

**Peace On Earth or Purity of Essence: Teaching
Mutually Assured Destruction Through *Fail-Safe*
and *Dr. Strangelove***

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Abstract

Trying to teach the Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) theory of US foreign policy to undergraduates is becoming increasingly difficult over time. Current undergraduate students have little connection to the days of the Cold War. In some cases, our students' *parents* were born at the end of the Cold War, meaning our current students have virtually no connection to that time whatsoever. Trying to impart the fear and paranoia of the Cold War to students two generations removed is difficult, but using films such as *Dr. Strangelove* and *Fail-Safe* can help the students connect to the era and to the history.

In our paper, we discuss how films about the Cold War can be used to show students both the reality and the fantasy that was the Cold War. We examine the potent symbolism in both movies that can provide valuable lessons and images to undergraduates to help them understand time period. In addition, both movies provide ample arguments for why Mutually Assured Destruction was, in the long run, a self-defeating policy approach.

In addition to discussing the Cold War in general, both movies provide characters that personify the "extremist" right-wing hawks, allowing the students to examine the flawed arguments used in the 1960s to accelerate the arms race. Using these characters and the arguments presented by the moderates in both movies, the arguments of the Cold War can be examined in class both from a broad theoretical perspective as well as the practical nature of nuclear war.

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As educators, one of our most difficult tasks is to impart the relevance of "ancient" history to our current students. Students who have not lived through the tumultuous events of the 1950s and 1960s often have a difficult time accepting that the battle over the civil rights movement created a gap between the Southern states and the rest of the nation that has yet to be fully repaired. Despite this gap, most students can find some level of common discourse with faculty about the civil rights movement because many of the issues raised still occupy a portion of the public debate. Most recently, the civil rights movement has gained attention for protesting the flying of the Confederate flag over the state capitol in South Carolina. Our society continues to debate issues of women's' rights, affirmative action, and the rights of gays and lesbians, and these debates provide our students with a common frame of reference to understand and interpret the events of the 1960s.

The same cannot be said about the Cold War. Most college students today were born in the 1980s, and thus they did not reach any level of real political awareness until

the 1990s¹. Given that, most college students have no clear memories of any part of the Cold War whatsoever. To them, the Cold War is an anachronism created by their parents (and grandparents) out of some misguided fear of Communism and Stalin. They cannot appreciate the level of fear, the nature of the paranoia, or the particulars of the era that drove many Americans to build their own fallout shelters and taught children to "duck and cover" if the Commies dropped the bomb. They do not see the world in the simple bilateral views that dominated American foreign policy for thirty years, and they have little or no idea what the concepts of containment or Mutually Assured Destruction mean.

How do we communicate the nature of this era to students? In a world where information is instantly transmitted around the globe, how do we show them an uncertain world where an enemy bomber could be directly over New York and no one might know about it? In an era in which the United States lacks a clear enemy (or has many, depending on how you define it), how do we explain to them the strident bilateralism that ran throughout United States foreign policy? It is this problem that we address in this paper. In the age of MTV and Nintendo[®], we believe that these issues can best be presented to college students through a medium they are comfortable with--the medium of film.

Massive Retaliation and Mutually Assured Destruction: Understanding the Theory

Although several different people take credit for developing the theory of Massive Retaliation, most scholars of American foreign policy credit its development to John Foster Dulles, President Eisenhower's secretary of state (Immerman, 1999). Even if

¹ A freshman in college in the fall of 2000 was most likely born between 1981 and 1983. They probably have no real memory of any president before Bush, and the term "Soviet Union" is, to them, something old professors use by mistake when they mean Russia.

Dulles was not the first person to think these terms, he was the first person to articulate it in a public venue in an article he wrote for *Life* magazine in 1952.

Massive Retaliation was a substantial revamping of United States foreign policy. Under the previous president, Harry Truman, the emphasis of US policy had been on using ground forces and financial muscle to contain Communist expansion into "democratic" nations. Truman believed that nuclear weapons should be used only as a last resort and only in retaliation for the USSR using them first (Roman, 1995).

Eisenhower and Dulles knew that the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact possessed much larger conventional armies than the United States, and they feared that the Soviet Union would take advantage of this superiority to launch a conventional war. Eisenhower and Dulles felt that the nuclear arsenal of the United States, which vastly outnumbered the nuclear capacity of the USSR, could not be limited to battlefield defensive uses. They advocated a policy that emphasized the use of nuclear weapons and decreased the emphasis on conventional containment (Craig, 1998).

Under this new policy, the focus would be on increasing the size and strength of the nuclear arsenal. Rather than engaging in a conventional war and then resorting to nuclear war if needed, Eisenhower's new position was that nuclear weapons could be used at any time for offensive or defensive purposes, even if this meant the US would be the first to use them (Craig, 1998). In effect, Eisenhower and Dulles would use the threat of imminent and unilateral nuclear assault whenever they believed the USSR (or any other nation) posed a threat to US interests. This threat of nuclear holocaust would only prove to be effective for a brief period of time. Once the Soviet Union began building up

their nuclear arsenal in response to Massive Retaliation, the situation quickly changed (Brands, 1988).

As the Soviet nuclear capacity began to grow throughout the late 1950s, many foreign policy experts began to re-think their position on Massive Retaliation. While it was possible to have a "winnable" nuclear conflict as long as the United States held a substantial advantage over the Soviets, if the capacities of both nations were near parity, winning no longer looked likely. Many scholars argued that a nuclear war between equally-matched nations was a war everybody would lose. In essence, they believed that an all-out nuclear conflict would result in the complete destruction of both nations-- Mutually Assured Destruction.

While some foreign policy analysts in the early 1960s saw this as an argument for arms control treaties, most believed that it meant the US needed to build even more nuclear weapons (Builder & Graubard, 1982). If the Soviets had the capacity to knock out the entire US nuclear arsenal with a first strike, then the Communists could "win" the war, so the US needed to have enough weapons left to launch a complete retaliatory strike *after* a Soviet first strike.

The problem was that no one had an exact count of the number of Soviet weapons. The lack of good intelligence information led most people to overestimate the Soviet nuclear arsenal, and thus overestimate the number of nuclear weapons needed to "win" the war. At the same time, the Soviet government also engaged in this process of one-upsmanship, and the size of both nations' nuclear stockpiles spiraled throughout the 1960s. As the US thought the Soviets were increasing their weapons count, the US felt it needed even more weapons, which made the Soviets feel they needed more weapons

(Wenger, 1997). This cycle, which continued almost unabated for over ten years, is the result of both Massive Retaliation and Mutually Assured Destruction.

As the stockpiles of weapons continued to expand, many people began to fear the possibility of accidental nuclear war. With thousands of weapons and hundreds of thousands of people involved in the operations and maintenance of the weapons, the possibility of human error leading to war grew with each new weapon. In a conventional war, an accidental attack might kill a few dozen soldiers--an accidental nuclear launch could kill millions. In addition to complex and often unclear chains of command, the lack of accurate intelligence information on what the Soviets were doing made the situation even more tense. Even if the US were able to detect a Soviet attack, would there be time to respond? What if the attack came as just a single missile--was it an accident or the first shot in an all-out nuclear assault? What if there was a breakdown in the massive computer networks that controlled the nuclear weapons? Was there any way to avert war once the first missile was launched?

These questions became the fundamental core of many fