska, not admitted as a state until 1959, as 'the last frontier'. Like his ancestors in their pursuit of the American nation's Manifest Destiny, Frank Parrish is breaking allegedly new ground – the things he seeks are undiscovered because they are unknown to the West, and all other forms and sites of knowledge are invalid in these terms. This film positions the US, through Parrish, as a pioneering nation working towards the betterment of mankind; rhetoric that speaks directly to their pursuit of winning the Cold War through both the expansion of democracy and the 'good Samaritan' aspirations of the American Century.[7] Many parallels can be drawn here between this romanticised era of the frontier and the world of the Cold War to which Parrish belonged. One of these is America's perceived need to conquer this 'wilderness of rock and ice' – a description that almost personifies the abstract, frosty terrain of the Cold War while quite literally placing the US at the 'summit of the world' – and simultaneously engaging with the contemporary interest in Alaska.[8] Here, to 'conquer' serves as a masculine definition for the act of simply visiting and returning alive; Parrish is defying the odds, proving his and, consequently, the superior nature of the US over those who have tried and failed before. The same interpretation might be applied to the US's expedition to the moon in 1969; more contemporary examples can be found in Operation Highjump (1946-7) and Operation Deep Freeze I (1955-6), both of which involved polar explorer, Admiral Richard E. Byrd. Highjump evaluated the level of military threat from the polar regions, and a documentary produced about it,

[6] *The Snow Creature* (1954), dir. W. Lee Wilder
[7] Henry Luce, 'The American Century', *Diplomatic History,* Vol. 23, No.2, (1999), pp.159-171, (p.170)
[8] *The Snow Creature* (1954), dir. W. Lee Wilder
David M. Kennedy, 'The Origins and Uses of American Hyperpower', in Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Short American Century: A Postmortem* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp.15-37 (p.16)

The Secret Land (1948), won an Academy Award. Deep Freeze established military bases in the Antarctic; throughout the 1950s, Alaska was also the subject of increasing military attention and construction.

Militarisation of 'cold places' escalated significantly throughout the 1950s. This union of military and scientific endeavours formed the wider context of creation and reception of *The Snow Creature*, and informed representations of tensions between scientists more generally and between scientists and the military, specifically in films such as *The Thing from Another World* (1951).[9] Another parallel is the depiction of the yeti as 'primitive'; a view that restages colonial perceptions of Native Americans during the days of the frontier, and extends to contemporary attitudes towards minorities in the US at that time.[10] With regards to the depiction of the yeti in Wilder's film, these contemporary attitudes, particularly towards African Americans, are perhaps more visible and this will be discussed further in the next section when the film transports the viewer back to California. It is important to acknowledge that while the experiences of Native Americans and African Americans are explored in the coming pages, these experiences are not being elided. Both are discussed here in different contexts (the Native American experience represented by the Sherpas in the Himalayas and the African American experience represented by the yeti in California) for the larger goal of ascertaining the US's geopolitical and cultural stance at this chaotic point in its history. As hinted at before, this perception of white American superiority extends to the depiction of the Sherpa natives who aid Parrish in his expedition. Their purpose is to serve as porters; to carry Parrish's equipment up the mountainside while he studies its

[9] Taking place at a military base at the North Pole, *The Thing from Another World* (1951) also addresses the concern of a military threat from the polar regions.

[10] This association is further reinforced when the yeti is transported to the US. Here, it is likely that the yeti would have eventually been paraded around the nation for the amusement of white Americans; a possibility hinted at by Parrish's colleague Wells earlier in the story. Again, this mediates the treatment of Native Americans after the closing of the frontier.

plant life. At one point he recalls they looked like 'human mules under the weight of our heavy supplies', also recalling the relationship between Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay, who reached the summit of Everest in 1953.[11] The impression given is that these 'natives' are sub-human in comparison to Parrish's intellectual white American; a view further reinforced by Parrish's later statement that he would 'shoot any man' that disagreed with him in the navigation of his expedition.[12] Their lives are secondary to Parrish's cause in the same way that the Native Americans were secondary to the colonists' aspirations concerning Manifest Destiny. The most overt comparison to Native Americans comes when Parrish asks his colleague to refrain from sharing his whisky with the Sherpas. 'Wells', he says, 'I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't hand that stuff to any of the men. And don't drink it in their presence.'[13] It is well-documented that the Native American population have suffered from 'chronic alcoholism and other forms of substance abuse' in the years since their removal, and that alcohol was frequently used in 'negotiations' over treaties to their severe detriment.[14] Alcoholism is a disease that affected 'more than half the native population' during the years discussed here and contributed to popular conceptions of Native Americans that still exist today; conceptions clearly referenced here.[15] Playing into notions of American superiority, Parrish and Wells are portrayed as mature, intelligent men who are capable of handling their drink responsibly, which stands in stark contrast to the depiction of the natives. It is a product of the Western world that the primitive Sherpas are ill-equipped to handle; a throwaway line that speaks volumes to the existence of a certain world view in America

[11] *The Snow Creature* (1954), dir. W. Lee Wilder
[12] ibid.
Later in the film, the natives steal a radio from Parrish to prevent him contacting the authorities. When Parrish and Wells eventually finds it, Parrish says: 'let's hope they haven't been monkeying with it', which again associates the Sherpa's with a lesser-evolved species.
[13] *The Snow Creature* (1954), dir. W. Lee Wilder
[14] Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492 to the Present* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997), p.247
[15] ibid.

at the time. It positions their relationship and, by extension, America's relationship with other countries of the world, in terms of strength and weakness; new and old; science and the unenlightened.

As the story progresses, Parrish's initial mission is thwarted by the natives, who stage a coup in response to a yeti abducting their leader's wife. When it is revealed, to Parrish's dismay, that the yeti does in fact exist, Parrish again asserts his authority by ensuring that it is captured and transported to the US for investigation. The final piece of geopolitical commentary emerges through Parrish's sole claim to the discovery of the creature. The people of Shekar do not put up a fight in staking a claim for keeping the yeti within their borders and instead immediately hand jurisdiction over to their American superiors despite the inhabitants of that nation being instrumental in its discovery.[16]

> As I said, your foundation was granted permission to explore the Himalayas. Your discovery is of a very unusual nature but it belongs to you and you are free to do with it as you wish.[17]

This statement solidifies *The Snow Creature* as a vehicle for the promotion of those values of the American Century that equate the US with being the dominant power in the world at that point. Here, the position of the US in world affairs is as the most powerful nation on the planet, and one that is at the forefront of scientific development and discovery. For the creative team behind this motion picture, the people of Shekar and, by extension, the rest of the planet, were living in an American world. The moral of the story: even in the Himalayas, the US is King.

[16] Parrish refused to believe that such a creature existed at first.
[17] *The Snow Creature* (1954), dir. W. Lee Wilder

Snow-White Supremacy: Addressing Issues of Race in *The Snow Creature*

If the first half of this film is concerned with making a geopolitical statement, its second half, moving from the Himalayas to California, shifts its focus to the internal issues of race and migration plaguing the US. Outside of its Himalayan habitat, the creature truly stands out as different. It is in this sense that the creature can be seen to serve as an allegory for minorities – particularly African Americans, if it is understood through the racist lens of a 'primitive nature'. When the creature arrives in California, it is held at the U.S. Department of Immigration. This is significant because it associates the creature with not only the process of immigration, but with minority identities in accordance with the popular fears concerning immigration at the time. In the years that this essay covers, immigration controls were notoriously strict. The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, for example, 'continued the use of highly restrictive national-origins quotas for Europe', which Donna Gabaccia argues deliberately enforced 'internationally offensive racial and national exclusions.'[18] As the potential product of racist attitudes, this association with the immigrant arguably foreshadows the creature's threat for its US audience.

The creature is held at the Department of Immigration because he is labelled a 'Snow Man' in a newspaper headline, leading some to assume that the creature might be humanoid. It is here that the creature is to be evaluated to ascertain its status. Dr DuPont explains the situation:

> I have to determine whether his brain is a calculating brain. From what we know of these snow creatures, they have been a legend. We have seen abstract drawings and heard stories of these nomads but they were always associated with human traits.[19]

[18] Donna R. Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), p.147
[19] ibid.

By addressing the idea that the creature might be an intelligent, free-thinking being and, by extension, might be considered more man than beast, Parrish's capture and extradition of the creature to the US becomes problematic because it draws comparisons to the treatment of African Americans under slavery. What is more problematic, however, is that this film appears to take little issue with Parrish's actions. While the film does raise some form of debate as to the nature of the creature, this is immediately overruled by Parrish's proclamation that such claims are 'ridiculous', drawing comparisons to *Brown v. Board* as a Cold War case through the assumption that the inclusion of this debate – like the outcome of *Brown* – was for superficial, internationalist purposes.[20] Essentially, the inclusion of this debate, regardless of how briefly it is addressed, might serve to benefit the US's image from a global viewership perspective.

Mapped on to a discussion of race, *The Snow Creature*, through both its depiction of the Sherpa and the titular creature, presents a particularly southern view. If the creature serves as an allegory for African Americans, then associating it with human traits would serve to place this primitive being on a more equal footing with the civilised white American. This plays into Andrew Butler's observation: 'to label someone as being part of a separate race is thus to question their membership of the human species, and this reinforces Western power structures and white privilege.'[21] At the time of the film's release in November 1954, the outcome of *Brown v. Board* had not only suggested that there was a level of growing support for equality within the US, but that it might

[20] ibid.
See Mary L. Dudziak, 'Brown as a Cold War Case', *The Journal of American History*, Vol.91, No.1, (2004), pp.32-42
This will be explored in more detail later.
[21] Andrew M. Butler, *Solar Flares: Science Fiction in the 1970* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), p.79

actually become a reality. Angela Onwuachi-Willig best describes the impact of this outcome by explaining:

> Indeed, *Brown* completely failed to even name, much less recognize, the material benefits that had come to Whites, even poor Whites, as a result of Jim Crow racism. As a result, it failed to make clear that enabling a system of true equality, not simply one of formal equality, necessarily meant that Whites could not maintain all of the unearned benefits of whiteness that they were enjoying in a Jim Crow regime. More so, *Brown* failed to recognize the assumptions and the unchallenged notions about black inferiority and white superiority that had not only been internalized by all in society, including sympathetic Whites and Blacks, but that it also had become deeply embedded within every aspect of our society.[22]

Butler supports this view in his assessment that 'the invisible forces of ideas are given power by a series of laws, especially those that grant rights and privileges to a dominant population.'[23] Outside of the popular conception that racism was an inherently southern trait, these attitudes affected the entirety of the US throughout the 1950s when the Second Great Migration and White Flight – the mass migration of white Americans from the city to the suburb – 'transformed the racial geography of the country.'[24] Onwuachi-Willig's statement points to an engrained sense of superiority among white Americans, regardless of location, within the US. *Brown* failed to consider the sheer extent to which this complex had infiltrated American society. She describes the outcome of *Brown* as 'a zero-sum game in which material and status gains for Blacks and other racial minorities are viewed only as losses for Whites.'[25] This is a complex position that maps on to Parrish's attitude towards the creature. By labelling the creature 'intelligent' or 'humanoid', thereby associating this primitive being with the evolved,

[22] Angela Onwuachi-Willig, 'Reconceptualising the harms of discrimination: How brown v. board of education helped to further white supremacy', *Virginia Law Review*, Vol. 105, No. 2, (2019), pp. 343-370, (p.355)
[23] Andrew M. Butler, *Solar Flares: Science Fiction in the 1970* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), p.79
[24] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, 'The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past', *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 91, No. 4, (2005), pp. 1233-1263, (p.1239)
[25] Angela Onwuachi-Willig, 'Reconceptualising the harms of discrimination: How brown v. board of education helped to further white supremacy', *Virginia Law Review*, Vol. 105, No. 2, (2019), pp. 343-370, (p.348)

civilised American, the creative team behind this film might have run the risk of covertly promoting equality. In 1954 as the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) – a committee responsible for investigating suspected subversives in the US, most notably in Hollywood – and the witch-hunt mentality of McCarthyism plagued the US, the perceived promotion of these values (regardless of whether they existed or not) held dire consequences for all of those involved on a picture. In the eyes of the HUAC, Joseph McCarthy – the US senator who led the charge against subversives in the US – and the many Americans blinded by a false sense of patriotism under the McCarthyite flag, the promotion of equality was often a tell-tale sign of communism; the treatment of the 'Hollywood Ten' in 1947 served as sobering and terrifying proof of this. This fear explains the sudden change of opinion concerning the creature on its escape. Despite showing intelligence through its escape, the creature is quickly labelled a 'dangerous killer beast' when it becomes an uncontrollable threat to the American people. Within the context of race relations at home, *Brown v. Board* suggested that white Americans might not always be able to suppress, contain and control minorities in their societies.

Approaching this issue from the standpoint that the years from 1945-1965 were the formative years of the so-called American Century, one has to ask the question: what constitutes 'American'? Aided by 'the racism and xenophobia that drove immigration restriction', the census taken in 1940, 1950, 1960, and 1970 highlights the overwhelming dominance of the white population, placing its overall percentage at 89.8 per cent, 89.5 per cent, 88.6 per cent, and 87.5 per cent, respectively.[26] Given American histories of racism towards people of colour, and the continuation of this after 1945, it is not a major leap to assume that the version of America many were envisioning going

[26] U.S. Population – 1940-2010, United States Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/cspan/1940census/CSPAN_1940slides.pdf [Accessed: 19/02/2019] Donna R. Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), p.124

forward was a white one, untainted by detrimental, foreign influences; 'a pure, homogeneous American people', as described by Ellison Smith in 1917.[27] *Brown v. Board* represented a milestone that might serve to initiate a chain reaction of events leading to racial equality in the US and this, in turn, posed a threat to America as it currently stood. President Eisenhower's decision to enforce integration at Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957 served to further bolster these fears, while the introduction of the 'pupil placement law' simultaneously illustrated that many white Americans would not go down without a fight.[28] Standing in for African Americans, the yeti, in breaking free from its restraints, can be interpreted to showcase the existence of paranoia among a certain element of white Americans at the time concerning the evolving position of minorities in their society as they attempted to break free from the societal restraints placed upon them.

This paranoia is further reinforced by the fact that the creature stalks and preys on young, white women. The film establishes this creature's predisposition towards women with its abduction of Subra's wife and the accompanying explanation that the yeti only comes out of hiding when it 'wants to steal [a] woman.'[29] The creature later confirms Subra's claims when, on its escape in California, it only emerges to attack women. Spying from the shadows of an alleyway, it first kills a young woman as her helpless shrieks of horror are heard off-screen. It emerges again soon afterwards on hearing an argument between another young woman and her partner. When this woman is forced out of her home in the dead of night, the creature strikes again, chasing her with intent

[27] ibid., p.141
Ellison Smith was chair of the Senate Immigration Committee in 1917.
[28] 'Arkansas eventually responded to the Little Rock crisis with a complex "pupil placement law" that established procedures for determining whether a child could change schools. The discretion granted to school authorities under such placement laws ensured that much segregation could be accomplished bureaucratically.' Mary L. Dudziak, 'Brown as a Cold War Case', *The Journal of American History*, Vol.91, No.1, (2004), pp.32-42 (p.39)
[29] *The Snow Creature* (1954), dir. W. Lee Wilder. This also establishes thematic links to *King Kong* (1933).

to kill before she finds refuge in a pharmacy. On both occasions, the creature is pictured lurking in dimly lit alleys where it consistently recedes into blackness and out of sight. Moreover, the screams of its female victims are always accompanied by the screen fading to black. This association of blackness with the vulnerability of these women makes it difficult not to associate this creature with African Americans, given the popular stereotypes afforded to men of colour in the South, and the haunting statistics concerning the often-fabricated allegations of rape and sexual assault of white women that still led to mob violence and lynching in this period. Still in effect at the time of this film's release, the Jim Crow laws notoriously dictated that a black man could not physically interact with a white woman without fear of being accused of rape. A large proportion of African American men lynched in the US were killed because of their often-innocent interaction with white women – or even just accusations of contact. Anelise R. Codrington writes:

> Most disturbing is that some men were lynched for no reason at all, or for simply looking at a white woman. The lynching was justified because the goal was to protect white womanhood. In some cases black men were accused of rape, when really the black men and white women were in consensual interracial relationships.[30]

Considering the expanding African American population in the US's urban areas, this paranoia concerning interactions (consensual or otherwise) between black men and white women fits with this particularly monstrous depiction of the creature; its fixation on women exaggerating pre-conceived notions regarding the savage, sexual threat posed to America's white women by African American men.

[30] Anelise R. Codrington, 'Bitter Fruit, Lynching, and the Legislative Reform to End It: A Timeline of Lynching, and Its Transformation into the Contemporary Era', *Southern Journal of Policy and Justice* Vol. 11 (2017), pp. 32-47, (p.35)
Popular culture is still commenting on this today. Set in Baltimore in 1962, *The Shape of Water* (2018) – coincidentally inspired by the *Creature from the Black Lagoon* – sees its own Gill-man persecuted by a southern agent; this creature, given the period in question, can also be seen as an allegory for the African American, and is also in a consensual interracial relationship with Sally Hawkins' female protagonist which is frowned upon. Addressing homophobia during the period in question, this film deals with an array of issues that plagued society both at the time and, frighteningly, to this day.

The creature finally meets its demise when a team of white police officers track it to the sewers and kill it by catching it in a net, beating it and shooting it – a brutal ambush reminiscent of lynch mobs in the South. Reinforcing the notion that this violence towards the creature was necessary, the film ends with the revelation that the lead police detective's wife has given birth; the status quo has been reaffirmed; the creature, standing in for African Americans, is no longer a threat to this white American family and the society to which they belong.

A Geopolitical Reading of *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954)

Where *The Snow Creature* waves the flag for US superiority, Jack Arnold's *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* defiantly condemns this stance. Likewise, while Wilder's creature personifies racist attitudes towards African Americans, Arnold's sympathetic Gill-man is used as a vehicle to rally against the plights of minorities in the US, though while still aligning those minorities with a space of horror. While *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* subverts expectations by championing the minority and condemning the real monster, the US, by placing a white American man in a villainous role juxtaposed against a visibly wronged 'monster', the minority is still, after all, a monster. However, Jack Arnold and the creative team that worked with him on this iconic film offer an alternative perception of the events and issues unravelling in the US at this time, both in regards to America's geopolitical stance and the somewhat interconnected issues of race and gender. Offering a counterbalance to the blindly patriotic nature of *The Snow Creature*, this section – discussing *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* – aims to illustrate that, despite the limitations of the time (and the expensive nature of Technicolor) the issues of the day were not as black and white as they might first appear.

To look firstly at the dichotomy between David and Mark, the two white male scientists on the expedition, Arnold criticises the popular geopolitical narrative on display in *The Snow Creature* by presenting Mark – an intelligent, white American man – as a villain; he serves to represent the trope of the 'arrogant white male' to which Cynthia Erb refers.[31] Mark Jancovich argues that he 'is presented as an acquisitive, goal oriented male scientist. He is more concerned with the dollars which publicity will attract than with research itself, and he values the money because it will enhance his power and prestige.'[32] From the moment he sees the creature, he becomes obsessed with the need to capture it, dead or alive, in order to take it back to the US and bask in the glory it will bring him. In *The Snow Creature*, Parrish is admittedly more concerned with the scientific ramifications of his find when compared to Mark's lust for power and prestige, but the two are very similar in the way they exert their power over those around them; the only difference being that Mark is clearly a villain, whereas Parrish is the hero of his story. In contrast to Mark, David simply wants to study the creature in its own environment.[33] In both films, the setting is depicted as a primitive space: it is said of the Amazon where they find the Gill-man that 'this is exactly as it was 150 million years ago when it was part of the Devonian era.'[34] Whereas David sees it as a space of scientific importance that must be investigated carefully, Mark wants to conquer this untamed land and aims to do so by hunting and capturing the titular creature as his

[31] Cynthia Erb, *Tracking King Kong: A Hollywood Icon in World Culture*, Second Edition (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009), p.2 See paragraph associated with footnote 4.
[32] Mark Jancovich, *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) p.177
[33] It could be argued that the film serves as a commentary on the debate raging in the US concerning their approach to fighting the Cold War. Mark can be seen to embody the values of massive retaliation whereas David is clearly more in favour of containment. Aaron S. Lecklider has written an excellent article documenting this debate in popular culture. See Aaron S. Lecklider, 'Inventing the Egghead: The Paradoxes of Brainpower in Cold War American Culture', *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 2, (2011), pp. 245-265
The Thing from Another World and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* are two fantastic case studies from the period that showcase contrasting opinions on these respective approaches.
[34] *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), dir. Jack Arnold

trophy. This is illustrated when Louis, the ship's captain, warns the scientists that the Black Lagoon is said to be 'a paradise . . . only no one has come back to prove it.' To this, Mark replies: 'we'll do it.'[35] As has become the American custom throughout those years defined by Manifest Destiny, and now, spurred on by the American Century, Mark must prevail in a show of superiority; to conquer the lagoon and triumph over its resident creature, earning himself and, by proxy, the US, a place in the history books. It is a mission that ultimately gets him killed.

Mark's death, coupled with David's willingness to enter the water again, prompts Kay's exclamation 'what's an expedition without two martyrs at least'.[36] This line is telling of the film's geopolitical stance. It serves as a criticism of this needless waste of life in the pursuit of fame and fortune. On a wider scale it can be interpreted to criticise the US's perceived superiority complex in approaching world affairs, pursuing the American Century, and partaking in the petty spirit of one-upmanship that had come to define the Cold War, as embodied by David and Mark's masculine need to not be outdone by the creature.

Unlike Parrish, this expedition is not welcome. They enter the lagoon regardless and, in response, the creature 'reacts violently to their invasion of his world.'[37] Here, it is mankind who is the villain; it is the US doing the invading. At a time when many science fiction films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), *The Thing from Another World* (1951), and *The War of the Worlds* (1953) equated the invasion narrative with the threat of domestic subversion and the fear of a Soviet invasion, *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* boldly points the camera at the US.[38] The film can be read as a

[35] ibid.
[36] ibid.
[37] Mark Jancovich, *Rational Fears* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) p.177
[38] It should be noted that, in regards to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, this is just one interpretation of the film. Equally popular, it has also been argued that the film serves as a criticism of McCarthyite

plea for the US to take a step back and read the situation before it intervenes in the affairs of other nations. Mark represents a culmination of the unsavoury aspects related to the American Century, the USA's post-war position of power, and the world view that accompanied it. Released in 1954, just one year after the Korean War ended (for the US, at least) and, more geographically relevant, in the year of the US-backed toppling of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman in Guatemala, the question of American intervention overseas inevitably made its way into the production of this piece.

Issues of Race, Gender, and Masculinity as Addressed in *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*

Just as *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* is critical of the geopolitical stance taken by *The Snow Creature* – itself a detrimental mouthpiece for the reinforcement of problematic attitudes already in existence in the US – Arnold's film is likewise critical of both the racist and sexist attitudes to which Wilder's film clearly subscribes; attitudes that were not universal as evidenced by this film and others like it, but were nevertheless widespread. *Lagoon*, like *The Snow Creature*, draws on the history of the American Frontier and the US's position at the head of the world table bolstered by the American Century when informing the characters and their interactions. As will become clear in due course though, for Arnold this history often informs arrogance and unwarranted aggression instead of wisdom and inclusivity; a superiority complex instead of a good neighbour mentality. Set in the Amazon, *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* uses international travel to provide invaluable geopolitical commentary; commentary that extends to wider issues at home.

conformity rather than as a mouthpiece for the threat of domestic subversion and the fear of a Soviet invasion.

Mark Jancovich argues that Mark 'is less concerned with learning from the creature's difference than with converting it into an object with which to enhance and display his own power.'[39] Kay, as the sole female character, serves a similar function; he wants her because she is pretty, and because she 'is' David's, albeit not formally. Tying internationalism to the domestic front, this relates nicely to *Brown v. Board* as a Cold War case and the motivations behind the US Government's sanctioning of the desegregation of schools in 1954. Providing an explanation for this support, Mary L. Dudziak writes:

> The U.S. Justice Department . . . filed amicus curiae (friend of the court) briefs in the cases leading up to *Brown* and in *Brown* itself. The Justice Department briefs gave only one reason for the government's participation in the cases: segregation harmed U.S. foreign relations.[40]

Just as Mark is less concerned with the scientific importance of the creature than he is with the wealth and reputation which accompanies his discovery, the US Government were clearly less concerned with the fact that racism existed in the US than with the notion that the world knew it existed. Such a revelation harmed its reputation abroad and, by extension, damaged its chances of winning the Cold War. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall further supports these motivations:

> The United States' treatment of its black citizens undermined its credibility abroad. At a time when the State Department was labouring to draw a stark contrast between American democracy and Soviet terror, win the allegiance of the newly independent nations of Asia and Africa, and claim leadership of the "free world," competition with the Soviet Union gave government officials a compelling reason to ameliorate black discontent and, above all, to manage the image of American race relations abroad.[41]

As an allegory for African Americans, Arnold uses the creature to criticise the exhibitionist nature of the US and the wider issues of 'self-interest and limited

[39] Mark Jancovich, *Rational Fears* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) p.177
[40] Mary L. Dudziak, 'Brown as a Cold War Case', *The Journal of American History*, Vol.91, No.1, (2004), pp.32-42, (p.34)
[41] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, 'The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past', *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 91, No. 4, (2005), pp. 1233-1263, (p.1249)

commitment' that accompanied the fervent presence of racism at home.[42] Mark's selfish approach towards his treatment of the creature can essentially be seen to mirror the US's self-centred utilisation of the *Brown* verdict in their ambition to enhance and display their own power through the benefits it would have for their image abroad. As Jason Dittmer so succinctly puts it, 'American power and authority is seen to result from the attractive power of American values and leadership.'[43] In the case of *Brown* and *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, these values are fabricated. Just as Mark – as part of a scientific community – is unashamedly more concerned with fame and fortune than he is with the scientific importance of his discovery, the US (or rather, white America) – as highlighted by the limited commitment to *Brown* – was more interested in its combined social standing at home and abroad than with a serious commitment towards enforcing equality. As the villain of this film, Mark serves as a vessel for Arnold's criticism of these attitudes on display by the US.[44]

Building on this, there are many similarities that allow comparisons to be drawn between the Gill-man and African Americans, when taking on board the representational structures in existence at the time of creation and reception. As has already been emphasised, the creature hails from a primitive space and is seen as being

[42] Mary L. Dudziak, 'Brown as a Cold War Case', *The Journal of American History*, Vol.91, No.1, (2004), pp.32-42, (p.34)

[43] Jason Dittmer, *Captain America and the Nationalist Superhero: Metaphors, Narratives, and* Geopolitics (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), P.141
Within the context of this work, Dittmer uses this assessment to illustrate the shift that takes place in Captain America comics between his Second World War conception and his revival in the 1960s. He argues that the character moves away from his roots of 'war and killing' and instead adopts an approach that 'downplays the role of force in producing centrality', relying instead on the promotion of American values. Extending beyond the medium of the comic-book as is evident by *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* within the context of *Brown v. Board*, it would appear that the US Government realised the significance of this power in the decade before.

[44] Alternatively, this can also be seen to an extent in *The Snow Creature* during the brief debate surrounding the creature's status at the Department of Immigration. Regardless of how seriously it is discussed, by addressing this question and the supposed rights that accompany it, the US is presented in a positive light through the values on display as associated with the implication that they might have a duty of care towards the creature.

subordinate to – or rather the property of – these white American men of science; something that is expanded in the film's sequel, *Revenge of the Creature* (1955), when the Gill-man is taken to a Seaworld-style institution to be put on display to the public for profit. Perhaps more closely mimicking the plots of *The Snow Creature, King Kong*, and *Mighty Joe Young*, this sequel depicts the creature being transported from its primitive habitat of the Amazon to the US, just as the yeti was forcibly removed from the Himalayas, Kong was snatched from Skull Island, and Joe travels to the US from Africa. As allegories for African Americans, there is the obvious notion of them being picked up elsewhere and transported to North America for profit, but the depictions of these creatures as different – their otherness exacerbated by the juxtaposition of their primitiveness against modern civilisation – plays into the popular beliefs of the time that African Americans were primitive due to their hereditary ties to Africa. Such an approach overlooks the cultural and social constructions placed on them in order to keep them in a subordinate position, but it does hark back to the age of slavery and exemplifies the ongoing superiority complex that existed among significant elements of the white population of America – particularly amongst those living in the South.[45] In *Revenge of the Creature*, these attitudes are addressed when the Gill-man escapes his aquatic prison and endeavours to find this film's leading lady, Helen, with whom it has become infatuated. Here, comparisons can be drawn to *The Snow Creature* as the Gill-man is depicted stalking Helen from the shadows, eventually stealing her away from her lover, and its former tormentor, Clete.[46] Like the yeti, the Gill-man eventually meets its demise at the hands of a white posse of men, again eliciting imagery of the lynch mob;

[45] In *Mighty Joe Young* (1949), Africa is referred to as 'darkest Africa' by New York showman, Max O'Hara; a description that plays into popular conceptions of Africa, extending to African Americans, with 'darkest' both referring to the colour of their skin and their unenlightened, primitive nature in comparison to the white population of the US. *Mighty Joe Young* (1949), dir. Ernest B. Schoedsack

[46] While in captivity, the Gill-man is subjected to shock therapy at the hands of Clete and his giant cattle prod as part of a process to ascertain how intelligent it is.

only here, the audience feels sympathy for the creature as a joint result of its torture and the time spent developing a mutual curiosity between itself and Helen. Unlike the sinister depiction of the yeti, the Gill-man is associated with a naïve and child-like fascination that ultimately gets him killed. It is a representation that speaks to and ultimately criticises the victimisation of African American men by Jim Crow.

The same analysis applies to *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*. Comparisons between the creature and African Americans under Jim Crow become particularly evident in viewing the iconic scene where the creature mimics Kay in the water. Here, as Jancovich points out, 'the creature does not directly threaten Kay, but cautiously reaches out to touch her leg. It appears almost nervously shy and even flees once it has touched her.'[47] This apprehension of Kay draws comparisons to the culture of fear surrounding interracial relations in the South at this time; interactions that saw a large shadow cast over them by the ever-looming lynch tree, as in the case of Emmett Till in 1955. Unlike *The Snow Creature*, Arnold's film is wholly critical of such perceptions. This critique is weaker in *Revenge*, where it is the Gill-man who is penetrating white space, and the invasion narrative is flipped back to the standard form: rather than Americans invading other countries, American eyes now turn to hostile invaders at their frontiers. In the process, however, a new element of critique develops where, to paraphrase Malcolm X, the Gill-man is bought home to roost: American activities abroad are shown to have direct consequences at home. More prosaically, it is an extension and development of the *King Kong* story, which is a clear influence on the film.[48]

[47] Mark Jancovich, *Rational Fears* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) p.179

[48] Like *Kong*, *Creature* has also attracted a queer following in the years since its release. For example, see here: https://www.mygaytoronto.com/416scene/20180822.php where *Creature* was included in a 'Queer Fear' series of films in Toronto.

The Gill-man as an allegory for African Americans is further reinforced by its subordinate position to David and Mark. This is highlighted particularly well in a scene where Mark flaunts the power of his harpoon gun. Jancovich writes:

> Mark clearly fetishizes his harpoon gun as a display of phallic dominance and aggression. He praises its efficiency and refers to it as "a positive weapon" while he both displays its power and boasts that it makes no difference what he shoots at.[49]

In the knowledge that Mark intends to use this weapon on the creature, one can be forgiven for drawing comparisons between Mark's treatment of the creature and that of the slave handler, the harpoon standing in for the whip here. Like the slave handler, Mark intends to bring the creature under control through an assertion of his phallic dominance. Moreover, parallels can once again be drawn between Mark and the colonial settler during the expansion westward. In this, the 'penetration' represented by the harpoon is both sexual – coded as his threat to Kay – and figuratively geopolitical – the damage caused by white penetration of Native lands through Manifest Destiny. Frederick Jackson Turner describes the original encounter between the European settlers and the Native Americans as a 'transformative experience.'[50] Michael Goodrum states that 'Jackson Turner identifies two particular modes of transformation: one acts on the settler, taking them back to a more "primitive" style of life, and the other is the actions of the settler on the wilderness itself, which is gradually submitted to the plough and brought under control.'[51] Placed within the context of *Lagoon*, Mark's invasion of the Amazon allows him to indulge his more 'primitive' side by engaging with the creature both intellectually, where he assumes his own dominance and physically, through his ability to use weapons, in a show of superiority. The harpoon is significant in the sense that it brings two worlds together: the primitive savagery of the arrow and the scientific

[49] Mark Jancovich, *Rational Fears* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) p.178
[50] Michael Goodrum, 'War, Profit, and Migration in *Firefly*', forthcoming
[51] ibid.

ingenuity of projectile technology belonging to the modern day. Like its handler, it is a weapon that is firmly rooted in the twentieth century yet simultaneously allows him to indulge his more primitive side by conquering the creature and his environment; the arrow inescapably conjuring an image of the Wild West and the accompanying theme of conquest.

The Creature from the Black Lagoon was released in 1954 amidst a climate of concern and paranoia relating to pre-discussed perceptions of 'losses for Whites'.[52] Those apparent losses gave rise to discontent amongst a large proportion of the nation's white population. The Great Migration, occurring between 1916 and 1970, is known as such due to African American migration in massive numbers from rural areas of the South to cities across the nation; cities that had previously been predominantly white spaces. To preserve their superior status within society, white American families reacted to this 'invasion' by fleeing to the suburbs; an act that would later become known as White Flight. Placed within the context of this ever-changing landscape, it is not surprising that comparisons between the old West and the twentieth century began to emerge. International travel provided new frontiers to conquer. In *The Snow Creature*, this frontier is that of the Himalayas. In *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, it is the primitive locale of the Amazon rainforest. In centuries past, the American took what was his as he believed was his right under the collective myth of Manifest Destiny. Fast-forward to 1954, and *Brown* struck a blow to 'a continued and false sense of superiority by Whites'; the Great Migration was perceived, without irony, as an invasion of the white man's land.[53] International travel within a fictional setting therefore allowed the American to relive past glories; to conquer frontiers, and recapture

[52] Angela Onwuachi-Willig, 'Reconceptualising the harms of discrimination: How brown v. board of education helped to further white supremacy', *Virginia Law Review*, Vol. 105, No. 2, (2019), pp. 343-370, (p.362)
[53] ibid., p.361

a lost sense of masculinity – all while continually staging the masculine identity performing such deeds as perpetually under threat. In *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, Mark represents the white man's discontent with the world in which he found himself and more so embodies the primitive urge to take back what he perceives as rightfully his.[54]

As the villain of *Lagoon*, Mark serves as a vessel for Jack Arnold to criticise the existence of such views. He does so by making the creature a 'sympathetic' character and associating his plights with those faced by the film's only female character, Kay.[55] Jancovich rightfully asserts that 'the most developed associations are between the creature and Kay. Mark wants to convert both into objects or trophies through which to display his power and prestige.'[56] Returning to his assessment that Mark is 'acquisitive and goal oriented', Jancovich argues:

> Not only are these features related to a contempt for everything that is different – he despises both the Rita, the boat on which they travel down the Amazon, and its owner, Louis – it is also related to a form of science which is only concerned with dominance and control.[57]

This obsession with dominance and control; to turn both Kay and the Gill-man into objects or trophies, speaks volumes about the anxieties dominating a section of the American male psyche at this time. Working in tandem with the paranoia concerning

[54] On this, it is worth reflecting on lines from 'Populism Yea Yea' from *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*: 'we'll take the land back from the Indians, we'll take the land back from the French and Spanish and other people in other European countries, and other people, too, and also other places… I'm pretty sure it's our land anyway'.

[55] Mark Jancovich, *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) p.177

[56] ibid., p.178

[57] ibid.

Early in the film, as Jancovich suggests, Arnold establishes Mark's attitudes towards women through his interaction with Kay and the clear disdain he shows towards the expedition's choice of boat that, by association with the name Rita, is also equated with the feminine. 'Couldn't you find anything better than this barge?', he says after aggressively kicking aside an item in his way. Mark clearly resents being aided in his mission by an object associated with the feminine, and he is also visibly only interested in Kay as a potential partner for him, as is highlighted by his competing with David for her affection, rather than recognising her scientific ability, which he could never admit is greater than his.

perceived advancements being made by minorities in society, it is also important to remember that this was the age of the Organization Man; the decade of the 'unmanning of American men' at the hands of the State, the corporation and women.[58] By so closely associating the creature and Kay, Arnold brings the issues of race and gender into the same discussion. The creature relates to Kay's marginalisation. It, like Kay, is living in a white man's world.

Jancovich writes that 'the creature is first drawn to Kay when she is swimming on the surface of the lagoon, on the boundary between his world and that of the human males.'[59] Interpreting water as a liminal space is key here. Jancovich says it represents the boundary between male and female but it more accurately represents the border between normality and the Other; in this instance, the Other represents both race and gender. Water has historically been associated with the feminine and the same is true here as the opening of the film explains that 'it was within the "warm depths" of the water that life was born'; a fact emphasised by Jancovich's assessment that 'the lagoon itself is shaped like a large womb.'[60] Both Kay and the creature are at home in the water, as is highlighted when Kay goes for a swim and the creature curiously mimics her from below the surface; an action that 'implies an identification with her.'[61] This relationship stands in contrast to the one she has with Mark and David. Like the creature, Kay is a trophy to these men as is evident by the way they compete to possess her. Jancovich argues that 'there are numerous occasions when Kay and the creature are shown staring at one another as if they both recognise something of themselves in the

[58] Citing Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.: K. A. Cuordileone, "Politics in an Age of Anxiety": Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960', *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 87, No.2, (2000), pp.515-545, (pp.524)
These are issues that Arnold would expertly expand upon and confront in a later film in his repertoire: *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957).
[59] Mark Jancovich, *Rational Fears* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) p.179
[60] ibid., p.180
[61] ibid., p.179

other through their difference from the men around them.'[62] Seeing something of its self in Kay, the Gill-man refuses to let her leave the lagoon with Mark and David. Just as Kay's scientific brilliance does not fit with Mark's perceived vision of femininity and is therefore seen as something that needs to be repressed, the Gill-man, as an allegory for the minority, does not fit with his conception of normality dictated by Jim Crow, and is likewise victimised. To quote John Clute, science fiction of this era was often 'written in the shape of Man. Women and other aliens had visiting rights only.'[63] *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* attempts to subvert this.

International travel perfectly encapsulates the geopolitical debate raging in America at the time concerning the US's approach to fighting the Cold War and living up to the American Century. In doing so, it simultaneously and ironically raises debate on issues closer to home. Serving as a snapshot of the issues plaguing 1945-1965, *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* and *The Snow Creature* are two examples of science fiction that feature international travel as part of their respective commentaries. Standing at the summit of the world in 1954, the creative minds behind *The Snow Creature* clearly believed that they should flaunt their power accordingly. This superiority complex in turn extended to issues of race and the notion that the white American man was unrivalled in his abilities. Released at a time of racial strife, *The Snow Creature* presents a blatantly racist view that plays to an embedded sense of white supremacy in US society. *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* engages with a different outlook. Jack Arnold's approach criticises everything for which Wilder's film stands. Similar to Klaatu boldly referring to the Cold War as a 'petty squabble' in *The Day the Earth*

[62] ibid.
This is a plot point that carries over into the relationship between the creature and Helen in its sequel, *Revenge of the Creature* (1955).
[63] Referencing John Clute: Andrew M. Butler, *Solar Flares* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), p. 11

Stood Still (1951), Jack Arnold's sympathetic portrayal of the Gill-man is damning of the US.[64] International travel and fantastical creatures allowed for a safe place to do such damning. Interplanetary travel, likewise, uses the theatre of space to engage in similar commentary.

[64] *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), dir. Robert Wise

Interplanetary Travel and its significance within the context of the Cold War and the American Century

> The thirty de Havilland Jenny biplanes flying in tight formation in the cloudless Texan sky spelt out the letters 'USA'. Bending down toward me, I remember my mother pointing to the tip of the letter 'S' and shouting 'there's your dad, Davy!'. . . It always reminded me of the moment in my childhood when I became hooked on the idea of becoming a pilot, just like my dad.[1]

The above testament is from David Scott, Commander of Apollo 15 and the seventh person to walk on the moon. As a future pioneer, this quotation places the abstract concept of the USA, in association with pride for both his father and his nation, as the motivation behind his later success. Within the context of the American Century, it reinforces just how embedded this sense of nationalism was within American identity and how the drive to break 'new ground' as it had in the nineteenth century now offered the opportunity, indeed the challenge, to remain at the head of world affairs. Interplanetary travel serves as an extension of the themes inherent in international travel; it engages with the geopolitical position of the US in the post-war world, and offers commentary on attitudes to, and representations of, race and gender. It also sparks a discussion concerning the Cold War more directly, as its presence within the realms of science fiction increased exponentially alongside the space race.

In science fiction, space became another frontier for the US to conquer; planets such as Venus and Mars became potential new homes for the American people – for their white population, more accurately – and the moon became an object of strategic importance as the US and the USSR competed to make it a base of operations from which to fire nuclear warheads, and ultimately control the outcome of the Cold War. Additionally, interplanetary travel can be interpreted to encompass the alien invasion narrative; of

[1] David Scott and Alexei Leonov, *Two Sides of the Moon* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2004), p.11

other-worldly beings travelling from their planet to earth and the discussions provoked in the atmosphere cultivated by Cold War paranoia. The twin fears of domestic subversion and an all-out declaration of war by the Soviets immediately spring to mind.

From film and television to comic-books and novels, the popular culture of the early Cold War period was fascinated with the story-telling opportunities provided by the vast expanses of space.[2] This chapter will look at the depiction of space travel as part of an attempt to explore space precisely as a 'space' to work through the constellation of issues that constituted the American Century.

> Let me take you on a little trip. My supersonic ship's at your disposal, if you feel so inclined.[3]

Invasion Narratives, Cold War Anxieties and the Space Race

> I don't know whether you remember the week the Russians sent up their first Sputnik. That was quite a week.[4]
>
> . . . every man, woman and child [is] in danger of being blown off the face of the living earth – what with those bloody moons hovering over our heads right now and missiles that can travel across continents . . .[5]

The launch of Sputnik I (the first artificial Earth satellite) on October 4, 1957 is popularly considered the beginning of the space race between the US and the USSR. This section aims to explore the setting of outer space as a source of anxiety for the American people by looking at the alien invasion narrative. The launching of Sputnik I by the Soviets should be viewed as *the* concrete event that solidified American fears related to the Cold War, giving them reason to worry as the USSR seemingly drew ahead of the once-superior US; a devastating blow to both the collective psyche of the

[2] The comic-book industry capitalised on this fascination with space. To name just a few, Avon Comics published *Out of this World* (1956-1959) and *Strange Worlds* (1950-1955); Charlton produced *Mysteries of Unexplored Worlds* (1956-1965); DC Comics ran *Strange Adventures* (1950-1978) and *Mystery in Space* (1951-1966); and EC released the short-lived *Weird Science* (1950-1953).
[3] The Kinks, 'Supersonic Rocket Ship', Track Eight on *Everybody's in Show-Biz*, RCA, 1972, Vinyl
[4] Ben Barzman, *Echo X* (USA: Paperback Library Inc., 1962), p.69
[5] Ibid., p.217

nation and the yet-to-be-recorded history of the American Century. Rob Latham argues that 'the escalation of the US space program following Sputnik only increased sf's crossover appeal'.[6] However, it is important to remember that outer space had captured the imagination of America long before this. One only has to look to John Carter of Mars created by Edgar Rice Burroughs in 1912, the pulp magazine *Amazing Stories* launched in 1926, or comic-strip characters like Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon created in 1928 and 1934, respectively, for proof of this. These fears pertaining to space gradually became more prevalent as the Cold War looked to become a reality with the detonation of the first atomic bomb in 1945. To reiterate, Sputnik simply served to solidify these once seemingly far-fetched fears. This section will establish the foundations of analysis by looking firstly at a Superman comic from 1950. This will be used as a representative model for the alien invasion narrative across comic-books as a medium. Using this story to lay the groundwork, the analysis will then turn to the presence of the alien invasion narrative in film as this section endeavours to interweave the anxieties of the era across mediums.

Adam Roberts has stated that 'critics are divided as to exactly when SF stopped being a minority interest and became a mass phenomenon. According to Edward James, it was during the 1950s that the genre experienced a "boom in America" leading to an explosive "growth in SF readership". James thinks that this readership was "inspired perhaps by worries of the future (for the Cold War fostered paranoia of all kinds)."[7] The 'apocalyptic imagination' (a term coined by Jerome F. Shapiro) stood at the forefront of this newfound culture of paranoia.[8] This 'imagination' was directly encouraged by the

[6] Rob Latham, 'Fiction, 1950-1963', in Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts, and Sheryl Vint, *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), pp.80-89, (pp.85-86)
[7] Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.80
[8] Jerome F. Shapiro, 'Atomic Bomb Cinema: Illness, Suffering, and the Apocalyptic Narrative', *Literature and Medicine*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1998) pp. 126-148 (p.128)

advent of the atomic age. Responding to the rise in fiction dealing with a post-apocalyptic world seen in novels such as *I am Legend* (1954), *The Long Tomorrow* (1955) and *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959), Shapiro argues that the apocalypse narrative is 'an example of how the culture responds to and represents events that induce anxiety.'[9] For the purposes of this work, this same analysis applies to interplanetary travel and the invasion narrative. With the rapid developments being made in science and technology in the aftermath of the Trinity Test on 16 July, 1945 – the world's first detonation of a nuclear device at Alamogordo, New Mexico, USA – these narratives rose in popularity because they no longer felt like a pipe dream. Where Sputnik I served as *the* concrete event that solidified cause for anxiety as 'a national space program became imperative to national survival,' these anxieties were nevertheless first realistically induced with the mushroom cloud over Hiroshima.[10]

Evidence for earlier fascination with and fear of atomic power is abundant. Superman welcomed the 1950s with an interplanetary story featuring Orson Welles. 'Black Magic on Mars' from *Superman* #62 (1950), sees Welles and the Man of Steel embroiled in an apocalyptic struggle with the Great Martler of Mars who, with help from his loyal subjects, the Solazis, intends to 'Blitzkrieg the solar system'.[11] While not the first issue

[9] ibid.
[10] Matthew Yockey, 'The Island Manhatten: New York City and the Space Race in The Fantastic Four', *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2005, pp.57-79, (p.62)
[11] Alvin Schwartz, Wayne Boring et al., *Superman* #62, DC Comics, 1950
It is worth noting that *Superman* #62 is the first issue since *Superman* #53 (August 1948) to feature space at the forefront of its cover art. Even in *Superman* #53 this was merely a cover depicting Superman's origin. This is made even more interesting when juxtaposed against the cover of the previous issue, titled: "Does Superman prefer Lois Lane as a Blonde, Brunette or Red Head?". Regardless of whether it was intended or not, the juxtaposition of them is interesting because the action-heavy, sci-fi oriented cover of issue #62 compared to the *Archie*-esque nature of *Superman* #61 is almost suggestive that the 1950s had arrived; that the Cold War and the space race would soon be at the forefront of the American mind, and space as the final frontier would take on even greater significance as its people looked to the stars for answers. Of course, this story was by no means a game-changer or illustrative of a shift in tone for the character. Nevertheless, the decision to place the concept of space exploration at the forefront of the issue that thrust the character into a new decade should not go without mention.

to do so, *Superman* #62 succeeds in grounding this sense of fantasy provided by the backdrop of space in contemporary context. Admittedly playing it safe by not casting the villains as overt allegories for Stalin and the Soviet Union, this story does play on a threat that was familiar, albeit less enigmatic. By modelling the Martians on the vanquished Third Reich this story continues to place the dictator as the enemy of both the United States and the free world. Martler and the Solazis build on the familiar, keeping the dictator at the forefront of the reader's imagination, while simultaneously easing them into a new era and its potential for a similarly dictatorial villain in Stalin and his successors. To quote John Donovan, it also presents space as a 'future battleground', which resonates with Shapiro's analysis as to 'how the culture responds to and represents events that induce anxiety.'[12] To reiterate, this is a premise that had long existed in the realms of American science fiction but, with the advent of the atomic age and the rapidity of scientific advancement in the years since, space as a 'space' for acting out a heated Cold War had now entered the realms of possibility.[13] Like the American West before it, space was also seen as a frontier for the US to expand the reaches of its power and influence. As history dictates, inherent to this expansion is the accompanying reality of conflict produced by other parties competing for control of this territory. The Cold War created the perfect conditions for such a conflict, and this would later come to fruition with the USSR's launching of Sputnik I and the 'critical Cold War test' that followed.[14]

[12] Jerome F. Shapiro, 'Atomic Bomb Cinema: Illness, Suffering, and the Apocalyptic Narrative', *Literature and Medicine*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1998) pp. 126-148 (p.128)
[13] John Donovan, 'Red Menace on the Moon: Containment in Space as Depicted in Comics of the 1950s' in Chris York and Rafiel York, *Comic Books and the Cold War: Essays on Graphic Treatment of Communism, the Code and Social Concerns, 1946-1962* (London: McFarland, 2012), pp.79-90 (p.80)
[14] Andrew S. Erickson, 'Revisiting the U.S.-Soviet space race: Comparing two systems in their competition to land a man on the moon', *Acta Astronautica*, Vol. 148 (2018), pp. 376-384 (p.378)

Like its cinematic counterparts, 'Black Magic on Mars' capitalises on arguably the biggest fear of the Cold War: invasion from an enigmatic foreign enemy. David Seed writes: 'long before they possessed the technical means, Soviet attacks on the USA were imagined and the popularity of dystopias . . . coincided with the hardening of a consensus on the Soviet threat.'[15] 'From the fifties right into the 1980s', he writes, 'the conviction of malign Soviet intent produced a series of narratives dealing with the communist takeover of the USA.'[16] *Invasion U.S.A.* (1952), as perhaps the most notable example (see chapter three), depicts this literally but this narrative, and the fears inherent to it, were more often depicted allegorically in a narrative unique to science fiction – the alien invasion.[17] At the height of this narrative's popularity, these invaders often served as allegories for a more terrifying 'alien' menace; a red menace. In *Invaders from Mars* (1953), *It Came from Outer Space* (1953) and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), for example, the argument can be made that these aliens stood in for communist saboteurs or brainwashed GI's.[18] Alternatively, the Martians in *The War of the Worlds* (1953) and *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* (1956) served to embody the threat of a more direct attack on the US from the Red Army. 'Black Magic on Mars' falls into this latter camp. No longer a threat to the US by the time of its publication in 1950, the Hitler-esque Martler instead draws comparisons to the contemporary threat embodied by Stalin and the USSR. While the name and appearance are clearly indicative of Hitler, communism and fascism were, by the 1950s, interchangeable political extremes and

[15] David Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War: Literature and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.94
[16] ibid., p.95
[17] *Invasion U.S.A.* is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.
[18] Again, to reiterate, this is just one interpretation among many possible readings of these films. As film, like all popular culture, is subjective to the individual consumer, this is by no means *the* definitive reading as many have argued – and rightly so – that the aliens in these motion pictures are instead representative of McCarthyite conformists rather than subversives. The only thing emerging with any clarity is that these films are overdetermined spaces where multiple, even contradictory, meanings coexist.

often characters who had been Nazis during the war became communists after it. Martler intends to conquer earth using his fleet of technologically advanced space ships; a threat that, while fantastical now, began to attract real concerns among some in the US at the time. This is especially true given that the technological parameters of the Cold War began to open up following the USSR's detonation of 'an exact copy of the Alamogordo bomb' in 1949.[19]

Despite being published in 1950, the Soviets' successful launch of Sputnik I in 1957 serves as an extension of this achievement, furthering this paranoia to an unprecedented level. The USSR had seemingly done the impossible by making the first move in their presumed conquest of space. More significantly, they had done so before the US. As the nation that had held the atomic monopoly and had been unrivalled in the fields of science and technology less than a decade before, this was a feat that 'caused a crisis of confidence' in its impact on the collective psyche of the US.[20] To quote Andrew Erickson:

> Having achieved the world's first satellite launch on October 4, 1957, Khrushchev believed that a new era of missiles could "demonstrate the advantages of socialism." Building on Stalin's assertion that technology decided everything, Khrushchev quickly cited Sputnik as proof that – thanks to its superior system – the USSR was surpassing the West. Washington's failure to match Moscow's feat – despite plans to orbit a satellite since 1955 – alarmed many Americans, who, like those in other nations, believed Khrushchev's exaggeration.[21]

This collective fear surrounding the ramifications of Sputnik was exacerbated by a popular view of the Soviets and communism at the time. According to Cyndy Hendershot: 'I.F. Stone astutely observed that during the 1950s, American liberals and

[19] Christopher Andrew, 'Intelligence and International Relations in the Early Cold War', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 24, No.3, (1998), pp. 321-330, (p.326)
[20] Iana Kohonen, 'The Space Race and Soviet Utopian Thinking', in David Bell and Martin Parker, *Space Travel and Culture: From Apollo to Space Tourism*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), pp.114-131, (pp. 114-115)
[21] Andrew S. Erickson, 'Revisiting the U.S.-Soviet space race', *Acta Astronautica*, Vol. 148 (2018), pp. 376-384 (p.377)

conservatives alike painted communists as "some supernatural breed of men, led by diabolical masterminds in that distant Kremlin, engaged in a satanic conspiracy to take over the world and enslave all mankind".[22] Combine this popular sentiment with John Donovan's assessment that space was seen as a 'future battleground' of the Cold War – an assessment repeatedly enforced by the alien invasion narrative in the years before Sputnik – and it becomes apparent why space was seen as crucial territory by the US, but also why the Soviets being the first to pioneer here had such an effect on their psyche. While fantastical to the modern-day viewer, the following excerpt of dialogue from *Invaders from Mars* (1953) is helpful in summarising popular fears belonging to this period and simultaneously indicates why science fiction become a popular vehicle for voicing these fears.

> Once we can shoot a rocket far enough into space it will just anchor there and then it's merely a matter of time before we set up interplanetary stations equipped with atomic power and operated by remote control. If any nation dared to attack the United States, just by pushing a few buttons we could wipe them out in a matter of minutes.[23]

The effect of Sputnik can be compared to the 'dangerous American myth of the "bomber gap", later followed by that of the "missile gap" in the early 1950s.'[24] It not only marked a major blow to the US's sense of superiority, it sounded alarm bells concerning the security of the nation. The Russians were coming.

Space was a tremendous source of anxiety for the US during the period discussed here. In 'Black Magic on Mars', the invasion never makes it to earth because Superman shows up and scuppers Martler's plan by forcibly removing him from the planet and exiling him to an isolated asteroid belt, essentially containing his once dangerous

[22] Cyndy Hendershot, 'From Trauma to Paranoia: Nuclear Weapons, Science Fiction, and History', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (1999), pp. 73-90, (p.77)
[23] *Invaders from Mars* (1953), dir. William Cameron Menzies
[24] Christopher Andrew, 'Intelligence and International Relations in the Early Cold War', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 24, No.3, (1998), pp. 321-330, (p.327)

influence; an act that would unknowingly foreshadow the US's long international history of removing influential figures from seats of power. Cinematically, earth is rarely so fortunate. Playing on the prevalent fears of a Soviet invasion and the potential for destruction held by the USSR's possession of atomic weaponry, the catastrophic destruction of US cities played a major role in the invasion narrative; a trope that extends to the creature features of this decade – most notably, *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953) which sees the titular monster 'devastate New York City.'[25] David Seed argues that 'the larger enterprise in these narratives of imagining [the] . . . conquest and occupation [of the USA] . . . is rendered symbolically through the erasure of cultural icons.'[26] Crucially for *Beast*, the titular monster descends from the Arctic circle, potentially indicative of the Soviet Union and its line of attack on the US, along the line of defensive radar stations on the east coast. The beast finishes up in Coney Island, a potent symbol of American culture, but it is defeated there; an unconscious acknowledgement, perhaps, of the significant role of American cultural warfare in the struggle with the Soviets. Destruction of cultural icons is most prominent, though, in *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* as the Martians descend on Washington DC during the film's climactic battle, destroying historical landmarks such as the Washington Monument, the Capitol Building, and the Supreme Court. 'In a 1957 article on Freud's theory of the "death instinct," psychoanalyst Franz Alexander warned that the insecurity of American society may be a sign of decline, comparable to the fall of Rome.'[27] The destruction of these historical and cultural landmarks play into the insecurity to which Alexander refers; it reiterates that, unlike in 1945 when they held the atomic monopoly

[25] Mark Jancovich and Derek Johnston, 'Film and Television, the 1950s', in Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts, and Sheryl Vint, *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), pp.71-79, (p.74)

[26] David Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.105

[27] Citing Franz Alexander: Cyndy Hendershot, 'From Trauma to Paranoia', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (1999), pp. 73-90, (p.84)

and revelled in their post-war triumph, the US was vulnerable. These landmarks are not only architecturally symbolic of American power and prestige – their very structure is symbolic of the foundations on which the US was built – but the American way of life. Their destruction drives home the reality that the American Century might mark the historic downfall of the United States, rather than its triumphant ascent.[28] *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* might end on a happy note, with the Martians defeated and the film's married protagonists retiring to the beach, but it is the images of chaos and destruction that stay with the audience long after the credits have rolled. The stopper the conclusion attempts to put on the bottle of the film's narrative is insufficient to prevent a little chaos and uncertainty leaking through to stain the popular imaginary.

The Space Expedition Narrative

Existing alongside the alien invasion narrative, films and other media depicting space expeditions to the moon and other planets serve as an extension of these fears. This section will expand on the issues discussed above by focusing on a small handful of films belonging to the era. Keith M. Johnston claims that 'space exploration was not a dominant theme of 1950s science fiction', hence the shortness of this section.[29] In spite of this, however, the significance of space to Americans in the context of the Cold War and the American Century is perhaps best highlighted by the few examples where space exploration is the dominant theme. This is particularly true of *Destination Moon* (1950). As the title suggests, this film follows a team of American astronauts as they make the first successful trip to the moon. The film immediately establishes its Cold War setting by opening with the 'sabotage' of a US rocket.[30] When asked what went wrong, Dr

[28] *Invasion U.S.A.* (1952) discussed in the next chapter would also play on these fears in a less fantastical, closer-to-home way.
[29] Keith M. Johnston, *Science Fiction Film: A Critical Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p.79
[30] *Destination Moon* (1950), dir. Irving Pichel

Cargraves replies: 'somebody tampered'.[31] Released just three months after the trial and conviction of Klaus Fuchs (a German theoretical physicist who supplied the atomic secrets of the Manhattan Project to the Soviet Union) at the height of paranoia concerning the presence of Soviet spies in the US, it is difficult not to assume that this 'somebody' was sympathetic to the Soviet cause. Before it has really begun, the film establishes that space is intrinsically tied to the nature of the Cold War.

Picking up two years later, a new rocket has been built for a manned flight. David Seed writes: 'here the flight is dramatized as a continuation of the US military machine (the space rocket is named *Big Boy*, a revision of the Hiroshima bomb *Little Boy*) and, more importantly, as a national race between the USA and the Soviets: "the first base is going to belong to us – or to Russia", declares one of the crew.'[32] Seven years before Sputnik, the exploration and colonisation of space was intrinsically tied to the outcome of the Cold War and, with it, the power and reputation of a nation. This is supported by Andrew Erickson, who writes: 'the Cold War was "a sustained competition in power creation," with space as one of its central theatres, and a race to land a man on the moon at the core.'[33] Like many plots from this era of science fiction, the film is obsessed with beating the Soviets to the moon; a plot that would mirror the space race beginning in 1957 and ending in 1969. Explaining the significance of the mission, General Thayer informs the audience:

> That rocket is an absolute necessity. If any other power gets one out into space before we do, we'll no longer be the United States, we'll be the disunited world.[34]

[31] ibid.
[32] David Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War: Literature and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.33
[33] Andrew S. Erickson, 'Revisiting the U.S.-Soviet space race', *Acta Astronautica*, Vol. 148 (2018), pp. 376-384 (p.377)
[34] *Destination Moon* (1950), dir. Irving Pichel

> We are not the only ones who know the moon can be reached. We are not the only ones who are planning to go there. The race is on, and we'd better win it because there is absolutely no way to stop an attack from outer space! The first man who can use the moon for the launching of missiles will control the earth. That, gentlemen, is the most important military fact of this century.[35]

While General Thayer's comments may sound wildly exaggerated today, these anxieties held considerable weight at this moment in time. Thayer's statements are also rooted historically through naming practices: 'Thayer' recalls the renowned nineteenth century American naval strategist, Alfred Thayer Mahan, who wrote of the significance of sea power in the creation and maintenance of the British Empire. What sea had done for Britain, space could do for the US. Identifying Thayer's comments as hyperbole, Johnston argues with hindsight that while *Destination Moon* 'suggested a privately funded expedition to the moon, there were few signs, in the early 1950s, that man was able to reach the stars.'[36] In spite of this, the ability of popular culture to tap into these real anxieties is supported by an article in the Soviet news agency *TASS*, published in response to the Soviet Luna II becoming the first probe to reach the moon on September 13, 1959. It read: 'there will [soon] be laboratories, sanatoria, and observatories on the moon.'[37] Released in June 1950, it should also be taken into consideration that these fantastical fears arose during a time when science and technology were rapidly advancing at a pace that had been unknown before. The Soviets had detonated their own atomic bomb in 1949; a feat 'American intelligence estimates had previously suggested would occur in 1953, while the British Joint Intelligence Committee believed that 1954 was the most likely date.'[38] Underestimated by its Western competition, the Soviets

[35] ibid.
[36] Keith M. Johnston, *Science Fiction Film: A Critical Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p.80
[37] Andrew S. Erickson, 'Revisiting the U.S.-Soviet space race', *Acta Astronautica*, Vol. 148 (2018), pp. 376-384 (p.378)
[38] Richard J. Aldrich, 'British Intelligence and the Anglo-American "Special Relationship" during the Cold War', *Review of International Studies*, Vol.24, No.3, (1998), pp.331-351, (p.333)

were proving to be a formidable opponent, and space, as proven later by Sputnik, was looking to be the next theatre of this constantly evolving rivalry. Just seven years later with the revelation of Sputnik:

> Robert Amory of the CIA informed [Sir Patrick] Dean[, Chairman of the JIC,] privately that, in reality, American intelligence agencies in Washington could not accept the essence of the British view that there would be a three-year gap between Sputnik and the arrival of a real threat from Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). The Americans believed that 'appreciable quantities' of ICBMs could be deployed in the next one to two years.[39]

Illustrating that this was not an isolated fear, other films from this decade would go on to showcase a similar concern towards the dangers inherent to the conquest of space. In *Flight to Mars* (1951), one character notes that they are 'close enough to the man on the moon to be able to talk to him.' To this observation, another retorts, 'if you do talk to him, be careful what you say. The moon can be a deadly menace to us.'[40] Not only were the Russians coming then, but the game was afoot. The USSR would prove this in 1957 with Sputnik I and their later achievements, prompting President Kennedy to 'declare a race to the moon on April 25, 1961.'[41] Outside of cinema, this declaration would have a major impact on another defining moment in cultural history: the origin of Marvel's 'first family', The Fantastic Four, according to Matthew Yockey, owe their creation to this perceived need to beat the 'commies' into space, a fact that 'locates the very existence of the group as superheroes within a space race context.'[42] Adding to this, Sean Howe observes that 'the space-race themes couldn't have been better timed:

[39] ibid., pp. 346-347
[40] *Flight to Mars* (1951), dir. Lesley Selander
[41] Andrew S. Erickson, 'Revisiting the U.S.-Soviet space race', *Acta Astronautica*, Vol. 148 (2018), pp. 376-384 (p.378)
[42] Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, et al., *The Fantastic Four* #1, Marvel Comics, 1961
Matthew Yockey, 'The Island Manhatten: New York City and the Space Race in The Fantastic Four', *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2005, pp.57-79, (p.59)

between the conception and publication of the comic, the Soviets made cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin the first man in space.'[43]

Interplanetary travel was also often used to comment on the potentially devastating ramifications of engaging in a full-scale war with the USSR. This is depicted particularly well in *Rocketship X-M* (1950). Here, a team of American astronauts shoot past the moon by mistake and arrive on Mars instead. After landing on the desolate red planet, the crew discover a city in ruins: it is clear that the planet was once home to an advanced species of Martians 'at least the equal to earth; perhaps considerably above.'[44] Picking up 'a strong field of radiation' on their Geiger counters in addition to acknowledging that the destruction was caused by 'blast effect coupled with intense heat', it is ascertained that this once-great civilisation had been subjected to a nuclear war.[45] Clearly a warning to mankind on behalf of the creative team, Dr Eckstrom reflects on this discovery by saying:

> Ironic isn't it? The mind of man wherever you encounter it. Earth or Mars. The highest attainments of human intellect always divert to self-destruction.[46]

The similarities between the Martians and humanity are later reinforced when the team come across humanoid natives of Mars, clad in what can only be described as prehistoric attire. Reiterating the parallels between them and us and, in doing so, foreshadowing the future of mankind if their current trajectory persists, Eckstrom's last words note that these 'savages' have gone 'from atomic age to stone age.'[47] This

[43] Sean Howe, *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story* (London: Harper Perennial, 2012) p.38
[44] *Rocketship X-M* (1950), dir. Kurt Neumann
[45] ibid.
[46] ibid.
Forbidden Planet (1956), dir. Fred M. Wilcox deals with similar themes.
[47] ibid. Cold War critique here is exacerbated by the fact that Dalton Trumbo, a member of the Hollywood blacklist, is now known to have worked, uncredited, on the screenplay.
A similar sentiment is expressed in Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* (1950): 'Looking at all this, we know we're not so hot; we're kids in rompers, shouting with our play rockets and atoms, loud and alive. But one day Earth will be as Mars is today. This will sober us. It's an object lesson in civilizations. We'll

expedition to Mars, the invasion narrative, and the race to the moon all fall under the banner of interplanetary travel as they endeavour to use outer space as a 'space' to navigate the issues and anxieties inherent to the Cold War. This 'space' often serves as a parallel for existing problems with alien invaders serving as allegories for the Soviets, and Mars serving as a literal parallel for Earth and its Cold War trajectory. Capitalising on the power of popular culture, it ironically makes the fantastical a vehicle for serious commentary concerning the issues of the day.

> Well, that goes to show you what a moon can do[48]

Finding a Geopolitical Place amongst the Stars

John Dumbrell asserts that 'the "psychology of supremacy" heralded . . . by the "American Century" was to dominate U.S. attitudes between 1945 and 1960. On the other hand', he writes, 'anxieties and insecurities that accompanied the new sense of American power profoundly shaped the national experience in these years.'[49] This psychological paradox of simultaneously looking forward and over one's shoulder, is prominent in American popular culture throughout 1945-1965. It is a particularly prevalent theme of this work as highlighted by *The Snow Creature* in chapter one. Illustrating the split in public opinion towards the American Century as Dumbrell suggests, *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* diametrically opposes the psychology of supremacy on display in *The Snow Creature*. Just as international travel in these films created a space for geopolitical commentary concerning the American Century, interplanetary travel served as a similar conduit for debate. Although, as the previous

learn from Mars.' Ray Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles* (Hammersmith, London: Harper Voyager, 2008), p.90

[48] Captain Beefheart & His Magic Band, 'Moonlight on the Vermont', Track Six on *Trout Mask Replica*, Straight, 1969, Vinyl

[49] John Dumbrell, 'Cold War America, 1945-1960', in Iwan W. Morgan, and Neil A. Wyann, *America's Century: Perspectives on U.S. History since 1900* (New York, U.S.A: Homes and Meier Publishers, 1993), pp.133-157, (p.133)

sections in this chapter highlight, interplanetary travel differs slightly to international travel in the sense that its commentary was often more deeply rooted in the issues relating to the Cold War. Looking closely at the novel *Echo X* (1960) by Ben Barzman and the character of Green Lantern revamped by DC Comics in 1960, this section will build on discussions in the previous sections of this chapter by exploring the geopolitical commentary inherent to interplanetary travel as a narrative device.

Building on the concept of Mars acting as a parallel world to Earth in *Rocketship X-M*, interplanetary travel offers fantastic opportunity to delve into the 'anxieties and insecurities' to which Dumbrell refers. *Echo X* takes the commentary on offer in *Rocketship X-M* and uses it to craft a story that deals with the discovery of a parallel earth.[50] This earth is almost identical to its sister planet. 'Everything that's been happening in our planet has been happening here – in almost – *almost*, I say – the same way.'[51] The exception to this is that the Second World War did not occur in their history, resulting in a peaceful and technologically superior planet that stands in stark contrast to the planet we know. Travel between the two planets is made possible by a ray of light that has revolutionised the way people live on this sister earth. The audience is informed that the ray was discovered in 'December 1941 – a Japanese research team announced the discovery.'[52] The novel makes it clear that the trajectory of these twin earths diverges at the precise moment the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor in our reality, thus directly associating the Second World War and the trajectory it sets in motion with the downfall of mankind. The basic premise of this story sees a delegation visit earth to ascertain whether its people can be trusted with this technology and inducted into their scientific community.

[50] *Echo X* was released in the US as *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.*
[51] Ben Barzman, *Echo X* (USA: Paperback Library Inc., 1962), p.140
[52] ibid., p.204

> [The World Council] will decide . . . if it is safe and desirable to turn over all of our scientific data to the people of your world and to set in motion our interplanetary project . . . It will depend simply on the question as to whether or not it would constitute a risk to the security of our world . . . If it turns out you are a very fierce and warlike people . . . then of course it would be foolhardy on our part to put in your hands an instrument with which you could easily destroy us.[53]

Barzman, harnessing the context of the Cold War, leaves no doubt in the readers mind that we are not worthy of this technology. Upon hearing about this discovery, the military swiftly devise ways to turn this technology into weaponry for the US to use against the Soviets. 'I've been led to believe you've discovered something of great military importance . . . haven't you invented something that can kill at a distance?', chimes the narrator's villainous uncle.[54] 'Have you any idea what it means? It means we'd have them! We'd have them! . . . We could wipe them off the face of the earth once and for all! . . . Blot them out!'[55] Standing in stark contrast to the sister planet that use this ray for the purposes of travel and as a source of clean energy, this warmongering attitude is damning of contemporary militarism. Whereas the discovery of this ray unites the people of Earth Two as is emphasised by the existence of a World Council where the Soviets and the Chinese work in harmony with the US and Britain, the ray immediately creates a frenzy on Earth One as the US military races to monopolise its power for the purposes of definitively winning the Cold War. In light of this concerning reality, the delegation unsurprisingly refuse Earth entry into their scientific community.

> It is with profound regret that the World Council has come to the unanimous conclusion that the peoples of our sister planet have not yet achieved that degree of development which would permit us to place at their disposal all the scientific and technological data which they do not possess.[56]

[53] ibid., p.173
[54] ibid., p.215
[55] ibid., p.216
[56] ibid., p.229

Narratively, this is similar to a story featured in *Captain Marvel Adventures* #98 (1949) which sees the titular hero visit the 'United Worlds'; an interplanetary play on the United Nations.[57] Like Earth's sister planet in *Echo X*, the planets belonging to the United Worlds 'have known only peace and prosperity.'[58] Again, similarly to Barzman's novel, Captain Marvel is informed that Earth was rejected membership over 500 years ago for being a 'backward planet' that has 'wars, crime and starvation.'[59] When he appeals this decision, it becomes clear that little has changed in five centuries. Earth is still plagued by war, famine and starvation, and, as a result, Earth is once again rejected membership. It is later offered membership when Captain Marvel saves the planet from asteroids and cures the president of typhoid; an offer Fawcett's flagship hero ultimately refuses. Instead, Captain Marvel chooses to leave his audience with a direct appeal to their sensibilities:

> Yes, folks, Earth needs a general cleaning up, as we all know! So let us put our shoulders to the wheel and rid our world of war, crime and all other evils! Only this way can we ever win our true place in the universe![60]

Eleven years later, Barzman would 'echo' this sentiment, illustrating that little had changed between 1949 and 1960 in regards to mankind's appetite for destruction. Both use utopian societies in juxtaposition to earth for the purposes of criticising the potentially devastating trajectory of the Cold War. Earlier in Barzman's story, the narrator and his love interest are at dinner with friends where they discuss the prospect of atomic warfare. Walking back from the restaurant, the narrator says: 'I know there won't be an atomic war in the same way I know that people in those apartment houses

[57] C. C. Beck, *Captain Marvel Adventures* #98, Fawcett Comics, 1949.
[58] ibid.
[59] ibid.
[60] ibid.
Rocky Balboa would later end the Cold War with a similar sentiment upon the release of *Rocky IV* in 1985.

won't suddenly start throwing themselves and their children out of their windows.'[61] To this, Jane replies: 'your point is very well taken . . . What you're saying is that we mustn't underestimate the fundamental urge to live. No matter what other complicated drives are superimposed on people, that simple instinct will always emerge as paramount. People want to live.'[62] As the novel draws to a close with the delegation's verdict and, more significantly, the emphasis placed on the military's obsession with obtaining this ray for destructive purposes, this earlier sentiment feels redundant. Like *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*, the reader is left with a disconcerting feeling that 'the fundamental urge to live' is no longer enough to prevent these two superpowers dooming the rest of the world. By marking the Second World War as the point in which these two earths diverge, *Echo X* offers a damning criticism of the Cold War and the attitudes of animosity on both sides that existed solely to bring our planet closer to the brink of annihilation. By offering a glimpse of an alternate earth that becomes a utopia because it avoided the bloodshed of WWII, the negative atomic advances created as a by-product, and the tensions that arose between East and West in its aftermath, the reader is left contemplating what could have been, and is spurred on to correct this course while they still can.

The other side to this coin as laid out by Dumbrell's assessment can be seen in DC's revamp of *Green Lantern* in 1960. Hal Jordan's run as the character introduces its audience to a superhero who belongs to an intergalactic police force known as the Green Lantern Corp. As keeper of the peace, it is Hal's responsibility to step in whenever a threat arises on earth or any of the planets under his protection; there is a clear parallel to the US's commitment to containment and rollback at this time. *Green Lantern* #1 (1960) is of particular note in regards to this 'psychology of supremacy' because it

[61] Ben Barzman, *Echo X* (USA: Paperback Library Inc., 1962), p.45
[62] ibid., p.46

explains how Hal became the Green Lantern. Crash landing on Earth, a dying alien member of the corps has to pass the mantle of the Green Lantern onto a suitable replacement. This successor must be an 'honest man . . . born without fear' who is chosen by the mystic nature of the Green Lantern's power ring.[63] After scanning the entire planet, the ring settles on Hal who, unsurprisingly, is a white American male. Chosen by a higher power – perhaps like the US in the aftermath of the Second World War – the future safety of this world and those which surrounded it, was placed in the hands of an American and, by proxy, the US.

If Henry Luce is to be believed, the American Century dictated that the latter half of the twentieth century would be forged by America. This idea carries more significance as the issue and its run progresses. In this first story titled 'The Planet of Doomed Men', Hal is tasked with liberating a race of Neanderthals from a 'fantastic gorilla-like creature' known as the Dryg.[64] A towering red monster (menace), the Dryg hunts and persecutes these helpless natives who are defined as primitive by their dishevelled form, lack of clothing and religion that involves the worship of a tree. In their worship they call out for a saviour to rescue them from their tormentor; a prayer Hal Jordan answers.[65] To quote Michael Goodrum, 'in terms of an image of American self, and American masculinity in particular, the narrative positions the US as a saviour, riding to the rescue of those less fortunate than itself.'[66] The Dryg is quite clearly representative of communism's destructive reach in Eastern Europe and Asia at the time, and the

[63] John Broome and Gil Kane, et al., *Green Lantern* #1, DC Comics, 1960
[64] ibid.
[65] In answering this prayer, Hal and, by extension, the US, is cast in a biblical light. This is a recurring motif of DC's superhero adventures; one that exists across their many properties and speaks volumes about their perceived geopolitical place in the world. This is explored further in time travel.
[66] Michael Goodrum, *Superheroes and American Self Image: From War to Watergate* (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2016), pp.61-62
To place his quote in context, Goodrum is referring to a story titled 'Ride, Bat-Hombre, Ride!' from *Batman* #56 (1949) which comments on the geopolitical position of the US by means of international travel. As stated previously, international and interplanetary travel often intertwine in regards to geopolitics. *Batman* #134 (1960) is another good example.

Neanderthals are likewise representative of those in danger of succumbing to this plight. As a commentary on the geopolitical atmosphere in 1960 – drawing particular influence from the unfolding situation in Vietnam – this god-like depiction of Hal Jordan plays into the 'psychology of superiority' that Dumbrell refers to, and speaks volumes about the existence of a certain attitude in the US concerning their place in the world. The primitive depiction of these natives is an essential part of this geopolitical commentary as the creative team seemingly draw inspiration from Native American and Asian stereotypes. Their worship of the tree, reference to the 'spirit of Ka-Ma', and the emphasis placed on the elements through language such as 'the natives are running as if scattered by the wind' evoke comparisons to popular conceptions of the Native American.[67] Likewise, their meek stature and yellow skin plays to racist stereotypes often applied to Asians; the colour of their skin is also symbolic of cowardice. By mapping these stereotypes onto the natives of this planet, the creative team associate the unfolding situation in Vietnam (the Vietnam War lasted from 1955-1975) with the American Frontier and consequently frame US involvement as a means of enlightenment; the natives evoking a primitivism that had once applied to the 'savages' of the Great Plains but had now become interchangeable with the residents of South Vietnam. Incapable of helping themselves and unable to demonstrate modern levels of social development, this negative representation of the natives reinforces the presence of this supremacy complex in the US; a complex informed by the pre-discussed issues of racism and xenophobia present on the home front. [68]

[67] John Broome and Gil Kane, et al., *Green Lantern* #1, DC Comics, 1960

[68] This exportation of domestic attitudes towards race through international and interplanetary travel is a common trope in the comic-book at this moment in time. These representations also play into fears harboured by Fredric Wertham as explored by Amy Kiste Nyberg in her book, *Seal of Approval.* See Amy Kiste Nyberg, *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), pp. 94-95.

This story concludes with Hal taking inspiration from *The Blob* (1958) – encasing the Dryg in a block of ice, and containing it in a location similar to Antarctica. As the strongest nation in the world despite competition from the USSR and the People's Republic of China, this story places the US as a higher power in the sense that Hal is literally depicted as a god to the natives. At its core, this is a story that depicts the mighty American coming to the rescue of their helpless and clearly inferior neighbours.[69] Standing in stark contrast to the poignant nature of *Echo X* and Captain Marvel's reflection on the destructive tendencies of mankind, *Green Lantern* instead pursues a triumphant sense of internationalism that can be seen across DC's many properties at this time. Both examples ultimately highlight just how split the nation was in their feelings towards the challenges of the American Century and the Cold War.

Space: The Final Frontier

> . . . we stand today on the edge of a New Frontier – the frontier of the 1960s – a frontier of unknown opportunities and perils – a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threats . . . the New Frontier is here, whether we seek it or not. Beyond that frontier are the uncharted areas of science and space, unsolved problems of peace and war, unconquered pockets of ignorance and prejudice, unanswered questions of poverty and surplus. It would be easier to shrink back from that frontier, to look to the safe mediocrity of the past, to be lulled by good intentions and high rhetoric . . . I believe the times demand new invention, innovation, imagination, decision. I am asking each of you to be pioneers on that New Frontier.
>
> – JFK, 15 July, 1960[70]

The concluding section of this chapter aims to acknowledge the influence of both the American Century and, more directly, the impact of the American West and Manifest Destiny, on American popular culture. Closing this analysis of interplanetary travel, its

[69] This positioning of Hal Jordan as the embodiment of US strength and its unrivalled geopolitical standing in the world only becomes more evident as this revamped run progresses. *Green Lantern* #4 (1961), #6 (1961) and #38 (1965) are of particular note.

[70] John F. Kennedy, 'Acceptance of Democratic Nomination for President', *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, 15 July, 1960, Accessed: 16/09/2019, https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/acceptance-of-democratic-nomination-for-president

focus will lie with the popular narrative of beginning again on another planet; a narrative clearly rooted in American history and identity as it unconsciously mimics the Pilgrims sailing from Plymouth for 'the new world' in 1620. Writing in 1994, Rick Worland argued that 'throughout the twentieth century, the Frontier Myth and American science fiction have enjoyed a closer ideological kinship than has been generally recognised.'[71] While in recent years, the amount of scholarly recognition towards this kinship has admittedly become more prevalent, the argument can be made that the contemporary production and reception of these sources recognised this kinship from as early as 1945 onwards. This kinship was famously addressed and spurred on thereafter by JFK's acceptance speech for his presidential nomination in 1960, but one only has to look to the examples of interplanetary narratives explored above to see that this association between space and the Frontier Myth were being made throughout the formative years of the Cold War. Manifest Destiny – to expand the reaches of the US – was a defining element of the American Century and its inherent 'psychology of supremacy'; with it came copious commentary concerning issues of race, class, and gender, and what it meant to be an American at this moment in time. Space served as a theatre to explore this question and the issues inherent.

A major theme that runs throughout this science fiction is the expansion of the US through the colonisation of other planets. *The Space Merchants* (1953) by Frederik Pohl and Cyril M. Kornbluth showcases this particularly well. Set in a dystopian future where Earth is overpopulated and running out of natural resources, this novel follows the character of Mitch Courtenay, a star-class copywriter working for Fowler Schocken Associates – the advertising firm granted sole jurisdiction over the marketing of Venus

[71] Rick Worland, 'From the New Frontier to the Final Frontier: *Star Trek* from Kennedy to Gorbachev', *Film and History*, Vol 24, Vol. 1-2, 1994, pp.19-35 (p.19)

as the 'next earth'. Early in the narrative Courtenay is placed in charge of coordinating the ad campaign for attracting colonists to Venus, and as such is framed by enemies of Schocken's cause, stripped of his star-class standing in society, and shipped off to Costa Rica to work at the Chlorella Plantation.[72] He goes from being a copywriter at the top of society to a farmhand; a 'cargo slob'.[73] As the story charts Courtenay's bid to rise to the top once again, he becomes involved with a group of political activists known as the 'Consies' – a thinly veiled allegory for a communist cell – who, throughout the book, are depicted as spies, terrorists and saboteurs (much like the popular view of communists in the US at the time).[74] It is revealed later that they were behind Courtenay's fall from grace. By the conclusion, however, it becomes clear that the 'Consies' are the real heroes of this story, with Schocken, Courtenay and their uniquely American brand of capitalism representative of everything wrong with the world; their selfishness, lust for money and all-consuming obsession with power having condemned the planet to self-imposed devastation. The Consies ultimately hijack the Venus project for the purposes of making the planet a new home for humanity. Their vision is for an 'unspoiled, unwrecked, unexploited . . . [and] undevastated' planet untainted by the capitalism that has made earth almost uninhabitable.[75] David Seed rightly argues that *The Space Merchants* 'describes the takeover of the earth and near planets as a commercial form of imperialist expansion.'[76] Expressing a similar sentiment to the

[72] The Chlorella Plantation is perhaps best described as a 'skyscraper farm' designed for synthetic food production. It is worth noting the parallels between the hostile, lower-class working conditions associated with this plantation and the popular connotations concerning slavery associated with the plantations in the American South.

[73] Frederik Pohl and C.M. Kornbluth, *The Space Merchants* (Great Britain: Orion Publishing Group, 1952), p.68

[74] This popular view of communists is reinforced by popular culture outside of science fiction, particularly in film noir throughout the latter half of the 1940s and early 1950s, and the spy thriller. *Pickup on South Street* (1953) and *North by Northwest* (1959) are two defining examples.

[75] Frederik Pohl and C.M. Kornbluth, *The Space Merchants* (Great Britain: Orion Publishing Group, 1952), p.183

[76] David Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.82

other entries discussed throughout this study, *The Space Merchants* condemns the toxic geopolitical stance taken by a large percentage of the American people who were carried away by the grand rhetoric of the American Century, and rose-tinted histories concerning the American West and Manifest Destiny. It ultimately calls for the USA to press pause on their current trajectory; to think about the potential ramifications American capitalism – and the inescapable hierarchy of superiority it imposes – might have on the future.

The issues of gender and race are once again inherent to this analysis. Schocken, after all, wanted to make Venus an exclusively 'American Planet' presumably inhabited by influential, wealthy white Americans who held a star-class rating. The creation of other planets in the dominant image of the contemporary US – which is to say, somewhere dominated by white men – became a prevalent theme throughout the years discussed here. Discrimination against those of a lower social standing is emphasised throughout *The Space Merchants*, particularly through the way people travel. Referring to an earlier business trip that saw Courtenay travel by rocketship, he says: 'it wasn't a pleasant trip; it was a miserable trip on a miserable, undersized tourist rocket. We flew low, and there were prism windows at all seats, which never fail to make me airsick.'[77] Transportation is used in *The Space Merchants* to consistently reiterate that this is a world dominated by a US capitalism enforced by class and social division. This mirrors the situation in the US at the time as seen in the divide between white suburbanites who moved around freely in their automobiles, and poor, often African American or Latino families who

[77] Frederik Pohl and C.M. Kornbluth, *The Space Merchants* (Great Britain: Orion Publishing Group, 1952)., p.59
This is further reinforced upon his escape from the Chlorella Plantation when he says: 'I went to New York City almost respectably, in a cheap front-office suit, aboard a tourist rocket, steerage class . . . Below decks we were a shabbier, tougher gang, but it was no labour freighter. We had no windows, but we had lights and vending machines and buckets.' ibid., p.101

were confined to public transport and the ghettoes.[78] It also difficult to not make the connection between the fictional urge of these star-class citizens to escape the squalor of earth and the reality of affluent white Americans relocating from the increasingly black cities to the suburbs. Gilbert Caluya argues that 'the literal distancing was made materially possible by the growth of American car culture under Fordist capitalism.'[79] In an essay defined by movement it is also worth considering how the movement of money privileged white American males over women and people of colour. Remembering that this was the era of the suburb and white flight, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall reminds us that:

> Black migrants who made their way to the "promised land" found themselves confronting not Mississippi in California but indigenous forms of discrimination and de facto segregation – the result not of custom, as "de facto" implies, but of a combination of individual choices and governmental policies (some blatant and some race neutral on their face) that had the effect, and often the intent, of barring African Americans from access to decent jobs, schools, and homes, as well as to the commercialized leisure spaces that increasingly symbolized "making it in America" for white ethnics en route to the middle class.[80]

Additionally, 'a two-track welfare system rooted in a "family wage" ideal figured the worker as a full-time breadwinner who supported children and a dependent, non-wage-earning wife at home – an ideal from which most people of colour were excluded.'[81] Viewing the woman as a domestically confined extension of the American male's success, this system victimised the female population of the US as well. Mapping reality onto *The Space Merchants*, star-class served to represent the privileged white man

[78] Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination* (1956) is also worth a read for its analysis of class division. Again, this is depicted at times using modes of transport to distinguish members of the upper class from everybody else. In Bester's depiction of the future, people get around by 'jaunting' (teleportation). To avoid being compared to everyone else, the upper class distinguished themselves by refusing to 'jaunte' and instead travelled in a variety of vehicles.
See: Alfred Bester, *The Stars My Destination* (Great Britain: Millennium, 1999), pp. 45-46

[79] Gilbert Caluya, 'Pride and paranoia: race and the emergence of home security in Cold War America', *Continuum Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 6 (2014), pp. 808-819, (p.810)

[80] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, 'The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past', *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 91, No. 4, (2005), pp. 1233-1263, (p.1240)

[81] ibid., p.1241

favoured by society. The world of *The Space Merchants* is an exaggerated foreshadowing of things to come based on the devastating impact of capitalism, racism and the corporate mentality. This criticism comes to fruition at the end of the novel when Courtenay realises the error of his ways. His wife, Kathy, who is also revealed to be a Consie, explains to him:

> Sure we wanted a ship to go to Venus. But we didn't want Fowler Schocken on Venus. Or Mitchell Courtenay, either. Not as long as Mitchell Courtenay was the kind of guy who would gut Venus for an extra megabuck's billing.[82]

Venus is seen by Kathy and the Consies as holding the potential for a fresh start for humanity; as holding the potential for utopia, unlike earth. The old Mitch Courtenay and the capitalist world represented by Fowler Schocken simply saw it as a means of making money; a planet rich in raw materials that those below star-class would have to harvest.[83] David Seed sums up Pohl and Kornbluth's criticism most succinctly.

> This imperialist urge simply applies to space what has already taken place on earth. The novel extrapolates on a series of projects of increasing magnitude: the American Midwest, India (on the analogy of the East India Company), Antarctica, and finally why not planets? The Venus project is explicitly contextualised within the history of American exploration and discovery![84]

The Space Merchants is quite clearly a commentary on the potential for a dystopian future should America continue down its current path but it is also critical of the 'psychology of superiority' that was an inherent part of the Frontier Myth and Manifest Destiny; a psychology that had defined US history thus far and had ultimately become a defining part of the nation's new collective myth: the American Century.

Building on this analysis of race, the film *When Worlds Collide* (1951) shares a similar premise to *The Space Merchants*, albeit less progressive in its execution. Months away

[82] Frederik Pohl and C.M. Kornbluth, *The Space Merchants* (Great Britain: Orion Publishing Group, 1952), p.183
[83] This is supported by Courtenay's experiences in Costa Rica.
[84] David Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.83

from Earth's destruction at the hands of a stray star, a group of scientists build a 'space ark' that transports a select group of men and women to the planet Zyra, where humanity will live on.[85] Repeatedly referred to as 'the New World', it is difficult not to map the rhetoric of the American Frontier and Manifest Destiny on to this film. This becomes problematic when it is realised that the group chosen to survive are universally white. Commenting on this fact, Adilifu Nama asserts that *When Worlds Collide* endorses the most strident form of American racial provincialism: "whites only" racial segregation.'[86] 'By having the sole survivors of Earth consist only of white Americans, *When Worlds Collide* overtly advocates white racial homogeneity as a requirement for the preservation of the American way of life and the rebuilding of a "perfect" world.'[87] The 1932 novel on which the film is based is also guilty of espousing a similar sense of wish fulfilment in its establishment of a purely white society, but extends this vision to reinforce the patriarchal order as well. The book opens with a memo stating: 'the women will be chosen for one purpose only: to breed a new generation in the new world.'[88] While this is not directly addressed in the cinematic version, it is hinted at in the sense that women are partly chosen because they are 'healthy' as opposed to the men who are chosen solely for their skill set.[89] Moreover, the depiction of women performing clerical work by storing critical works of knowledge on microfilm, in addition to feeding the men of the camp, suggests that the patriarchal order will

[85] *When Worlds Collide* (1951), dir. Rudolph Maté

[86] Adilifu Nama, *Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction Film* (Austin, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 2008), p.14

[87] Ibid., pp. 14-15

It should be noted that the American scientists who realised Earth would be destroyed held a meeting at the UN, where they warned other countries that action must be taken in order to survive. These nations ridicule the American scientists at first. When they eventually realise that the Americans were right and that they, too, must build their own space arks, it is essentially too late for them. This delay in building coupled with their lack of faith that escaping the apocalypse is possible ultimately leads to their downfall. The result of this is that the group of white Americans discussed above are the only one to make it to Zyra. In addition to the inherent commentary concerning issues of race and gender, this film also consequently makes a geopolitical statement concerning American superiority.

[88] Philip Wylie and Edwin Balmer, *When Worlds Collide* (New York: Paperback Library, 1970), p.1

[89] *When Worlds Collide* (1951), dir. Rudolph Maté

continue on Zyra. A prevalent narrative within science fiction at this time, *When Worlds Collide* serves as a snapshot of American attitudes towards race and the position of women at this moment in time; a snapshot that provides great insight into perceptions concerning American identity and, just as crucially, the future of American identity at a time labelled the American Century. The conscious decision to adapt this book into film in 1951 ultimately illustrates that it spoke to widespread fears concerning the potential emancipation of women and minorities alike within the US. It is included here to further reinforce and showcase the differing opinions presented by popular culture at such a divisive point in history.

Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* (1950) more directly recognises the similarities between the American Century and the Frontier Myth. Here, interplanetary travel is used as a vehicle to criticise the existence of Manifest Destiny in the Twenty-First Century, and inherent superiority complex that accompanied the US's geopolitical ambitions. 'Mars is opening up. It's a frontier now, like in the old days on Earth, out West, and in Alaska.'[90] 'The second men should have travelled from other countries with other accents and other ideas. But the rockets were American and the men were American and it stayed that way.'[91] Like Schocken in *The Space Merchants* and the team chosen to survive in *When Worlds Collide*, the US here intends to sculpt Mars in its own image. Further comparisons are drawn between these expeditions and the American Frontier when it is revealed that the Martians, like those in H.G. Wells' seminal classic, *The War of the Worlds* (1898), were unintentionally killed by contact with humans.[92]

[90] Ray Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles* (Hammersmith, London: Harper Voyager, 2008), p.151
[91] ibid., p.144
[92] '. . . the Martians—*dead*!—slain by the putrefactive and disease bacteria against which their systems were unprepared.' H.G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books, 1966), p.179

> Chicken-pox. It did things to the Martians it never did to Earth Men. Their metabolism reacted differently, I suppose. Burnt them black and dried them out to brittle flakes . . . So York and Captain Williams and Captain Black must have got through to Mars, all three expeditions. God knows what happened to them. But we at least know what *they* unintentionally did to the Martians.[93]

Here, Bradbury intentionally draws comparisons to the Native American experience with Smallpox at the hands of early European settlers and, by extension, the American Frontier, but he also, through the description of the Martians' charred bodies, draws comparisons to the atrocities committed at Hiroshima and Nagasaki where the victims of the atomic bomb were reduced to scorched shadows on the pavement. In drawing comparisons to the American Frontier, Bradbury suggests that the expansionist ambitions of the US have not changed since the birth of the nation. By further associating these ambitions with the imagery of atomic devastation, he highlights the evolution of the US's destructive capabilities in obtaining what they seek. Reflecting on the extinction of the Martians, one character notes that they were killed by 'a child's disease, a disease that doesn't even kill *children* on Earth.'[94] Any sense of remorse here is overshadowed by this superiority complex, as proposed by the suggestion that these Martians must have been inferior to human children.[95] Using the concept of the Frontier to evoke a history of the US taking what they perceive to be theirs by no other right than the fact they are Americans, Bradbury constructs a deeply critical take on the contemporary US. Like all great science fiction writers, Bradbury comments on the state of the world at that time and presents his readers with a prediction concerning the future. He uses *The Martian Chronicles* as a vehicle to express his fears concerning the

[93] Ray Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles* (Hammersmith, London: Harper Voyager, 2008), p.83
[94] ibid., p.84
[95] A similar complex is espoused by H.G. Wells in *The War of the Worlds*, which clearly had an influence on Bradbury's work. 'These germs of disease have taken toll of humanity since the beginning of things—taken toll of our pre-human ancestors since life began here . . . But there are no bacteria in Mars, and directly these invaders arrived, directly they drank and fed, our microscopic allies began to work their overthrow..' H.G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books, 1966), pp.179-180

rapid developments of science and technology as the US descended further and further down this atomic age rabbit hole; to criticise their geopolitical ambitions spurred on by the American Century and a determination to win the Cold War. A recurring theme of Bradbury's work is his criticism of the US's 'psychology of supremacy'; in 'A Sound of Thunder' (to be discussed later) he criticises mankind's need to intervene in the past in order to conquer prehistoric beasts and prove one's superiority; in *Fahrenheit 451* he labels the US power-hungry, ignorant warmongers; and in *The Martian Chronicles* he equates this complex with its downfall.

Like international travel, interplanetary travel is used as a narrative device by these storytellers and filmmakers to comment on the USA's geopolitical position in the world at this time. For some, nothing but praise is deemed worthy. For others, criticism floods the pages of these screenplays and novels. Popular culture allows for such subjectivity. Inherent to this analysis of the US's place within the larger world, these commentaries are likewise unable to ignore the issues of race and gender plaguing the home front. Where international travel directly addresses these issues, interplanetary travel does so subtly but simultaneously more boldly through the use of allegories provided by the fictional and fantastic settings of other worlds. Highlighting the significance of interplanetary travel and science fiction at large as a force for commentary in the context of the American Century, Bradbury can have the honour of bringing this chapter to a close:

> Life on Earth never settled down to doing anything good. Science ran too far ahead of us too quickly, and the people got lost in a mechanical wilderness, like children making over pretty things, gadgets, helicopters, rockets, emphasising the wrong items, emphasising machines instead of how to run the machines. Wars got bigger and bigger and finally killed Earth . . . Earth is gone. Interplanetary travel won't be back for centuries,

maybe never. But that way of life proved itself wrong and strangled itself with its own hands[96]

We've started and won two atomic wars since 1960. Is it because we're having so much fun at home we've forgotten the world? Is it because we're so rich and the rest of the world's so poor and we just don't care if they are? I've heard rumours; the world is starving, but we're well-fed. Is it true, the world works hard and we play? Is that why we're hated so much?[97]

[96] Ray Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles* (Hammersmith, London: Harper Voyager, 2008), p.301-303
[97] Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (Hammersmith, London: Voyager, 2004), p.81

'Why this Preoccupation with Time?': Time Travel in American Science Fiction from 1945-1965[1]

Time travel has proven to be an enduring mechanism for exploring alternate pasts, presents, and futures. It can concern the ability of the individual to effect change, sometimes on a personal level, sometimes nationally, even globally. Through the dialogue it establishes with other periods, time travel can also be a tool for narrating nations, showing a trajectory from past to present, from present to future, or establishing links between current individuals and figures from the past or future. There are many strands and consequences of time travel that make it a narrative device that is often difficult to fully understand. The potential for creating alternate universes – the 'many worlds theory' coined by Hugh Everett III in 1957 – is just one example. Likewise, chaos theory – popularly referred to as the butterfly effect – often produces complex and convoluted storylines due to the ramifications of meddling with the past. This chapter will endeavour to avoid these complications, instead choosing to focus on time travel as the gateway to a required destination – the past or the future – and the significance this destination has in relation to the present in which these narratives were conceived and, for want of a better word, consumed. David Wittenberg states that:

> Time travel fiction is a 'narratological laboratory,' in which many of the most basic theoretical questions about storytelling, and by extension about the philosophy of temporality, history, and subjectivity, are represented in the form of literal devices and plots, at once both convenient for criticism and fruitfully complex.[2]

This can be applied beyond narrative theory. Narratives of travel, whether in time or space, can be seen to function as a laboratory where readers consider the present, its relationship to the past, and its trajectory into the future. Time travel stories in particular

[1] *The Time Machine* (1960), dir. George Pal

[2] David Wittenberg, *Time Travel: The Popular Philosophy of Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.2.

offer a plurality of potential futures, suggesting unease about the project of the 'American Century', but also the desire to explore it, to enact it, to find justifications for the future in the past – and to see present actions extend into the future.

Often overshadowed by the fantastical nature of the past and the future, the present is crucial in providing an explanation for why time travel became so popular during the vacuum of time and space that was 1945-1965. Janet Staiger's concept of 'context-activated' reception is key here; something Cynthia Erb explains in her assessment that 'the production of textual meanings is shaped by contextual factors.'[3] While time travel narratives are ultimately works of fiction, its use as a narrative device during this period is rooted in reality, with the protagonist's present often mediating that of the contemporary audience. Unable to leave their own present reality, the creative minds behind these works project their hopes and concerns for the future on to their fiction. The decision to go backwards or forwards in time, in addition to what the protagonist finds there, says a lot about attitudes towards the US during the years discussed here. Going back, for example, might suggest the desire to escape the confusion of the present and take solace in the certainty of the past. Alternatively, going forward might suggest either a confidence in America's ability to navigate the Cold War and the American Century, or might rather serve as a confirmation of fears concerning the current trajectory of the US. As mentioned in the introduction to this work, this might be indicative of Ursula K. Le Guin's point regarding 'going backwards and looking forwards,' a sense that sometimes the best thing to do is not to push ever onward, but to go to a point of safety that also operates as a vantage point.[4] The more optimistic of

[3] Cynthia Erb, *Tracking King Kong: A Hollywood Icon in World Culture*, Second Edition (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009), p.7

[4] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be', retrieved from https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/382-spring-2010/non-euclidean-view-california-cold-place-1982/ last accessed 20 September 2019.

these visions is envisioned in the technologically advanced metropolises of a utopian landscape, whereas the opposite is often brought to life by the war-ravaged landscapes of a dystopia.

This chapter will begin by looking at DC's superhero comics and their work in framing the US's navigation of the years from 1945 to 1950. The apparent preoccupation with the past in these texts potentially creates an air of uncertainty towards the responsibilities inherent in the American Century. Transitioning into the 1950s, DC's optimistic visions of the future become the focus as a shift in the national outlook can be seen to take place in correlation with the emergence of a consumer culture, and the increasing sense of affluence experienced by a large percentage of the US population. Taking a brief detour into *The Twilight Zone* and the works of Ray Bradbury and Robert A. Heinlein, the chapter will also delve into the emergence of a certain criticism espoused towards those who harboured rose-tinted notions of the past; notions that hindered their ability to look forward and progress. Moving into the tumultuous 1960s, it will finally track a sense of regression back to the attitudes of uncertainty on display in the latter half of the 1940s. Marvel Comics offered a less optimistic interpretation of the future; a view supported by George Pal's *The Time Machine* (1960). It should be noted that a lot of academic work has disregarded the significance of superheroes in the immediate years after the Second World War and throughout the 1950s. Bradford Wright, for example, suggests that they had 'far less to say about their world than ever before', and got progressively 'sillier' as a result.[5] While it can certainly be argued that the comics of this period were 'sillier', the time travel narrative, as just one example,

[5] Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth in American Culture* (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), p.59

would prove that this medium had plenty to say about the world.[6] It can also be that, in the climate of fear around the Senate subcommittee hearings on juvenile delinquency of 1954 and the resultant introduction of the Comics Code Authority, which introduced severe representational limits on the comics medium through a 'vigorous programme of self-censorship', connections to the present remain, but are more fanciful so as to circumvent tighter regulatory control.[7] In the context of the American Century and the Cold War, as mapped on to the period from 1945-1965, time travel functions as a narrative device in possession of endless commentary.

Looking back; Moving forward: 1945-1950

> Americans have recently found it more comfortable to see where they have been than to think of where they are going.
> Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition* (1948)
>
> Do you take refuge from the present by wishing for the past?[8]
>
> This is a story of the future, but not the very distant future . . . It is a story that might have taken place the day after tomorrow. Like all stories of the future, however, its beginnings lie far back in the past.[9]

In focusing on a selection of superhero stories belonging to DC Comics published between 1945 and 1949, this particular section will attempt to explain why travel to the past became a popular narrative device during these years; how the past provided both a safe space to work through the emotions associated with its new-found position of

[6] *Whiz Comics* #150 (1952) acts as a good reference for this 'silliness.' Captain Marvel battles an army of wasps capable of carrying miniature nuclear warheads. While 'silly', it also engages with fears of nuclear conflict and, as manifest in the Creature Feature films of the 1950s, the threat of insects to American agriculture. See William M. Tsutsui, 'Looking Straight at "Them!" Understanding the Big Bug Movies of the 1950s', *Environmental History*, Vol.12, No.2, (2007), pp.237-253

[7] Amy Kiste Nyberg, *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), p.84
The influence of American psychiatrist, Frederic Wertham, should also be mentioned here. His book, *The Seduction of the Innocent*, published in 1954, claimed that depictions of violence, murder, sex, and drug use, among other adult themes, in comic-books caused its juvenile readers to become delinquents. His testimony given at the 1954 Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency played a major role in the conclusions drawn by the Committee, and the consequent establishment of the Comics Code Authority that implemented heavy censorship in comic-books going forward.

[8] Bill Finger and Sam Citron, et al., *Superman* #38, DC Comics, 1946

[9] *Tobor the Great* (1954), dir. Lee Sholem

power, and offered a blueprint for the navigation of the American Century as the US entered uncharted waters. Henry Steele Commager captured the essence of American concerns when, in 1949, he professed that "if a future directed by America was not wholly clear, neither was it a blank . . . for the America that would shape the unknown future was an America whose character had been formed in the known past."[10] As Hofstadter and Commager show, American historians of this time framed their uncertainty about the future by refracting it through the certainty of the past, suggesting it not just as a space for comforting reflection, but for negotiating future direction.[11] In a present where men seemed dishonourable, paranoia had infected both city and suburb, science threatened the extinction of mankind, and the future looked entirely unclear, it made sense to look to the past for answers.

A fascination with the past emerged in the superhero comic during the latter stages of the Second World War. Looking closely at the publication of *Batman* during this period indicates a concentrated burst of time travel adventures from 1945-1950 starting with *Batman* #32 (1945) and ending with #59 (1950).[12] Such a focus on time travel as a narrative device suggests that it was not an anomaly, but instead held historical significance for its ability to address concerns regarding the future: to consider the

[10] Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind: An Interpretation of American Thought and Character Since the 1880s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 441.
[11] Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition: And The Men Who Made It* (New York: Vintage, 1948)
[12] While Wonder Woman characterised the most frequent engagement with the past through the very nature of her character as a representative of the ancient world, Batman and Robin were the most persistent travellers in time of this era. Their stories also drew a significantly finer line between the comforting reflection found in romanticising the past, and attempts being made to negotiate the future direction of the US, when compared to other characters from this period such as Superman and Captain Marvel. In *Superman*, time travel was often used as a narrative device where Lois Lane would get herself into trouble, only for Superman to embark on a rescue mission. Captain Marvel, on the other hand, was a comic-book clearly directed towards a more juvenile audience, and therefore approached time travel in a juvenile and significantly more whimsical way.
Time travel had a huge presence in comic-books at this moment in time, featuring in all three of DC Comics' flagship properties, Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman; *Captain Marvel Adventures* and its associated properties belonging to Fawcett Comics; and outside of the superhero genre in titles such as *Jumbo Comics*, *Boy Comics*, and *Planet Comics* to name just a few.

current confrontation with the ideas and challenges of the American Century and to find both fantastical escapism and lessons in the past at a time when guidance was needed more than ever.[13] This concentrated burst of time travel storylines can be attributed to the fact that the war was over and many Americans were addressing unprecedented geopolitical questions, and attempting to navigate them through the elevated post war concept of the American Century.

Through the actions of their friend, Professor Carter Nichols, the Dynamic Duo are sent on approximately seventeen different adventures through time spanning *Batman*, *Detective Comics*, *Star Spangled Comics*, and *World's Finest Comics* from 1944-1950, and discover that the past offers a means of finding themselves and, allegorically, the nation; the process of discovery also articulates purpose and rationale, dramatizing and simplifying geopolitics.[14] As Victoria Byard notes, 'the timeslip fantasy drama was particularly suited to investigating historical paradigm shifts and the breakdown of metanarratives, such as imperialism, national identity, and the concept of a great

[13] Adding further support to this is the fact that these stories were not written by one individual but rather a group of people, often changing from issue to issue, with views different from one another. This suggests that the significance of time travel in these Batman stories was not isolated to the views of one individual but rather a shared experience; not just in an abstract national sense but more directly as a shared experience of working at DC on these specific comics. These writers include Don Cameron, Bill Finger, and Edmond Hamilton, among others.
Dick Sprang illustrated a considerable number of these time travel stories; a task he took great pride in and found a 'special joy' to illustrate. Mark Cotta Vaz cites Sprang's 'desire to explore the remote canyons and rivers of the Southwest' where he would 'retrace the trails of the early expeditions that first opened up the region' as his inspiration for many of these stories. This romanticism of the past, as highlighted by Sprang's attention to detail concerning the historical accuracy of the respective architecture and costumes of these differing time periods, is abundantly apparent in these time travel adventures. Mark Cotta Vaz, *Tales of the Dark Knight: Batman's First Fifty Years: 1939-1989* (London: Futura Publications, 1989), p.83

[14] Nichols appeared in 19 issues of *Batman* between his first appearance in *Batman* #24 (1944) and #127 (1959), eight issues of *World's Finest Comics* between #42 (1949) and #138 (1963), and six issues of *Detective Comics* between #116 (1946) and #295 (1961). Nichols subsequently appears as a supporting character in the four-issue mini-series, *America vs. the Justice Society*. Going on the appearances of Professor Carter Nichols in comic-books featuring Batman and/or Robin between 1944 and 1950, time travel features in each of the following issues: *Batman* #24 (1944), #32 (1945), #36 (1946), #38, #43 (1947), #44, #46 (1948), #49, #52 (1949) #58 (1950) #59, *Detective Comics* #116 (1946), #135 (1948), #136, *Star Spangled Comics* #71 (1947), #73, and *Worlds Finest Comics* #42 (1949).

tradition.' [15] It was precisely this situation in which the US found itself as it surveyed the ruins not only of Europe, but of nineteenth century European ideological projects. Superhero narratives about time travel at this specific historiocultural moment indicate both uncertainty and confidence; a desire to look to others for guidance, but in carefully crafted ways that privilege desired outcomes, dependent on clear hierarchies of power and heroism that foreground the US. Despite the way in which the narratives and images, and the ideologies with which they are infused, structure reader responses, comic-books were able 'to address problems that are usually relegated to "higher" literary types, or at least to more self-consciously experimental and philosophically oriented ones,' engaging with profound questions of precisely what constitutes 'America' and what role it should serve in the international arena through the apparently escapist act of sending their protagonists backwards in time.[16]

Travel in time was supported by more conventional travel, showing how superhero comic-books engaged, however obliquely, with notions of critical internationalism. Robert Shaffer defines this idea as the 'interchange of information between Americans and other peoples' and, as such, is a project that 'existed in creative tension with that of intercultural understanding.'[17] This stands in contrast to the triumphant internationalism seen in the international and interplanetary exploits of these characters, often more interested in projecting American values than engaging in dialogue.[18] A key difference between critical internationalism in reality and in these fictions, however, is that the places and people met by the superheroes are also, inevitably, American projections

[15] Victoria Byard, "'I belong to the future': Timeslip Drama as History Production in *The Georgian House* and *A Traveller In Time,*" in *Time Travel in Popular Media: Essays on Film, Television, Literature and Video Games* eds. Matthew Jones and Joan Ormrod (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015), pp. 149-164 (p. 151)

[16] David Wittenberg, *Time Travel: The Popular Philosophy of Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.11.

[17] Robert Shaffer, "Pearl S. Buck and the East And West Association: The Trajectory and Fate of 'Critical Internationalism', 1940-1950," *Peace and Change* 28, no. 1 (2003), pp. 1-36 (pp.4-5)

[18] ibid., p.17.

through time and space. No matter how dialogue is presented, it is on American terms; dialogue of this nature can therefore be seen as a cover for the inherent superpower politics of narratives, or as an appeal for dialogue as an approach, albeit one within a framework that privileges American superpower engagement as the ultimate means of settling disputes.

The very act of looking to the past suggests a certain degree of discomfort in the present and the current trajectory of the US, especially when Batman uses his adventures in time to measure himself against past societies in locations with contemporary geopolitical relevance, such as Greece. In the years that followed the Second World War, Greece was embroiled in a civil war between Nationalists and Communists; international support for both sides transformed a domestic concern into a global conflict. In looking to the past through this comic narrative, the US could position itself as a twentieth century equivalent to Ancient Greece – a pioneering force for democracy (though the 'democracy' of both was problematic by modern standards). In a story that allows the US to measure itself against Ancient Greece and, by allegorical extension, its contemporary European neighbours, 'Peril in Greece' from *Batman* #38 (1946) sees Batman and Robin thwart a plot to spark civil war at the first Olympic Games. Geopolitical commentary is an inherent part of the narrative, with Batman's intervention in the past foreshadowing US intervention in the Greek Civil War, from 1946 to 1949. This becomes significant as a major theme running throughout these adventures in the past is the depiction of the American as saviour; a depiction that clearly draws inspiration from the international efforts of the US in the Second World War and foreshadows their later efforts in implementing the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan. In *Batman* #24 (1944), #32 (1945), #38 (1946), #46 (1948) and #52 (1949), Batman is seen to take the place of a less-capable and, crucially, un-American individual in order

to save the day.[19] To refer back to *Batman* #38, the Caped Crusader – an 'honorary Athenian citizen' at this point – competes in the first Olympic Games as a last-minute replacement in the pentathlon, emerging victorious over the Herculean Lysis with visibly little effort.[20] Additionally, Superman travels to Ancient Egypt in *World's Finest* #32 (1948) and frees the slaves of a dictatorial pharaoh. Here, Superman takes on the role of Moses in the Old Testament and, in doing so, associates the US and their position in the post-war world with divine providence – and with the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. If Superman serves as an allegory for the US, and this story draws parallels with their Cold War mission to 'support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation', this biblical comparison speaks volumes for the geopolitical commentary present in these comic-books.[21] To further demonstrate American superiority, Superman follows this act by single-handedly completing the construction of a pyramid; a feat that would have taken the pharaoh's slaves years to accomplish on their own. To quote the comic in question: 'the seventh wonder of the world completed by Superman [the US] – the eighth wonder!'[22] Mapping contemporary concerns onto the past, the perceived superiority of these characters, not just as twentieth-century men, but as Americans, says a lot about the triumphant internationalism of the period that characterised one approach to American geopolitics – as well as drawing on the Jewish

[19] The stories mentioned here are: 'It Happened in Rome', 'All for One, One for All', 'Peril in Greece', 'The Batman that History Forgot!', and 'Batman and the Vikings!', respectively.

[20] Edmond Hamilton and Jim Mooney, et al., *Batman* #38, DC Comics, 1946.
In *Batman* #24, Batman and Robin thwart a plot to fix a chariot race by having Batman take the place of Rome's best chariot racer, Gito, who is about to compete in his last race. Similarly, in *Batman* #32, Batman stands in for the infamous French musketeer, Charles D'Artagnan, who is injured in combat, and becomes a superior version of the man he was impersonating by the musketeer's own admission: 'Batman, you are a handsomer D'Artagnan than I.' Here, Batman does what D'artagnan is incapable of in foiling the conspiracy of a spy and rescuing his 'sweetheart' from certain death. Furthermore, in *Batman* #52, Batman replaces his Viking doppelganger so that he may redeem him in the eyes of his comrades, who regard him as a coward, and in *Batman* #52, the Caped Crusader impersonates Leonardo DaVinci in bringing a dictator's reign to an end.

[21] Stephen E. Ambrose and Douglas G. Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism; American Foreign Policy since 1938*, Eighth Revised Edition (New York City, USA: Penguin Books, 1997), p.75
Quoting President Truman's speech on March 12, 1947

[22] Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, et al., *Worlds Finest Comics* #32, DC Comics, 1948

origins of Superman and his creators. As Dominick LaCapra argues, 'there has been an important tendency in modern culture . . . to convert trauma into the occasion for sublimity, to transvalue it into a test of the self or the group,' a process clearly in operation in these stories.[23] Interpreting these less-capable men as the rest of the world at this point, and viewing these heroes as the enlightened, intellectually, and physically superior Americans, illustrates that these narratives were engaging with attempts to construct the present through reference to the past. Therefore, while time travel can certainly be seen as a means of escaping the uncertainty produced by the Cold War, the past can also be seen as a 'safe space' for negotiating the actions of the US going forward, ultimately leaving the reader with a renewed sense of confidence once they, like the protagonist, have returned to their present. Essentially, the past (as projected by Americans on American terms) is used as a device to map contemporary issues on to a romanticised, simplified, era. This fits quite nicely with Jason Dittmer's concept of the collective myth; the comic-book serving as 'the powerful institution' that 'aim[s] to structure the perspectives of those within [the] collective identity' of the American Century.[24]

Furthering the theme of triumphant internationalism, it can be argued that the perceived international superiority of the US carries over into the depiction of science and magic in these stories. As is to be expected with travel to the past, science of the twentieth-century was viewed as magic by earlier audiences. One of the focal points of 'Batman in King Arthur's Court' from *Batman* #36 (1946), sees a showdown between Batman and Merlin – a wizard famed for his unrivalled knowledge of magic; at least, that is, until he meets his match in Batman. This is a plot that, as evident from the story's title, draws on

[23] Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p.23.
[24] Jason Dittmer, *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, & Identity* (Plymouth, United Kingdom: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), p.71

the events of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889).[25] For context, when Merlin seemingly summons thunder and lightning – a power exclusively reserved for the gods – Batman's scientific intellect tells him this science is merely a gunpowder concoction developed in China around this time; not magic, just simple science. Moreover, in *Wonder Woman* #17 (1946), Steve Trevor chases several Roman legionaries off with his pistol as they cry 'run, his metal stick is magic!'[26] In the presence of US superiority, as is subtly reinforced by Steve's exclamation – 'this shows what one American could have done to Caesar's army!' – the famously formidable Romans succumb to this show of power; a possible nod to US assumptions concerning the influence of their atomic monopoly in shaping the outcome of the Cold War.[27] If the Romans serve as an allegory for the Soviets in this instance, this interpretation lines up with Stephen Ambrose's assessment that, during the immediate years after the Second World War, 'there was a popular feeling that America could handle her foreign problems through possession of the atomic bomb'.[28] Carrying over into popular culture, the depiction of the American through the narrative of science versus magic could serve to represent a knowing jab at the rest of the world in light of the US's sole possession of the atomic bomb; an analysis that places the earlier, superstitious man as an allegory for the rest of the world standing in stark contrast to the US' twentieth century man of science.[29]

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[25] Further highlighting the popularity of time travel during this period, Twain's work was also adapted as a radio play and a feature-length film in 1947 and 1948, respectively.

[26] Joye Murchison and Harry G. Peter, *Wonder Woman* #17, DC Comics, 1946

[27] ibid.
It is important to remember that the USSR were not in possession of their own atomic bomb at this time. They would not detonate their own until the 29th August 1949.

[28] Stephen E. Ambrose and Douglas G. Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism; American Foreign Policy since 1938*, Eighth Revised Edition (New York City, USA: Penguin Books, 1997), p.75

[29] This interlude also draws on Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur's Court* (1889), a frequent point of inspiration for travel to the past – and one described as 'an object-lesson in democracy' by William Dean Howells in *Harper's Magazine* in 1890: http://twain.lib.virginia.edu/yankee/cyharper.html. Another excellent articulation of the same basic

Another interpretation that showcases a more critical strand of internationalism and therefore provides a more accurately balanced view of American opinion towards foreign affairs at this time, is the idea that time travel narratives depict an urge to return to a state of naivety concerning science. Ancient Rome, for example, is described in *Batman* #24 (1944) as being a 'splendid, seething city where gladiators fought on crimson sands and chariots churned at break-neck speeds!'[30] Likewise, *Wonder Woman* #20 (1946) describes it as a place of 'glamour and danger.'[31] In these descriptions that laud the past as perfect or glorious, there is a clear sense of longing, of a desire for simpler times. It cannot be overstated that the atomic bomb changed the landscape of life as people knew it; a fact that was increasingly apparent as elements of Cold War logic and rhetoric became increasingly embedded in American society, culture, politics, and economics. Moreover, the years leading up to the Second World War had dragged the US out of the approach to international politics that had underpinned the blissful ignorance of interwar isolationism; a decision solidified and made irreversible by the end of the Second World War. If such a concept was possible, time travel would allow Americans to return to a simpler, less terrifying time; a time when modern science did not exist and yet, ironically, everything seemed to make more sense. Rather than the complexities attendant with peering behind the curtain of creation and destruction, simple solutions could be more comfortably accepted. The difficulties of such an idea are rendered explicit when Merlin performs on stage. In his critique of and contest with Merlin, Batman represents the desire of the audience to peer behind the curtain, to

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principle is *Evil Dead 3: Army of Darkness* (1993), which exaggerates these discussions past the point of parody while also drawing on Cold War science fiction/fantasy special effects by Ray Harryhausen in its animation of the skeletons that constitute the army of the evil dead.

[30] Joseph Samachson and Dick Sprang, et al., *Batman* #24, DC Comics, 1944.

[31] Joye Murchison and Harry G. Peter, *Wonder Woman* #20, DC Comics, 1946

Moreover, Ancient Greece is described as being a place of 'glory' in *Batman* #38 (1946). In *World's Finest Comics* #32 (1948), Ancient Egypt is referred to as a 'great kingdom'. Similarly, in *Wonder Woman* #9 (1944), the pre-modern world was presented as an era of perfection.[31]

discover the machinery that makes the tricks work and, as a result, the ideologies those tricks strive to uphold. Modernity, or at least its Cold War aspects, undermines the ability to accept things at face value according to these stories.

Keeping with this more nostalgic representation, the destinations of the past, for all their visible flaws, are often depicted as a time when men respected one another. Evil men still existed. War was still a reality. But good always triumphed over evil, and could always be told apart from bad – at least this is how the past is romanticised here. The same was not true of the world in which the readers of these comics lived. The Second World War was the stage on which atrocities such as the Holocaust and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were acted out; the developing Cold War seemed to suggest that there may yet be repeat performances. Not only had the horror of atomic warfare not been expunged by its repeated occurrence, but the act of dropping atomic bombs seemed to work towards a world in which other states would not only develop such weapons, but might also use them.[32] In looking back, the generation reading these comics viewed honour and respect as courtesies belonging to a bygone era – for there can be no honour and respect in combat when the weapons involved render vast swathes of territory as nuclear wastelands.[33] While for most, minor details such as a king wearing his best jewels in honour of his guests in *Batman* #49 (1948), Batman being knighted for his efforts in *Batman* #36, or Julius Caesar bowing humbly in admiration of Princess Diana in *Wonder Woman* #20 (1946) will be glossed over as insignificant moments in the grander scheme of these fantastical stories; they should nevertheless be seen as significant within the context of a modern world gone mad. Produced at a time when mankind was heading towards the possibility of nuclear warfare and the potential

[32] The Soviet Union's detonation of their own atomic bomb on 29 August, 1949 confirmed the reality of this fear.

[33] The terror of nuclear war was represented in *Captain Marvel Adventures* #66, Fawcett Publications, 1946, when Captain Marvel was the sole survivor of a global nuclear war.

for atomic annihilation – a fact made more frightening by the apparent absence of honour among men – it should not be considered too great a leap to associate the depiction of these values here with the desire for a chance to live in a less-hostile and more honourable world – or at least one where combat was governed by rules and individual skill rather than abstract collective scientific acumen. Kings donning full ceremonial regalia or bestowing honours on visitors should also be seen in the context of Old World diplomacy, a system from which the US was divorced as the result of its modernity and status as a republic.[34] However, in such manifestations of respect for US citizens, it can be seen as a passing of the mantle, with 'Old World' being literalised through the element of time travel. These characters demonstrate that the US was always already willing and able to adopt the mantle of global leadership, eliding past isolationist attitudes and the nation's relative historical weakness.

> The past is a different country; they do things differently there.
>
> L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between*

As the subjectivity of popular culture dictates, there is no clear-cut reading of these texts. These characters as allegories for the US highlight both confusion and certainty in their approach to the obstacles thrown up by the American Century; feelings that existed in equal measure throughout this period in accordance with human nature. The time travel narratives explored here suggest that movement through both time and space offer points of comparison with the present; the differences to be found there are both prospective models for conduct, yet also justificatory ones. The travellers through time or region sometimes begin as uncertain, looking somewhere other than their present

[34] See *Superman* #54 (1948) and #67 (1950) for a reiteration of this fact. Playing into the triumphant internationalism that so often accompanied these superheroes in their international, interplanetary or adventures in time, Superman refuses to kneel to the monarchs of the nations he visits in accordance with the US's status as a republic.

reality for guidance, but in doing so largely find justification in their own strength, judgement, and preferred course of action. However, the mutability of time and place that leads to this conclusion has within it the seeds of uncertainty – of a process of becoming rather than being. By positing the past as a source for, as well as of, the future, the past is changed through the hero's intervention, just as the hero is changed by his journey to the past. Even as justification for present policies is found, the process by which it is found cannot help but be transformative of the individual who discovers it. That time travel happens repeatedly in the historical moment of the early Cold War flags the confusion of that time as it also reproduces its conviction: in looking back anxiously at history to find the triumphant ascendancy of American values and strength, the USA, through its superhero proxies, finds precisely what it requires, presupposing ahistorical ideologies that exist unproblematically outside the conditions that give rise to them. In approaching this through Hartley's quotation, we see the past and present as existing simultaneously, pursuing parallel lines of development that can intersect and overlap, taking influence from one another; foregrounded by their mediation in comics, both past and present emerge as collective constructions that are never, and can never be, fully settled.

To quote Ursula K. Le Guin:

> In order to speculate safely on an inhabitable future, perhaps we would do well to find a rock crevice and go back.[35]

Time Travel Narratives and the Science of the Future as depicted in the 1950s

> If we can put this tremendous machine of ours, which has made this victory possible, to work for peace, we can look forward to the greatest age in the history of mankind.[36]

[35] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be', retrieved from https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/382-spring-2010/non-euclidean-view-california-cold-place-1982/ last accessed 20 September 2019.

Moving into the 1950s, the proceeding sections will focus more heavily on travel to the future as the US began to look forward and became less hesitant towards embracing the grand rhetoric espoused by Luce in 1941. It will occasionally return to stories set in the past but it will become clear in due course that a feeling on animosity emerged towards those who harboured romanticised notions of the past in this decade. Travel to the past in science fiction belonging to the 1950s often served as a vehicle for such criticism. Matthew Jones and Joan Ormrod have stated that 'we are obsessed with the idea of time travel and the possibilities it offers us to venture into the past, to meet iconic figures and amend mistakes, or to travel to the future to discover our place in history.'[37] Where this obsession with the past was a staple of time travel narratives during the latter half of the 1940s, the 1950s sees a curiosity emerge concerning the US's place in the world going forward. The future, as it is popularly imagined today, was arguably created in 1950s America. It was the decade when automobiles resembled rocket ships; consumerism went hand-in-hand with futurism; freeways changed the landscape of the nation and revolutionised interconnectivity and travel; and outer space was beginning to look tangible. In an atmosphere popularly associated with 'the good old days' and 'suffused with nostalgic yearning' through depictions of the era in pop culture classics such as *American Graffiti* (1973), *Happy Days* (1974-1984) and *Grease* (1978), it is not entirely surprising that a sense of whimsical optimism concerning the future emerged from the decade. Such an atmosphere clearly masked a host of larger anxieties.[38]

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[36] Harry S. Truman, 'Public Papers: Harry S. Truman - 1945-1956', Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum, https://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=93&st=&st1= (accessed 26/05/2019)
This excerpt was taken from a speech given by Truman to General Eisenhower and his men at the raising of the flag over the US Group Control Council Headquarters in Berlin on July 20, 1945.

[37] Matthew Jones and Joan Ormrod (eds), *Time Travel in Popular Media: Essays on Film, Television, Literature, and Video Games* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015), p.9

[38] Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing or How Hollywood Taught us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1983), p.4

The 1950s was not a decade that abandoned the previously discussed idea of looking back to move forward, although it did occasionally criticise this. It was, however, a decade that saw the US become more familiar with their post-war role in foreign affairs; a decade that embraced the American Century and projected Luce's rhetoric of grandeur on to fictional visions of the future. For DC Comics, this future was fantastical and appeared to enhance everything that was currently great about the 1950s in the US: cars still had fins and wrap-around windshields but could also fly; skyscrapers were taller and more colourful; and atomic energy powered cities instead of destroying them. While, for others, the future would look dystopic, the prevailing view of the decade as illustrated by DC was decidedly brighter than the decade before. This section will explore the shift in national outlook that seems to have taken place in the 1950s by continuing the analysis of time travel narratives in DC Comics before expanding out into the works of Robert A. Heinlein, Ray Bradbury, and Alfred E. Green. Where a predisposition towards travel to the past throughout the latter half of the 1940s ultimately suggests a sense of apprehension towards the American Century, travel to the future in the 1950s is illustrative of a nation confident in its ability.

The Man of Tomorrow in the World of Tomorrow: DC's Vision of the Future

> An awed Superman looks upon the amazing world of tomorrow! . . . So this is the future! It's magnificent![39]
>
> Spaceships flying to other planets! Cities built on asteroids under plastic domes! Amazing science inventions unknown in 1959! Such is the world in the next century![40]

Continuing the analysis of time travel narratives in stories belonging to DC Comics, this section intends to highlight an embrace of the American Century on behalf of the American people by exploring the utopian futures presented in these fantastical adventures; futures seemingly made possible and influenced by the consumer culture of

[39] Bill Finger and Wayne Boring, *Superman* #128, DC Comics, 1959
[40] Otto Binder and Jim Mooney, *Action Comics* #255, DC Comics, 1959

the decade in the sense that the American people were constantly exposed to the wonders of new technology through the power of advertisement, and the positive impact this had on the mood of the nation. It will also delve into problems that arise though these depictions, namely these futures being unanimously white spaces.

In summarising David Wittenberg's division of time travel into three separate phases, Jones and Ormrod state that the first of these phases, taking place from 1880 to 1905, 'is a period in which it is believed that Grand Narratives can explain the meaning of life'.[41] Further to this, they assert that writers responded to this grand narrative with 'predictions of possible utopian futures.'[42] DC's comic-books in the 1950s are more in line with this first phase; the American Century serving to represent the grand narrative to which Jones, Ormrod and Wittenberg refer. Produced during the formative years of the American Century the future served as a vehicle for the prediction of its outcome. For DC, this prediction was positive. Refusing to accept that the atomic bomb and future developments would taint the meaning of life and bring about a dystopia akin to that depicted in Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959) or Pat Frank's *Alas Babylon* (1959), DC's vision of the future is repeatedly depicted as a vast metropolis; a place where flying saucers, the latest 'rocketmobile' models, and colourful, space needle-esque skyscrapers reinforce the wonders of science and technology.[43] Writing about science fiction generally, Adam Roberts suggests that 'as American fortunes

[41] Matthew Jones and Joan Ormrod (eds), *Time Travel in Popular Media: Essays on Film, Television, Literature, and Video Games* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015), pp.8-9

[42] ibid.

The other two phases from 1920-1950 and 1950 to the present day, respectively, are seemingly more interested in the science behind time travel and its consequences. The second phase supposedly takes place from the 1920s through to the 1950s. It is 'influenced by Einstein's theory of relativity, which aligned space with time . . . It sees the development of more complexity in time travel and the embracement of temporal phenomena such as paradoxes, time loops and varying notions of causality.' The third phase supposedly takes place from the 1950s to the present day. This phase is 'affected by quantum physics, string theory and notions of the multiverse. It features the "ongoing *visualisation* of parallel and multiplied lines of narrative".' ibid., p.9

[43] Otto Binder and Curt Swan, et al., *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen* #28, DC Comics, 1958

grew, this especially American mode of literature took on some of the energy and ebullience of its national outlook'; a view that DC's vision appears to mirror.[44] These cities of the future are essentially representative of the US as a beacon of hope and prosperity to the rest of the world. They are the ultimate vision of John Winthrop's city upon a hill.

The 1950s can almost be seen as a return to the optimistic atmosphere of 1939-1940, which saw a renewed sense of prosperity thanks to the economic impact of the European war effort. Channelling the notion that 'American life was good and getting better all the time', bolstered by the consumer culture of the decade, DC's utopian visions can be interpreted to showcase a rediscovered sense of confidence on behalf of the nation towards the mission of the American Century.[45] Picking up where it left off before the Second World War, these depictions reignite the spark of optimism concerning the future that had existed in the US before they joined the fight in 1941; the vibrant pages of the comic-book serving as a vessel for 'the glowing images of the future presented at the . . . 1939/40 New York World's Fair.'[46] Like the Fair, the goal of the US in both fighting the Cold War and attempting to live up to Luce's vision of the American Century, was "Building the World of Tomorrow."[47] DC's vision is representative of the best possible outcome.

Writing in 1929, the founder of *Amazing Stories*, Hugo Gernsback, states:

> Not only is science fiction an idea of tremendous import, but it is to be an important factor in making the world a better place to live in, through educating the public to the possibilities of science and the influence of

[44] Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.75
[45] Andrew J. Bacevich, 'Life at the Dawn of the American Century' in Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Short American Century: A Postmortem* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp.1-14, (p.6)
[46] Peter Fitting, 'Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction', in Gregory Claeys, *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 135-153, (p.140)
[47] ibid.

> science on life . . . If every man, woman, boy and girl, could be induced to read science fiction right along, there would certainly be a great resulting benefit to the community . . . Science fiction would make people happier, give them a broader understanding of the world, make them more tolerant.[48]

To quote Peter Fitting, 'Gernsback is a significant figure in the understanding of modern science fiction (at least in the United States) insofar as he epitomises the enthusiasm for the possibilities of science and technology.'[49]

The fantastic tales of future adventure presented by DC throughout the 1950s stand testament to Gernsback's hopes and dreams. Throughout the decade, DC was clearly more concerned with the benefits of science than it was with its dangers. It chose to depict advances in consumerism and the consequent benefits to society over detrimental advances in weaponry. Using the consumer lifestyle of the US as the foundation for its vision, these comics use the future to showcase the positive impact science can have on humanity. As an exaggeration of this culture that had come to define the US way of life, as evident in the Khruschev/Nixon 'Kitchen Debates' of 1959, the future is depicted as a place where affluence is seemingly universal and, as a result, crime is minor or has been eradicated. These societies are racially homogenous, and men and women accept their gender roles without struggle – the root of social problems, according to these stories, is the inability of all to consume equally. In *World's Finest* #91 (1957), for example, a scientist informs the reader that Metropolis has had 'no crime for centuries.'[50] Similarly, in *Superman* #128 (1959), an FBI agent tells Superman that 'our Earth of the future was a nearly perfect world'; a statement reinforced at the end of the

[48] Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.67-68
Roberts describes *Amazing Stories* as the first science fiction pulp magazine with 'any commercial durability'. In this context, Gernsback is a particularly significant individual because of his role as a pioneer – a founding father – of the popular strand of science fiction that would take off in the period discussed here. He laid the foundations of the genre for the writers and filmmakers that came after him.
[49] Peter Fitting, 'Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction', in Gregory Claeys, *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 135-153, (p.137)
[50] Edmond Hamilton and Dick Sprang, et al., *World's Finest* #91, DC Comics, 1957

story by the existence of a 'United Worlds' organisation and its connotations of harmony and companionship.[51] Moreover, in *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen* #28 (1958), Jimmy visits Metropolis during the sixtieth century to discover that science has produced 'human magnets' that make it impossible to get away with a crime once it has been committed, directly tying advances in science to the improvement of society.[52] The future created by DC is ultimately one that strives to envision the potential of humanity's best traits.[53] It also suggests, in accordance with the themes of guidance imbued by the American Century, that the American way of life as popularly personified by its consumerist affluence, was the way forward; the template for achieving a utopia sculpted in the image of the US that would ultimately see its founding principle of manifest destiny brought to completion. This is particularly significant within the international context of the Cold War. To reference Gilbert Caluya:

> The exhibitionistic abundance of American consumer culture, particularly surrounding household goods and appliances, transformed the aggressive ideology of American capitalist democracy into a seductive one.[54]

With much of the world looking to the US as the path to future development, the appeal of the consumerist lifestyle, underpinned by aggressive American cultural imperialism, gave them an advantage in their struggle to contain communism and brought them a

[51] Bill Finger and Wayne Boring, *Superman* #128, DC Comics, 1959
In drawing attention to *Captain Marvel Adventures* #98 (1949), the titular hero perceives Earth to be unworthy of membership to this organisation. Fast-forward to 1957, however, and Earth is a member. While these are admittedly two separate characters belonging to two separate companies, the difference in outlook between these two decades should not be ignored.
[52] Otto Binder and Curt Swan, et al., *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen* #28, DC Comics, 1958
In highlighting that popular culture inspires other mediums, the technology in this story seemingly takes inspiration from Philip K. Dick's short story, 'The Minority Report' (1956). Taking place in the future, the basic premise dictates that mutants, known as 'Precogs', are able to foresee all crime before it occurs, allowing the government to prevent the crime as it is about to take place.
[53] This is personified literally in *Batman* #59 (1950) when it is revealed that a descendent of the joker 'decided to work with the law instead of against it.' Bill Finger and Bob Kane, *Batman* #59, DC Comics, 1950
[54] Gilbert Caluya, 'Pride and Paranoia: Race and the Emergence of Home Security in Cold War America', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 28, No.3 (2014), pp. 808-819, (p.808)

step closer to winning the Cold War.[55] The depiction of the future by DC took the American way of life, its industries, and its cities as they stood in the 1950s, and 'turned them up to eleven', suggesting an embrace of the American Century and the sense of confidence as a world power that came with it; a confidence that did not necessarily exist in the immediate years after the Second World War.[56] Where the past was used to find inspiration for greatness, the future allowed DC to envision their 'place in history' as Jones and Ormrod suggest, but with no restraints on the imagination.[57] In the context of the 1950s, the climate of the Cold War, and the foundational years of the American Century, that place was as pioneers; missionaries for the American way of life; the pavers to utopia. The future, 'shot through with suggestions of skyscrapers, neon-lighting, and space-ships,' was American through and through.[58]

This, however, brings us back to the issue of race and what it meant to be an American as the American Century got underway. While the future is fantastical in the depictions from DC, and is clearly a place of peace and harmony as highlighted by the fictional crime rates, DC nevertheless fails to depict this future as culturally diverse. The main protagonist and their antagonist; secondary characters; even pedestrians drawn simply to fill out the background of scenes, are all white. Mapped on to the racial strife present in the US at the time – particularly in regards to the Great Migration – DC's colourless utopias display the same motivations behind the emergence of the American suburb; the wish for a white space, or as Caluya so succinctly puts it, the need for 'a socially and

[55] This ties in to the analysis of *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1954) on page 42.
[56] *This is Spinal Tap* (1984), dir. Rob Reiner
[57] Matthew Jones and Joan Ormrod (eds), *Time Travel in Popular Media: Essays on Film, Television, Literature, and Video Games* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015), p.9
[58] Neil Campbell, 'Landscapes of Americanisation in Britain: Learning from the 1950s', in Neil Campbell, Jude Davies, and George McKay, *Issues in Americanisation and Culture* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp.126-146, (p.131)

racially homogenous "bourgeois utopia."[59] So, while the future presented by DC lives up to Gernsback's hopes for science fiction in that it 'educates the public to the possibilities of science and the influence of science on life', it does not necessarily 'make the world a better place to live in' because it fails to achieve his larger goal of instilling humanity with 'a broader understanding of the world that would make them more tolerant.'[60] In the context of the American Century and the parallels it draws with Manifest Destiny, this representation, or lack thereof, is problematic; a fact exacerbated by the definition of utopia as a near-perfect community. Just as the future in these comics is inspired by the consumer culture of the 1950s, this future is also influenced by the fact that 'DC catered to white culture' throughout the 1950s in response to an era when 'American race relations were a political tinderbox about to explode.'[61] The result of this is a vibrant future, albeit one devoid of colour. Isiah Lavender III writes that 'for most of its history sf has considered itself a "colour-blind" genre . . . blithely portraying a future free from racial struggle (not seeming to notice that this harmony is accomplished by eliminating non-white people)'; hence the low crime rates in these stories.[62] To reference Adilifu Nama: 'For decades it appeared as if science fiction was the symbolic wish fulfilment of America's staunchest advocates of white supremacy.'[63] Taking into account the treatment of minorities in the US throughout the years discussed here; the context of the American Century and what defined Americanism; and the inescapable conclusions drawn concerning the whiteness of the US's future,

[59] Gilbert Caluya, 'Pride and Paranoia: Race and the Emergence of Home Security in Cold War America', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 28, No.3 (2014), pp808-819, (p.810)
[60] Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.67-68
[61] Neta Gordon, 'The Enemy Is the Centre: The Dilemma of Normative Masculinity in Darwyn Cooke's DC: The New Frontier'*, Men and Masculinities*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2019), PP. 236-253, (P.246)
Adilifu Nama, *Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction Film* (Austin, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 2008), p.14
[62] Isiah Lavender III, 'Critical Race Theory' in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* edited by Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts, and Sherryl Vint, (2009), pp.185-194 (p.185)
[63] Adilifu Nama, *Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction Film* (Austin, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 2008), p.10

these depictions are undoubtedly suggestive of the inability of white Americans to conceive a racially heterogenous society, even as they lived in one.

Science, Technology and the debate surrounding Dystopia vs. Utopia

> Have you wondered what is in store for America – and for you . . . A nightmare of shuddery terror . . . or a golden era of glorious dreams come true[?][64]

Andrew Butler writes that 'the stories of the early sf genre melded adventure with scientific marvels.'[65] This is something that shines through in works from DC. For those looking beyond the image of the 1950s produced by nostalgia and popular culture in the years since, this decision to focus on the wonders of science, instead of its dangers, is perhaps surprising, given that the biggest scientific breakthrough at that moment was the atomic bomb. M. Keith Booker argues that 'the looming threat of nuclear holocaust or other dire consequences of the Cold War was a dominant factor in the science fiction imagination from the end of the 1940s' onwards; that 'many dystopian visions of the future were strongly informed by Cold War pessimism.'[66] Adam Roberts further supports this, stating 'there are many examples of 1950s SF that mirror an increasing unease.'[67] 'We find in the 1950s an increasing scepticism.'[68] This is not surprising. The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki served as 'the opening thunders of the atomic era', showcasing the devastating possibilities of technological and scientific advancements; the USSR's detonation of their own atomic bomb in 1949 brought nuclear holocaust into the realms of possibility when the Korean War broke out in 1950; this, in turn, prompted the creation and detonation of the first hydrogen bomb by the US in 1952, with the Soviets attaining their own in 1955; the launch of Sputnik I in 1957

[64] Bill Finger and Jack Burnley, et al., *Batman* #15, DC Comics, 1943
See chapter three, footnote 77, for full quotation.
[65] Andrew M. Butler, *Solar Flares: Science Fiction in the 1970* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), p.11
[66] M. Keith Booker, 'Science Fiction and the Cold War', in Seed, David, *A Companion to Science Fiction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), pp. 171-184, (p.171)
[67] Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.79
[68] ibid.

suggested that these missiles might one day be fired from outer space, to the detriment of all life on earth.[69] These developments were suggestive of a dystopian future – if the future existed at all. As Booker and Roberts suggest, this clearly translated into other forms of literature from the decade such as *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), *The Space Merchants* (1953), and *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959), and motion pictures such as *Robot Monster* (1953) and *On the Beach* (1959), which also support Rob Latham's claim that 'near future dystopia and global apocalypse were to become the genre's two most prevalent themes during the [1950s].'[70] In illustrating that both the American Century and the Cold War stirred different emotions and provoked ever-changing reactions in the American people across the decade of the 1950s, this section will explore how travel to the future was used as vessel to enact the best and worst possible outcomes.

Outside comic-books and novels, Alfred Green's *Invasion U.S.A.* (1952), which W. W. Dixon describes as 'one of the most spectacularly violent films of the era', is perhaps the most striking example of the latter.[71] Channelling Staiger and Erb's assessment of 'context-activated reception', Sam Edwards writes that 'no expression of human creativity can escape *time*. Place and moment *always* shape the production of any cultural artefact, and film is no different.'[72] Released in 1952 at the height of the Korean War and 'as the Alert America Convoy toured America' warning of the incessant need to prepare for an atomic attack, the film is clearly influenced by fears concerning the

[69] John Michel and Joe Kubert, et al., *Strange Worlds* #1, Avon Comics, 1950

[70] Rob Latham, 'Fiction, 1950-1963', in Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts, and Sheryl Vint, *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), pp.80-89, (p.86)

[71] Wheeler Winston Dixon, *Visions of the Apocalypse: Spectacles of Destruction in American Cinema* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), p.67

[72] Cynthia Erb, *Tracking King Kong: A Hollywood Icon in World Culture*, Second Edition (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009), p.7

Sam Edwards, 'The Moving Image as Memory: Past and Present on Screen', in Sam Edwards, Michael Dolski and Faye Sayer, *Histories on Screen: The Past and Present in Anglo-American Cinema and Television* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), pp.45-62, (p.57)

destructive potential of the Cold War.[73] Speaking to the worst fears of many Americans, the film depicts an invasion of US territory 'by an unnamed foreign army that was Soviet in all but name.'[74] Featuring infiltration by foreign troops dressed in American uniforms, the atomic destruction of US landmarks such as Boulder Dam and New York City, retaliation from the US with nuclear strikes of their own, and the deaths of all five protagonists, *Invasion U.S.A.* addresses the prominent fears produced by the Cold War from espionage to mutually assured destruction. As the film ends, it is revealed that the protagonists have been hypnotised into a time-slip where they witness the future of the United States if changes are not made to its current trajectory.

> **Mr Ohman:** Did you enjoy your little excursion into the future?
>
> **George Sylvester:** It isn't on the level is it? It isn't really going to happen?
>
> **Mr Ohman:** It is unless you do something to stop it. Tomorrow springs from today like water from a rock. If you want to change what you will become, first change what you are . . . That goes for everybody.[75]

A far cry from DC's optimism, the future in *Invasion U.S.A.* is bleak and dystopic. To reference Richard O'Brien: 'with a bit of a mind flip, you're into the time-slip, and nothing can ever be the same'.[76] Time travel is used here to address the 'near future and [presumed] global apocalypse' as Latham suggests, but it also sparks a commentary concerning the US' current approach to the Korean War, and the Cold War more

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[73] J. Hoberman, *An Army of Phantoms: American Movies and the Making of the Cold War* (London: The New Press, 2011), p.222

[74] Keith M. Johnston, *Science Fiction Film: A Critical Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p.75

[75] *Invasion U.S.A.*, (1952), dir. Alfred E. Green
This is reminiscent of a wartime story in *Batman* #15 (1943), titled 'The Two Futures' that sees the US taken over by Nazi Germany. 'Have you wondered what is in store for America – and for you – when the slave armies of the insane dictators have ended their murderous assault upon the decent and peaceful nations of the world? Here is your answer in unforgettable terms given by the mighty Batman and his Robin, who wondered, too – and discovered that while the past is beyond changing, and the present darkened by the thunderclouds of war, the future still belongs to those of us with courage to make of it what we will! A nightmare of shuddery terror . . . or a golden era of glorious dreams come true . . . you have only to choose between them when you have read this gripping tale of the two futures.' Bill Finger and Jack Burnley, et al., *Batman* #15, DC Comics, 1943

[76] *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), dir. Jim Sharman

generally.[77] These fears are encapsulated by the warmongering single, 'When they Drop the Atomic Bomb' (1951), by Jackie Doll and his Pickled Peppers, which opens with the lyrics:

> There will soon be an end to this cold and wicked war
> When those hard-headed Communists get what they're lookin' for
> Only one thing that will stop them and their atrocious bunch
> If General McArthur drops an atomic bomb[78]

Filmed against a backdrop of chaos and paranoia surrounding General Douglas McArthur's command of the Korean War – paranoia exacerbated by a degree of sabre-rattling support for McArthur – *Invasion U.S.A.* is undeniably a product of this anxiety. The titular invasion is less concerned with the evil nature of the enemy and the call for pre-emptive action against them, and is instead focused on the foretelling of things to come if the US's current trajectory remains unaltered. As Mr Ohman makes clear, actions have consequences. 'That goes for everybody', he says, suggesting that the US, the USSR, and the rest of the world must change if there is any hope of a thaw in the Cold War.[79] David J. Hogan has labelled the film anti-communist but perhaps a more accurate reading would be to label this film anti-Cold War.[80] J. Hoberman supports this, arguing that the film 'was essentially a feature-length version of an Alert America informational short'; the serious nature of the film being enforced by the staging of a parade at its Hollywood premiere by 'helmeted civil defence wardens', and the display of a model commissioned by the Civil Defence Administration depicting a 'bombed out city' in the theatre's lobby.[81] Peter Fitting argues that 'with the decision to use the atomic bomb against civilian targets in Japan, science fiction lost much of its optimism,

[77] Rob Latham, 'Fiction, 1950-1963', in Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts, and Sheryl Vint, *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), pp.80-89, (p.86)
[78] Jackie Doll and his Pickled Peppers, 'When They Drop The Atomic Bomb', Track A on *When They Drop The Atomic Bomb/Get Me A Ticket On The Wabash Cannonball*, Mercury, 1951, Vinyl
[79] *Invasion U.S.A.*, (1952), dir. Alfred E. Green
[80] See David J. Hogan, *Invasion USA: Essays on Anti-Communist Movies of the 1950s and 1960s* (Jefferson, NC, USA: McFarland and Co, Inc, 2017)
[81] J. Hoberman, *An Army of Phantoms* (London: The New Press, 2011), p.222

as the greatest invention of the twentieth century was used not to improve the world but to almost instantly kill some 200,000 people.'[82] *Invasion U.S.A.* shares this sentiment.

As previously stated, the 1950s was a proving ground within the world of American popular culture. With regards to the vast majority of this period's literature and cinematic offerings, Booker, Fitting and Roberts' assumptions concerning science fiction's bleak visions of the future are correct. Often overlooked, and subsequently neglected by these scholars, comic-book representations of the future, particularly those featured in DC's superhero exploits, often served to defy these assessments. When DC addressed the significance of advancements in atomic power, the creative teams behind these stories often portrayed such developments in a positive light. In 'The Thing from 40,000 AD' featured in *Superman* #87, for example, the Man of Steel confronts a shapeshifting foe from the future.[83] Realising he is matched, Superman takes the fight to an atomic test site where, unbeknownst to the Thing, an atomic bomb detonates: 'the whole desert [is] ignited in a tremendous mushrooming blast that shakes the air with man-made thunder', destroying the villain in the process.[84] Where Superman, the fictional embodiment of US superiority fails, the real-world embodiment of American ingenuity and might triumphs, recalling wartime stories that stressed the ability of the American military to eclipse even Superman. The use of language such as 'tremendous' and 'man-made thunder' to describe the atomic blast suggests a sense of awe on behalf of the writers.[85] The nuclear blast is not something that is conveyed as terrifying, but rather as something that showcases US might; they have essentially snatched power

[82] Peter Fitting, 'Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction', in Gregory Claeys, *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 135-153, (p.140)
[83] A villain clearly inspired by Howard Hawks and Christian Nyby's *The Thing from Another World* (1951).
[84] William Woolfolk and Wayne Boring, et al., *Superman* #87, DC Comics, 1954
[85] ibid.

from the gods.[86] This is further reinforced earlier in the story when Superman stumbles upon an 'intricate' machine powered by atomic power in the Thing's lair, to which he responds in a Doc Brown fashion: 'Great Scott! The creature was building a type of atomic motor with improvements unknown in our age!'[87] The suggestion that 'improvements' can be made to current atomic technology proposes that nuclear power will be a staple of American society and its foreign policy for centuries to come. For DC, atomic power – weaponised or otherwise – was a force for good, and was clearly integral to the future of the US; not something that ought to be buried out of fear and forgotten about, but rather continually researched with the promise of the advancement of mankind. The atomic bomb was merely the beginning.[88]

Set in the future, where fantastical technology was at hand, and within the confines of the comic-book where the depiction of death was kept to a minimum for its largely juvenile readership (after 1954, anyway), science powered cities rather than destroyed them; it solved crimes on the rare occasion they occurred, producing a universally peaceful way of life of which Michael Rennie's Klaatu would have been proud; and when bad guys did bring weapons to the table, the good guys had better weapons to subdue them.[89] For DC, who continued to look to the past throughout the 1950s in order to gauge a blueprint for moving forward into the American Century, they also dared to dream what the full potential of the American Century could create.

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[86] Something can clearly also be said here about the geopolitical commentary present in the fact that contemporary American technology has emerged victorious over a "superior" being from a technologically advanced future.

[87] William Woodfolk and Wayne Boring, et al., *Superman* #87, DC Comics, 1954
In an essay about time travel, it is only right that at least one reference to *Back to the Future* (1985) is included.

[88] Atomic energy in the year 2956 has moved beyond the confines of death and destruction, and instead 'supplies power, by wireless, to every machine, car and plane on earth.' Wayne Boring and Stan Kaye, *Action Comics* #215, DC Comics, 1956.

[89] Just look at any one of Batman and Robin's or Green Arrow and Speedy's adventures to the future for proof of this. *Batman* #59 (1950) and *Adventure Comics* #194 (1953) are both good examples.

Robert Heinlein's Vision of the Future

As mentioned in the introduction to this section on the 1950s, the decade marked a shift from the time travel fiction of the latter 1940s in the sense that creative minds began to criticise romanticism of the past. This section will explore these views using Robert Heinlein's *The Door into Summer* (1957), Ray Bradbury's 'A Sound of Thunder', and select episodes of *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964) with the goal of highlighting this shift in the national outlook towards the American Century compared to that seen in the decade before. Robert Heinlein's *The Door into Summer* was one of the defining time travel stories of the decade; one that simultaneously praised contemporary technology – showcasing its potential to revolutionise the future – and denounced the concept of the 'good old days'. It is a peculiar narrative in the sense that it uses time travel to amend a hardship inflicted on the protagonist earlier in the story, but ultimately advocates that people should look to the future instead of romanticising the past. The basic plot sees the protagonist lose his company to his scheming best friend and fiancé, who drug him and place him in suspended animation for thirty years after he confronts them over their relationship. In the future, he is stunned by the developments science and technology have undergone but remains desperate to return to his own time to rectify the crimes that were committed against him. He does so and returns to the future, acknowledging that the past has no place for him anymore – the future is his 'door into summer'.[90] Similar to DC's vision, the future here is imaginatively optimistic. Robots carry out household chores; there are research colonies on Venus; modern science has managed to 'lick the common cold'; and, perhaps most crucially, bathroom mirrors no longer

[90] Robert Heinlein, *The Door into Summer* (London, Great Britain: Pan Books Ltd., 1970), pp.189-190
At the beginning of this book, Heinlein explains that his house had six doors to the outside world; doors that, when there was snow outside, his cat Pete would visit one by one in the hope that the snow would have disappeared; that he would find his door into summer. This door into summer can be read as a metaphor for a better, brighter future.

steamed up when you needed them.[91] Set in 1970 and 2000, the novel explains that a nuclear war had broken out at some point during the 1960s and devastated parts of America, including Washington DC.[92] Returning to Heinlein's opinion prefaced in the introduction of this work 'that an adequate definition of sf might be "realistic speculation about possible future events, based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on a thorough understanding of the nature and significance of scientific method", suggests that this war was a prediction on Heinlein's behalf; a prediction that reveals a staggering insight into the paranoia of those living through the Cold War.[93] This is perhaps unsurprising given the perils of the decade thus far. The beginning of the 1950s was plagued by the Korean War; 1954 marked the French retreat from Vietnam after their defeat at Dien Bien Phu, serving as a catalyst for the disastrous involvement of the US; and 1956 witnessed the Suez Canal Crisis which saw the USSR threaten Britain, France and Israel with nuclear strikes. Writing in 1956, Heinlein understandably saw nuclear war as a distinct possibility.[94] Despite this knowledge that such a war might not be entirely fictitious, Heinlein maintains that science is a force for good that is crucial to the future of the US. In this, he is more overt than DC, saying: 'despite the crape-hangers, romanticists, and anti-intellectuals, the world steadily grows better because the human mind applying itself to the environment, *makes* it better, with hands . . . with tools . . . with horse sense and science and

[91] ibid. p.100

[92] In this particular narrative, Denver becomes the new capital of the US. This war is referred to as the Six Weeks War.

[93] Neil Easterbrook, 'Robert A. Heinlein (1907-88)', in Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts, and Sherryl Vint, *Fifty Key Figures in Science Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp.96-101, (p.97)

[94] *The Door into Summer* was published as a novel in 1957 but debuted in serialised form in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* throughout October-December, 1956.

engineering.'[95] This line personifies a defining attitude belonging to science fiction during the 1950s. To reference Andrew Butler:

> this sf believed in the possibility of progress, whereby each new invention would work to liberate mankind, and, even if engineering problems might occur, further technology would resolve them. The isolated genius could change the world and an individual hero could bring down a tyranny.[96]

Butler's emphasis on the significance of the 'individual hero' plays nicely into futuristic superhero exploits, but his comment that 'the isolated genius could change the world' is significant for another reason in association with Heinlein's views concerning the progress of mankind. Published during a decade that had cultivated the popular image of the 'egghead', this statement is significant. Aaron S. Lecklider writes:

> A signature moment in the evolution of the egghead occurred in October 1956, when *Newsweek* featured an egghead cover story. The image on the magazine's cover featured a white egg donning spectacles of a decidedly old-fashioned, feminine type. The egghead was depicted in noirish shadow and positioned in an asymmetrical composition to the right side of both the magazine's cover and the photograph's borders. This double asymmetry, combined with shadowing and an eerie absence of facial features, rendered the image ominous and vaguely threatening.[97]

Released around the same time Heinlein was writing *The Door into Summer* in serialised form, this 'widely circulated' article, or at least the atmosphere surrounding and supporting such sentiments, likely influenced his work.[98] Criticising this 'populist reaction against intellectuals' by labelling them 'crape-hangers, romanticists, and anti-intellectuals', Heinlein negates the representation of the egghead as 'sensitive, feminine, and explicitly gay' by associating intelligence with an image of masculinity informed by getting one's hands dirty; through the idea that man can make a difference with both his brain and 'with hands . . . with tools . . . with horse sense and science and

[95] Robert Heinlein, *The Door into Summer* (London, Great Britain: Pan Books Ltd., 1970), pp.189-190
[96] Andrew M. Butler, *Solar Flares: Science Fiction in the 1970* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), p.11
[97] Aaron S. Lecklider, 'Inventing the Egghead', *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 2, (2011), pp. 245-265, (p.251)
[98] ibid., p.252

engineering.'[99] Criticising the concept of the egghead, Heinlein instead views the future of the US as dependent on the marriage of these two personalities – brain and brawn – in the successful pursuit of victory in the Cold War and the attainment of the American Century. Despite this animosity on display towards the intellectual, the white, male population of the US simultaneously believed that they were inherently intelligent and, therefore, superior to the rest of the world for no other reason than their American status. Lecklider writes:

> The notion that Americans by and large wished to believe themselves "natively" qualified to eggheaded-ness points to the expansion of exceptionalist language to describe American identity during a period of pitched conflict between the political ideologies of the US and the USSR.[100]

As a nationalist inspired by his early naval career, Heinlein's work is clearly more in line with this view. He viewed American ingenuity as being the key to the future, and within the context of the US's position at the head of the world table at this moment, he saw the American as 'natively qualified' to steer the world in the right direction.

Commenting on the state of the US towards the end of the decade, Heinlein criticises what he perceives as a rose-tinted and misplaced desire to return to the past; to escape to a time before the atomic bomb and the American Century; before the Organisation Man and the 'egghead'.[101] The post-nuclear age, despite its dangers, held equally fantastic opportunities made possible by developments in science and technology; developments

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[99] ibid., p.253
Robert Heinlein, *The Door into Summer* (London, Great Britain: Pan Books Ltd., 1970), pp.189-190

[100] Aaron S. Lecklider, 'Inventing the Egghead', *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 2, (2011), pp. 245-265, (p.248)

[101] 'The Last Flight' – episode eighteen from season one of *The Twilight Zone* – deals with the theme of escaping the present. In this episode, a British fighter pilot from the First World War accidentally travels into the future when he abandons his wingman in a dogfight. Arriving in modern day (1960) America, the pilot comes to realise that he must return to his present and fight his own battles; to face his destiny and rescue his wingman who faces certain death without his intervention. Placed in the context of the 1960s and the Cold War, this episode can be interpreted to address a widespread urge on behalf of the US population at the time; the desire to escape their present. Taking inspiration from the fighter pilot, the audience are expected to confront their present lives and the world they live in; to live for themselves, address the current issues plaguing mankind, and to take up the mantle of the American Century.

that, crucially, would not occur without the existence of intellectuals. With the help of science, humanity will learn from their mistakes and better themselves time and again in their evolution before ultimately achieving utopia. Closing the book with a reflection on both the past and the future, Heinlein writes:

> Whatever the truth about this world, I like it. I've found my Door into Summer and I would not time-travel again for fear of getting off at the wrong station. Maybe my son will, but if he does I will urge him to go forward, not back. "Back" is for emergencies; the future is better than the past.[102]

A Detour through the Twilight Zone[103]

Airing on television in 1963, 'Out of the Past' from season four of *The Twilight Zone*, offers a similar view of the past and the future, and simultaneously illustrates that these views were still in existence once the 1950s had come to a close. It conveys a man discontent with the world he lives in.

> We live in a cesspool; a septic tank; a gigantic sewage complex in which runs the dregs, the filth, the misery-laden slop. And the keeper of the sewer? Man. He is a scientifically advanced monkey who walks upright and with eyes wide open into an abyss of his own making.[104]

In an effort to alter the present, Paul Driscoll attempts to change the past on three separate occasions. He tries to convince a Japanese official to evacuate Hiroshima on the day the US dropped the atomic bomb; he attempts to assassinate Hitler; and he endeavours to alter the course of the *Lusitania* on the fateful day it was torpedoed. In all three attempts, he fails, becoming convinced in the process that 'it's not possible to alter the past'.[105] In response, Driscoll travels back in time to Homeville, Indiana in 1881; a

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[102] ibid.

[103] *The Twilight Zone*, 'The Hitch-Hiker', Season One, Episode Sixteen. Directed by Alvin Ganzer. Written by Rod Serling. CBS, January, 1960.
This subheading is inspired by the closing narration of this episode: 'Nan Adams, age twenty-seven. She was driving to California; to Los Angeles. She didn't make it. There was a detour . . . through the Twilight Zone.'

[104] *The Twilight Zone*, 'No Time Like the Past', Season 4, Episode 10. Directed by Justus Addiss. Written by Rod Serling. CBS, March, 1963

[105] ibid.

place he romanticises as a time of 'band concerts and summer nights on front porches.'[106] In choosing to alter these particular events, the First and Second World Wars (and the technology they produced) are inextricably linked to the state of the world in 1963. Furthermore, the desire to return to a time long before the First World War suggests a desire on behalf of Driscoll to return to a time of isolationism; of pure, untainted Americanism. Once in the past, however, Driscoll comes to realise, as Heinlein's protagonist did, that he does not belong there.[107] 'The past is sacred', he says.[108] 'It belongs to those of you who live in it.'[109] Once in the past, he realises he is cursed with knowledge. He knows that President James Garfield will be assassinated during his time there. He also knows that a school will burn down, injuring twelve children in the process. As with Hiroshima, Hitler's rise to power, and the sinking of the *Lusitania*, he is unable to prevent these events from happening. To live in the past

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This is a defining theme of 'The Time Element'; a teleplay written by Rod Serling (featured on the Westinghouse Desilu Playhouse) that is often referred to as the unofficial pilot for *The Twilight Zone*. The notion that it is impossible to alter the past is a theory popularised by Alfred Bester's short story, 'The Men Who Murdered Mohammed' (1958). This can be viewed online here: https://archive.org/stream/Fantasy_Science_Fiction_v015n04_1958-10_Gorgon776/Fantasy__Science_Fiction_v015n04_1958-10_Gorgon776#mode/2up (pp.118-129)

[106] *The Twilight Zone*, 'No Time Like the Past', Season 4, Episode 10. Directed by Justus Addiss. Written by Rod Serling. CBS, March, 1963

[107] This criticism of the desire to return to the past is a theme that appears in many of *The Twilight Zone's* episodes. In 'The Trouble with Templeton' from Series 2, Episode 9, a renowned actor has become complacent and given up on life. He longs for the good old days. When he accidentally travels back in time, his wife and best friend tell him that they do not want him there; that he does not belong, to which he returns to the present more disheartened and lonelier than ever. Upon his return, he finds a script in his pocket that shows his wife and friend were just acting in order to snap him out of his complacency with life. 'Acting! They were acting for me! They wanted me to go back to my own life . . . and live it' (*The Twilight Zone,* 'The Trouble with Templeton', Series 2, Episode, 9, Directed by Buzz Kulik, Written by E. Jack. Neuman and Rod Serling, CBS, December 1960). Upon this discovery, Booth abandons his self-pity and longing for the past. He abandons his complacency with his life; his routine; his adulterous wife; and asserts himself as Mr Booth Templeton to his young and arrogant director. The message of this episode is to stop dwelling on the past and live your best life. Other similar episodes are 'Once Upon a Time' (season 3, episode 13) and 'Of Late I Think of Cliffordville' (season 4, episode 14) which both conclude that the past is never as it is romanticised. 'You wanted it as it was. It's not my fault your memory is so imperfect.' (*The Twilight Zone,* 'Of Late I Think of Cliffordville', Season 4, Episode 14. Directed by David Lowell Rich. Written by Rod Serling, CBS, April 1963).

[108] *The Twilight Zone*, 'No Time Like the Past, Season 4, Episode 10. Directed by Justus Addiss. Written by Rod Serling. CBS, March 1963

[109] ibid.

would be to live in a world where man cannot make a difference. On this epiphany, he says:

> I'm going back to where I belong. I couldn't live in a world menaced by a bomb and I find out now that it doesn't make any difference if it's a world or twelve children burned in a fire . . . That's what I've learned Harvey, to leave the yesterdays alone and do something about the tomorrows. They're the ones that count. God let there be a tomorrow![110]

Channelling the same message on display in the closing narration of *The Door into Summer*, Driscoll comes to realise that the post-nuclear age, despite its dangers, held the potential for change and the evolution of mankind. The possibility of nuclear war was a terrifying one, but that came with the territory. War and weapons have always been causes of anxiety. At that point in time, the nuclear bomb simply represented the refinement and evolution of that threat. At least in the present, the future can be carved by current attitudes and actions. This is what Luce's 'American Century' was all about.

Past, Present and Future Collide with a Sound of Thunder

To conclude the 1950s with Ray Bradbury's 'A Sound of Thunder' (1953), this short story sees its protagonist travel back to the prehistoric age as part of a hunting safari. One of the founding and most effective texts depicting the butterfly effect in action, 'A Sound of Thunder' reinforces the notion that the past should be left alone. 'We don't belong here in the past' explains one of the tour guides – a statement that becomes the text's resounding message.[111] By wandering from the set path and accidentally killing a butterfly, the protagonist alters his present and the future immeasurably. His actions have changed the English language. 'Time' becomes 'tyme', for example, and 'year' becomes 'yeer'.[112] More worryingly within the context of the Cold War, by altering the past, the protagonist has created a future where a dictatorial figure now serves as

[110] ibid.
[111] Ray Bradbury, 'A Sound of Thunder', in Ray Bradbury, *Ray Bradbury Stories Volume 1* (London, England: Harper Voyager, 2008), pp.252-262, (p.254)
[112] ibid., p.261

President of the United States. President Deutscher is referred to as an 'iron man', drawing clear parallels with Stalin's persona as the 'Man of Steel'.[113] A name clearly of German origin, it is also difficult not to draw comparisons between the fictional Deutscher and Adolf Hitler. Pre-dating Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), which deals with an alternate history where the US finds itself under a dictatorship after losing the Second World War, Bradbury's subtle use of this scenario as a direct consequence of time travel can be read as criticism of the obsession with the past on display through America's remaining isolationist element.[114] The events of the past have brought America to where it is today. To go back and relive them, or to go back and change things, could have catastrophic consequences. The past belongs in the past. The US should instead set its sights on the future, which would require new and different solutions to new and different dilemmas. The American Century suggested that the future was there for America's taking. Their mission for the future, Luce says, is 'to accept wholeheartedly our duty and our opportunity as the most powerful and vital nation in the world and in consequence to exert upon the world the full impact of our influence, for such purposes as we see fit and by such means as we see fit.'[115] For Bradbury, Heinlein, and Serling, to dwell on the past was to halt progress. The past did not hold the answers, but the blueprints laid out by America in the 1950s just might. The key to achieving an American Century lay not in the past, but in looking to the future. It was time for America to exert itself.

[113] ibid., p.262

[114] This dystopic outcome of the Second World War crops up a few times throughout this period. See also: *Batman* #15, DC Comics, 1943 and *Rip Hunter . . . Time Master* #20, 1965

[115] Henry Luce, 'The American Century', *Diplomatic History,* Vol. 23, No.2, (1999), pp.159-171, (p.165) Originally published in *Life* Magazine on 17 February, 1941 and reprinted here by permission of *Time* Magazine Inc.
To quote the aptly named *The Police* song 'Born in the Fifties: 'we're taking the future, we don't need no teacher.' The Police, 'Born in the Fifties', Track Eight on *Outlandos D'Amour*, A&M, 1978, Vinyl

Going forward; Moving backwards: Dystopian visions of the future and other lessons from Science Fiction between 1960 and 1965

The years between the end of the Second World War and 1960 represent the foundational years of the American Century. These years are often romanticised through the lens of rock 'n' roll, drive-ins and dancehalls, but the swinging sixties – at least with reference to the Cold War – marked a significant shift. Characterised by significant internal and external conflict, the early years of the 1960s saw a departure from the optimism on display in 1950s SF. This section will look firstly at the dystopian future depicted in George Pal's *The Time Machine* (1960) in an attempt to unravel the commentary inherent concerning the complacency of the American people. Born from a culture of fear surrounding the existence of subversives in the US and the accompanying witch-hunt mentality, the rise of a consumer culture, and the false sense of security brought about by the myth of the American Century, this film criticises the show of complacency on display by the American people who appear to have lost their drive, and uses dystopia as tool for predicting the outcome of this complacency if the US continues down its current path. It will follow this analysis with an exploration of two Marvel comics published in the early 1960s with the goal of showcasing a return of the apprehensive attitudes towards the American Century on display in the 1940s. These comics, using the superhero as an allegory for the US once again, demonstrate that even the most powerful of beings can be defeated; a humbling message for a time when the grand rhetoric of the American Century had bolstered arrogance and overconfidence in both the abilities and rights of the American people. These comics likewise take a more negative approach to the potential impact of science and technology on the future of the planet at a time when mutually assured destruction looked to become a reality outside of the pages of the comic-book.

George Pal's *The Time Machine* (1960)

> I don't much care for the time I was born into. It seems people aren't dying fast enough these days. They call upon science to invent new, more efficient weapons to depopulate the earth.[116]

Where some examples of popular culture highlight discontent with the present but ultimately conclude that mankind will better itself in due course, other examples belonging to the 1960s did not share in this optimism. *The Time Machine* is a prime example of this. The above quotation arises at the beginning of the film as the protagonist, George, and his friends discuss Britain's controversial actions in the Boer War. In response to his discontent with the present, George travels into the future where, as if to prove his analysis of mankind, he is greeted by the evolution of humanity's appetite for destruction. He first stops in 1917 to find Britain in a state of total war that has claimed the life of his best friend. He moves on to 1940 where he witnesses the London Blitz and the destruction of his home. He then travels to 1966 where he finds an overwhelmingly Americanised London ripped straight from the pages of DC's comics. This time, he is interrupted by the detonation of an atomic bomb and, presumably, the onset of a third world war.[117] Escaping from the blast, George's time machine becomes encased in lava which forces him to travel to the year 802,701. At first this future seems idyllic. He is greeted by an 'Eden' of green pastures and unspoiled jungles that are rich with fruit; the first people (the Eloi) he comes across are laughing and playing by a tranquil river.[118] It appears that mankind has finally evolved

[116] *The Time Machine* (1960), dir. George Pal

[117] In the same way that the Six Weeks War in *The Door into Summer* can be seen as a prediction on behalf of Heinlein, such a strike on London (and its Americanised exterior), might be viewed as a prediction on behalf of George Pal and his team. As depicted here, such a conflict seems like the logical next step in the downfall of man. Where The Second World War started twenty-one years after the end of the First World War, this strike takes place twenty-one years after the end of the Second World War – a coincidence?

[118] Jerome F. Shapiro, 'Atomic Bomb Cinema: Illness, Suffering, and the Apocalyptic Narrative', *Literature and Medicine*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1998) pp. 126-148 (p.131)

beyond their 'petty squabbles' and once-insatiable appetite for death and destruction.[119] Beneath this outward appearance, however, this future is far from utopian. As he gets closer to the Eloi, a woman can be seen drowning as her people watch, unstirred. Without George she would have died, and it is here that the first signs of complacency begin to show. As the story progresses, George asks the Eloi questions about their heritage and history; their lives; the advancements made in science and technology, and so on. 'I have come a long way and would like to know a few things', he says; to which the Eloi reply, 'why?'[120] They are uninterested; complacent in their ignorance. They have 'no knowledge of books or fire.'[121] In the future, humanity has gone backwards; a once great people reduced to cavemen: 'living vegetables.'[122] When George eventually finds a library to fill in the blanks, he is met by a ruinous old building that has been neglected for centuries. The books – and with them, man's history – crumble to dust in his hands as he tries to read them. To quote H. G. Wells, "Gallery after gallery, dusty, silent, often ruinous, the exhibits sometimes mere heaps of rust and lignite, sometimes fresher"; as Dolly Jørgensen remarks, 'the overwhelming feeling is of a place time forgot.'[123] The library here represents the graveyard of knowledge; the hollow shell of a once-great society. Jørgensen goes on to say:

> Although we cannot physically travel in time, we can mentally travel in time. We can visit the past in a museum exhibit, but we can also envision the future through it because the memories made in a museum may later be

[119] *The Day the Earth Stood Still,* dir. Robert Wise, 1951
In perhaps what might be considered the most iconic science fiction film of the 1950s, Michael Rennie's character Klaatu refers to the Cold War as a 'petty squabble'. A bold message to convey at such an early stage in the Cold War, especially considering the presence of the HUAC in Hollywood at that time. It is a message that is just as critical of the US as it is of the USSR.
[120] *The Time Machine* (1960), dir. George Pal
[121] ibid.
[122] ibid.
[123] Dolly Jørgensen, 'Remembering the Past for the Future: The Function of Museums in Science Fiction Time Travel Narratives', in Jones, Matthew and Ormrod, Joan (eds), *Time Travel in Popular Media: Essays on Film, Television, Literature, and Video Games* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015), pp.118-131, (p.122)

> recalled and put into action. The museum is our own personal time machine. Remembering the past becomes a way forward to the future.[124]

The Time Machine can be seen to revert to the way of thinking on display throughout the late 1940s, which Jørgensen summarises succinctly. In neglecting the past and its history as highlighted by the ruinous condition of the library, mankind has regressed. By Jørgensen's logic, the Eloi have condemned themselves to a life in limbo – of being lost in time – because the museum is no longer able to serve as a vessel for envisioning the future. The past has died and, because of their inability to build upon pre-existing knowledge, so has mankind's ticket to utopia. The result, according to Jerome F. Shapiro, is 'filmdom's finest example of the modern apocalyptic tradition.'[125]

Referring to Wells' original work, Will Tattersdill writes that '*The Time Machine* is frequently read as an evolutionary fable, a nightmare of the possibility of human degeneration.'[126] This same assessment can be applied to George Pal's film. Drawing once again on Heinlein's view that 'the world steadily grows better because the human mind applying itself to the environment, *makes* it better', humanity's evolution is thwarted by the self-destructive level of complacency on display by the Eloi.[127] Going on the theory that the atomic strike on London in 1966 saw the enactment of a civilisation-destroying war, the rebuilding of civilisation would logically require history books and the invaluable lessons concerning politics, religion, and science, among others, contained within them. Given this, and the condition of the library in the year 802,701, it can be inferred that at some point between 1966 and this future, civilisation lost contact with the lessons of the past, consequently spawning the lackadaisical race

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[124] ibid.

[125] Jerome F. Shapiro, 'Atomic Bomb Cinema: Illness, Suffering, and the Apocalyptic Narrative', *Literature and Medicine*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1998) pp. 126-148 (p.131)

[126] Will Tattersdill, 'Periodicity, Time Travel, and the Emergence of Science Fiction: H. G. Wells's Temporal Adventures in the Pages of the *New Review*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Volume 46, Number 4, 2013, pp. 526-538, (p.530)

[127] Robert Heinlein, *The Door into Summer* (London, Great Britain: Pan Books Ltd., 1970), pp.189-190

known as the Eloi. Placing this within the context of 1960, this reading acts as a commentary on prevalent fears concerning the emasculation of the American man. Again, in reference to the novel, Patrick Parrinder argues that the Eloi are the 'foreboding of a race that has "lost its manliness" – an issue he describes as a 'universal anxiety' of the time; an analysis that once again maps onto the film and the atmosphere in which it was conceived.[128] This concern was further bolstered by a series of articles published by *Look* Magazine in 1958, titled: 'The Decline of the American Male', and it even made its way into the comic-books of the day. In *Superman* #38, for example, one character, referring to 'the good old days', notes: 'men were tougher then! They didn't have to take pills!'[129] Summarising the general conclusions drawn by these works, K. A Cuordileone writes:

> American males had become the victims of a smothering, overpowering, suspiciously collectivist mass society – a society that had smashed the once-autonomous male self, elevated women to a position of power in the home, and doomed men to a slavish conformity not wholly unlike that experienced by men living under Communist rule.[130]

In drawing parallels with the US in the 1960s, the environment in which George finds the Eloi can be compared to the suburbs that housed the white-collared American male. As Cuordileone suggests above, the American man had become tamed, domesticated by a life popularly defined by suburbia. No longer an individual as much as a mindless drone reminiscent of the 'pod people' in Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), the American male became defined by his desk job; his Ford Thunderbird or Chevy Impala parked in the driveway; and the white picket-fenced suburban home that

[128] Patrick Parrinder, *Shadows of the Future: H.G. Wells, Science Fiction, and Prophecy* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995), p.16. The presence of this anxiety is supported by the publication of three defining studies on the subject: David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), Robert Lindner's *Must You Conform?* (1956), and William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1957).
[129] Bill Finger and Sam Citron, et al., *Superman* #38, DC Comics, 1946
[130] K. A. Cuordileone, "Politics in an Age of Anxiety": Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960', *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 87, No.2, (2000), pp.515-545, (pp.522-523)

housed his picture-perfect nuclear family. No longer able to think for himself, this 'once-autonomous male' became brainwashed by the 'corporate mentality'; a cog in the US corporate machine. [131] The blue-collared factory worker or farmhand turned soldier of years past, inextricably linked with the very notion of masculinity in the US for decades, evolved into the feeble, white-collared office worker at the dawn of the 1950s.[132] Helpless in the shadow of the mushroom cloud, the American man became aware that his fate, and that of his family, lay not in his hands, but in the hands of two giants and a proverbial red button. Looking at *The Time Machine*, this can be mapped onto the relationship between the Morlocks and the Eloi.

Within the context of the most direct fears that arose from the Cold War, the underground creatures that serve as the antithesis of the Eloi have often been labelled by Roger A. Berger as allegories for the threat of communism within the US.[133] Likewise, other readings have placed emphasis on issues of class and race.[134] Alternatively, the Morlocks are symbolic of the American government and the American Century more generally. Pulling the strings from behind closed doors in the same way that the Morlocks scheme underground, the government preys on the American male (the Eloi)

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[131] ibid.
The 'corporate mentality' was coined by W. H. Whyte in his influential study, *The Organization Man* (1956), and refers to the development of a new social ethic following the Second World War. It essentially means group mentality. No longer capable, or perhaps fearful, of thinking for himself, the American man, often working for a corporation in this scenario, dedicates his life to his career. For those indoctrinated by the corporate mentality it becomes difficult to differentiate the individual from the group. He essentially becomes part of one body; he becomes the corporation. Working together efficiently like a well-oiled machine, these men are obedient and unquestioning in their work which is, of course, essential to efficient corporate functioning.

[132] AMC's *Mad Men* (2007-2015) has popularised the image of the white-collared office worker during the 1960s in recent years.

[133] Roger A. Berger, 'Ask What You Can Do for Your Country: The Film Version of H.G. Wells's "The Time Machine" and The Cold War', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 3, (1989) pp. 177-187
'The Morlocks represent, of course, the Other – and within the context of 1950s cold-war science fiction, Communists.' (p.183)

[134] Peter Fitting, for example, argues 'it is a vision of the future in which class division and conflict have led to a degraded society in which the underground Morlocks feed on the degenerate remnants of the aristocracy whom they raise as cattle.'
Peter Fitting, 'Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction', in Gregory Claeys, *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 135-153, (p.139)

by turning the once-masculine GI into the domesticated and easily manipulated organisation man. It can be argued that the government started this chain reaction when they enacted the GI Bill in 1944, which 'provided education, housing, and small business assistance, along with mental and physical rehabilitation in government-funded hospitals.'[135] The Bill was designed to smoothly transition soldiers back to civilians; a transition on which, according to Laura McEnaney, 'the fate of post-war democracy hinged.'[136] Writing in 1944, Willard Waller called veterans "America's Gravest Social Problem."[137] He further expanded upon the issue, noting: "We know how to turn the civilian into a soldier . . . but we do not know how to turn the soldier into a civilian again."[138] The GI Bill held the answers. Security, education, and the potential for well-paid desk jobs as a result, helped to tame these 'regimented warriors' returning from war.[139] When they were needed again in later years for less honourable endeavours such as the Korean War and Vietnam, these men were summoned, chewed up, and spat out once again in both the government's pursuit of the American Century and its triumph over communism. In this reading, the film's most haunting scene, where the Eloi are summoned by the Morlocks to be fed upon, takes on an entirely new meaning. The trance-like state in which they walk towards certain death without question can be read as an exaggeration concerning the modern man's loss of his 'inner-directed personality'; a trait coined by David Riesman that Cuordileone describes as being a 'strong inner drive and sense of self [that] permitted . . . [man] to forge ahead boldly without concern for peer approval.'[140] The Eloi here choose to march to their deaths because they have

[135] Laura McEnaney, 'Veterans' Welfare, the GI Bill and American Demobilization', *Journal of Law, Medicine and Ethics*, Vol. 39, No. 1, (2011), pp. 41-47 (p.41)
[136] ibid. p.42
[137] ibid.
[138] ibid.
[139] ibid.
[140] K. A. Cuordileone, "Politics in an Age of Anxiety": Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960', *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 87, No.2, (2000), pp.515-545, (p. 523)

lost the ability to think for themselves. They have been brainwashed by the Morlocks into accepting this outcome as a matter of fact; it has become routine in the same way that the white-collared man belonging to 1960s America was indoctrinated into accepting their daily corporate routine. This imagery serves as an extreme visual embodiment of the 'collectivist mass society' and 'slavish conformity' that Cuordileone suggests defined the 1950s and 1960s in the US.[141] Ultimately, *The Time Machine* should certainly be 'read as an evolutionary fable, a nightmare of the possibility of human degeneration.'[142] A product of paranoia concerning the emasculation of the American man, the film can and should be read as a foretelling of humanity's collapse pending the continuation of this culture of complacency.

The Pessimism of the Marvel Age

Marvel Comics were considerably less optimistic about the future when they emerged to take the comic-book world by storm in 1961. The first two appearances of Kang the Conqueror in *Fantastic Four* #19 and *Avengers* #8 require particular attention. Released in October 1963 and September 1964, respectively, these comics are significant because their stories were conceived in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis when America and the USSR came close to nuclear conflict over the presence of atomic missiles in Cuba. For many Americans, this had been a turning point for perceptions concerning the Cold War because it highlighted just how precarious the balance between war and peace had become. In *Fantastic Four* #19, the team travel back to Ancient Egypt to bring home a cure for blindness for the Thing's love-interest, Alicia, and, in doing so, stumble upon Kang who has travelled from the thirtieth century to reign over Egypt with an iron

[141] ibid., pp. 522-523

[142] Will Tattersdill, 'Periodicity, Time Travel, and the Emergence of Science Fiction: H. G. Wells's Temporal Adventures in the Pages of the *New Review*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Volume 46, Number 4, 2013, pp. 526-538, (p.530)

fist.[143] This issue is pivotal for two major reasons. Firstly, the team fail in their mission. Not only do they fail to prevent Kang's escape, they also fail in bringing Alicia's cure back with them. Unlike the whimsical stories told by DC during the 1950s, this adventure does not have a happy ending. It can be argued that the team's failure marked a shift in the way comic-books were written, but also in the way comic-book writers began to address the Cold War and the American Century. Referring to this shift, Bradford Wright offers the suggestion that 'the very notion of a troubled and brooding superhero who could not always accomplish what he set out to do betrayed the limited scope of his superpowers – and suggested perhaps the limitations confronting the American superpower as well.'[144] It illustrated that victory was never a preordained outcome, something preached by many comics up until this point.

In the brief glimpse we are given of the future in *FF* #19, the audience is introduced to a cityscape almost identical to the sprawling metropolises depicted by DC throughout the 1950s. Kang refers to the year 3000 as a 'century of peace and progress' which is suggestive of the creative team's desire to envision a brighter future on the other side of the Cold War.[145] Misleading in this depiction, they also sow the seeds for this future's dystopic demise which would come to fruition in *Avengers* #8. Referring to the future, Kang says:

> It was 'a glorious age of enlightenment. The century of peace and progress . . . the ultimate in civilization and culture! And I hated it![146]

In his discontent with the tranquillity of his present, the war-mongering Kang uses futuristic technology to return to Ancient Egypt and enact his dictatorship. This issue shows what one man's discontent with his present can do; something exacerbated by the

[143] Kang is known as Rama Tut to begin with.
[144] Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2003) p.217
[145] ibid.
[146] ibid.

technology of the future. It also highlights that, regardless of how good the future might be – even if mankind has achieved utopia as suggested here – things can quickly change. This is supported in *Avengers* #8 where, after escaping from Ancient Egypt, it is revealed that Kang travelled one thousand years beyond his present to the fortieth century. Here, the future is dystopic.

> The fortieth century is barbaric, savage . . . with men constantly at war, fighting with weapons so scientifically advanced that they cannot even understand their composition for they were manufactured centuries earlier by more intelligent humans[147]

Channelling the regression of mankind on display in *The Time Machine*, Marvel takes the template of the future as envisioned by DC during the 1950s and expertly recreated in *FF* #19, and reimagines it based on a realistic trajectory informed by the turbulent years of the 1960s thus far. The dystopian future on display here is illustrative of what Jim Casey has labelled 'Marvel's wary exploration of scientific advancement.'[148]

Bringing Time Travel Full Circle: 1945-1965

As the 1960s got underway, time travel flourished as a narrative device that enabled commentary on the decade's most prevalent fears: most notably, those concerning the rapid advances being made in science, and the devastating potential of such developments. Jim Casey notes that, 'rather than celebrating the wonders of technology', like DC's ventures into the future, Marvel 'warned of its concomitant dangers'.[149] Quoting Bradford Wright, Casey expands on this by arguing that 'this cautionary attitude toward science was unique to Marvel: "While DC used sci-fi to exalt the virtues of scientific progress and the certainty of peace through technology, Marvel

[147] Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, et al., *Avengers* #8, Marvel Comics, 1964
[148] Jim Casey, 'Silver Age Comics', in Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts, and Sheryl Vint, *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), pp.123-133, (p.127)
[149] ibid

spoke to the anxieties of the atomic age."[150] While DC remained optimistic in comparison to Marvel, it should also be noted that the 1960s saw travel to the past rise in popularity again. DC's *Rip Hunter . . . Time Master* which ran from 1961-1965 dealt predominantly with travel to the past. In a piece of ideological time travel, it also seems to tap into an earlier period of time travel narratives, those of 1945-50. As the Cold War pressures of the 1960s began to mount, people began to question whether they and, indeed the world, would see 1970. The past became a place of solace once again.

Charting the period from 1945-1965, time travel in American popular culture highlights the journey of a nation trying to find its place in the world. In the immediate years after the Second World War, time travel provided an escape from the uncertainty of the present and offered a blueprint for those seeking inspiration from the past to shape the future. As the 1950s dawned and the American people began to more widely accept and embrace the American Century, time travel offered a means of envisioning the future. Taking the reins, DC Comics capitalised on the consumer culture that came to define this period, and envision a utopia, albeit one for a select percentage of the population. As the USSR drew ahead of the US in the space race, the Civil Rights Movement gained traction, and tensions reached boiling point in Cuba and Vietnam, time travel as a narrative device in the 1960s adjusted once again to meet the public mood; this time with dystopian visions of future civilizations destroyed by nuclear war, and, in the case of DC, the return of a pre-occupation with travel to the past.[151]

[150] ibid.

[151] Looking at some of the key events that came to define the early 1960s, it is not difficult to see why dystopian futures replaced utopias in time travel narratives. In regards to the Civil Rights Movement, riots broke out in Mississippi and Birmingham in 1962 and 1963, respectively; Martin Luther King Jr. gave his famous 'I Have a Dream' speech at the equally historic March on Washington in August, 1963; and 1965 saw the brutal suppression of the Selma-to-Montgomery March for voting rights. The early 1960s also saw the assassination of President Kennedy in Dallas, Texas in November, 1963, and the escalation of the Vietnam War when the US warship, the USS Maddox, confronted three North

Vietnamese torpedo boats in the waters of the Gulf of Tonkin. The Gulf of Tonkin Incident led to the US engaging more directly in the Vietnam War.

Conclusion

The years from 1945-1965 represent a defining phase in the history of the United States of America. Closing the door on the Second World War as the mushroom clouds remained suspended over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the US turned its back on the isolationism that had defined its immediate past, and stepped into a new era where the first frost of the Cold War was felt immediately. Embracing the grand rhetoric espoused by Henry Luce in 1941, the US pulled up its chair at the head of the world table where, over the coming decades, its neighbours would watch on as the self-declared greatest country in the world reached equally new highs and lows. The American Century was upon them.

To reiterate the opposing views that frame the introduction of this work, these formative years split public opinion in regards to the role of the US in this post-war world. For David M. Kennedy, 'the [Second World] War incubated in Americans a new national self-confidence, infused with a sense of moral rectitude, missionary zeal, and duty to lead.'[1] For Hugh Brogan and Michael Goodrum, '. . . "Americans were [instead] often intensely apprehensive about the future" [and] concerned about . . . its place in the new global political order.'[2] The US emerged from the Second World War as the most powerful nation on the planet and their discovery of nuclear power changed the landscape of war, politics and, ultimately, life as people knew it. The US had essentially harnessed the power of the gods by the end of the Second World War and, to begin with at least, it was theirs and theirs alone to do with as they pleased. Nuclear actions have chain reactions though. The US, then, was staring into the abyss, into uncharted

[1] David M. Kennedy, 'The Origins and Uses of American Hyperpower', in Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Short American Century: A Postmortem* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp.15-37, (p.32)

[2] Michael Goodrum, *Superheroes and American Self Image: From War to Watergate* (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2016), p.50

territory; as such, it is important to remember Nietzsche's statement that 'He who fights with monsters should be careful lest he thereby become a monster. And if thou gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee.'[3] In fighting the monsters of the Second World War, and particularly in the way the US delivered the final blows of the war in the Pacific, there was some unease as to whether the US had 'abdicated its position of moral leadership by employing the tactics of its enemies' through its atomic assault on civilian populations.[4] For some, this sense of unease concerning the US's interventionist world role would continue throughout the years discussed here. Others, as Kennedy suggests, embraced it.

Occupying the space of the 'collective myth' as Jason Dittmer terms it, the American Century became a crucial part of American identity in the years after 1945.[5] Just as Manifest Destiny had once spurred Americans on in their expansion westward and their conquest of North America, the American Century had a similar effect on the American psyche post-1945 in the perceived need to expand the reaches of democracy – defined on their terms – throughout the modern world. Narratives and images contained in popular culture during these formative years engaged with some of the dramatic possibilities of the inherently dramatic phrase, 'the American Century'. Science fiction as a genre did this perhaps better than any other. In looking specifically at the years between 1945 and 1965, this work has framed the American Century as a journey, through journeys. Looking at international, interplanetary and time travel, respectively, the goal of this thesis was to look beyond the confines of the domestic front and the often-inherent commentary concerning Cold War paranoia associated with fear of the

[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Dover Publications, INC., 1997), p.52
[4] William W. Savage Jr., *Commies, Cowboys and Jungle Queens: Comic Books and America, 1945–1954* (Middletown: Wesleyan university Press, 1998), p. 12.
[5] Jason Dittmer, *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, & Identity* (Plymouth, United Kingdom: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), p.71

bomb and domestic subversion. Instead, its aim was to look at the geopolitical debate surrounding America's place in the world at this moment, in addition to wider issues concerning race and gender, and how these Cold War anxieties fit into the larger context of the American Century.

While closest to reality in theory, international travel is not hampered by this. Admittedly not as fantastical or perhaps as exciting as the settings of outer space or those provided by time travel, international travel within popular culture at this time provides invaluable geopolitical commentary through the actions of displaced Americans. When this international setting is combined with the concept of the Other as depicted in *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* and *The Snow Creature*, this narrative becomes a gateway to unmatched insight into contemporary debates around American identity. Inherent to this is the commentary present concerning issues of race.

Intertwined with interplanetary travel in the sense that they both explore similar issues, it made sense to approach international travel from a more confined analysis of two case studies before expanding upon these issues with a significantly broader exploration of interplanetary travel. Inspired by Cynthia Erb, the idea was to consider how *Lagoon* and *Snow Creature* 'operated against a field of social discourses defined by what might be described as tensions between notions of the domestic and the foreign.'[6] Using 1954 and the *Brown v. Board of Education* trial to frame this chapter, both films provided a snapshot of these 'tensions' that plagued the period from 1945-1965. Highlighting this split in public opinion concerning the US's place in the world at this moment, both espouse geopolitical commentary inherent to the depiction of international travel in popular culture. As case studies, they offer two completely different opinions towards the constitution of American identity.

[6] ibid., p.17

While *The Snow Creature* is infused with the 'national self-confidence' and 'missionary zeal' that Kennedy subscribes to, *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* is critical of this uniquely American superiority complex. Geopolitically, *The Snow Creature* is significant because it reinforces US supremacy from the very beginning. It frames the nation as pioneers as its American protagonist, Frank Parrish, conquers the Himalayas, recalling the US's long history of conquest from the American Frontier to their more recent efforts in Alaska. Wilde's film positions the US as a pioneering nation working towards the betterment of mankind; rhetoric that speaks directly to their pursuit of winning the Cold War through both the expansion of democracy and the 'good Samaritan' aspirations of the American Century.[7] Rather than waving the banner for American supremacy, *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* is instead critical of the US's current trajectory. Portraying its titular creature as a sympathetic character, the audience is made to question US intervention overseas. Using these creatures as allegories for African Americans, they likewise espouse differing views concerning the issues of race at home. For Arnold, the sympathetic nature of the creature and its apparent murder at the hands of white American men at the end of both the 1954 original and its 1955 sequel can be viewed to criticise both the existence of lynch mobs supposedly 'defending' white womanhood and the Jim Crow Laws in the South. It more so utilises the criticisms aimed at the 'exhibitionist' nature of the *Brown v. Board* trial to frame the relationship between the Gill-Man and his white tormentors. In the grander scheme of the Cold War and foreign opinion concerning the US, African Americans, like the Gill-man, were seen as pawns as opposed to real people; a means to an end crucial to their public image and, by extension, their geopolitical aspirations concerning both the Cold War and the American Century, rather than legitimately striving for

[7] Henry Luce, 'The American Century', *Diplomatic History,* Vol. 23, No.2, (1999), pp.159-171, (p.170)

equality as an end in itself. Less honourably, *The Snow Creature* portrays its titular creature as a monstrous being that preys on young women. Once transported to the US from the Himalayas, mimicking the movement of African Americans from the South to cities in the North, the creature comes to embody the perceived threat African American men posed to the US's white women; a threat informed by Jim Crow racism. Ultimately, international travel in the popular culture from this period not only highlights a split amongst the American people in regards to their place in the world and the perceived rights that accompany this position, but it also offers unblinking insight into the racism that plagued the US throughout the years discussed here.

Interplanetary travel builds on and extrapolates from this. Even its fantastic elements channel hopes and fears related to the American Century and the Cold War struggle. This commentary on race and American identity is still inherent as seen in examples such as *The Space Merchants* and *When Worlds Collide* where new planets stand in for new frontiers, and new frontiers beg the question as to who will conquer them, and what the future evolution of Americana will look like both in terms of race and culture. Interplanetary travel is perhaps most significant, however, in the sense that it directly addresses fears associated with the Cold War. To quote John Donovan, the theatre of space essentially becomes a 'future battleground', where potential outcomes of the Cold War are acted out.[8] Martians become stand-ins for Soviets, expeditions to the moon become crucial to controlling the outcome of the conflict, and desolate planets belonging to once-great civilisations serve as warnings against the US's current trajectory and the devastating potential for nuclear annihilation. Mapped onto the American Century these Cold War-induced fears can be summarised as fear concerning

[8] John Donovan, 'Red Menace on the Moon: Containment in Space as Depicted in Comics of the 1950s' in Chris York and Rafiel York, *Comic Books and the Cold War: Essays on Graphic Treatment of Communism, the Code and Social Concerns, 1946-1962* (London: McFarland, 2012), pp.79-90 (p.80)

what the future might hold – if the future existed at all. In the years between 1945-1965 that saw the birth of the atomic age, and consequent developments in science and technology occur at a pace that had been unknown before, culminating in Sputnik in 1957 and the exaggerated belief that nuclear missiles would soon be capable of launching from space, the great beyond that is space became a theatre to express concerns about that other great beyond – the future. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, and indeed throughout the years discussed here, the American Century represented a time of great confusion and uncertainty for the American people.

Time travel is simultaneously the most abstract and direct. It can appear divorced from reality, but in doing so offers itself up as a clearer lens for analysing the present in which it is created and consumed because it situates the past and future as part of a continuous Cold War present. To reiterate, narratives of travel, whether in time or space, can be seen to function as a laboratory where readers consider the present, its relationship to the past, and its trajectory into the future. Time travel stories in particular offer a plurality of potential futures, suggesting unease about the project of the 'American Century', but also the desire to explore it, to enact it, to find justifications for the future in the past – and to see present actions extend into the future. In wanting to address the popularity of time travel at specific points in time throughout the twenty years discussed here, this work separated the evolution of this device into three separate periods: 1945-50, the 1950s and 1960-195, roughly.

Where interplanetary travel highlighted a fear towards the uncertainty of the future throughout the years discussed here, time travel engaged with this most prominently in the years immediately after the Second World War and did so via travel to the past. The popularity of the past over the future as a destination at this moment in time highlights the confusion of this early post-war period. It was a time when the US was still

adjusting to their interventionist post-war role. Time travel at this moment, to borrow a phrase from Ursula Le Guin, was popular because it offered the ability to 'look back in order to move forward'; to use the past as a blueprint for navigating the treacherous waters of the American Century.[9] As the 1950s arrived, this preoccupation with time travel shifted its gaze to a time to come where, to begin with at least, many envisioned a future inspired by technology modelled on the US's consumer lifestyle. As the 1960s approached and the space race gained traction, the conflict with Vietnam looked to be the next major blot on the tapestry of the American Century, and the Cuban Missile Crisis threatened the planet with nuclear winter as opposed to the promise of utopian metropolises, time travel lost its sense of optimism. For some seeking to escape their present, time travel offered a place of solace in the past. For others, the future looked decidedly dystopian.

To quote the late Stan Lee, the US was finding that 'with great power there must come great responsibility'; in 1945, it was American shoulders on which this responsibility rested.[10] In the years between 1945 and 1965, science fiction allowed a nation to work through the challenges thrown up by the Cold War and the American Century; challenges no other nation had faced before. While some embraced this journey, others were reluctant, but it was a journey nonetheless, and is one that is best explored and understood via the travel narrative in popular culture. At a time defined by scientific advancement and competition, the future had never been so uncertain. To quote the man who started it all:

[9] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be', retrieved from https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/382-spring-2010/non-euclidean-view-california-cold-place-1982/ last accessed 20 September 2019.
[10] Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, *Amazing Fantasy* #15, Marvel Comics, 1962.

The issues of tomorrow are befogged.[11]

[11] Henry Luce, 'The American Century', *Diplomatic History,* Vol. 23, No.2, (1999), pp.159-171, (p.160)

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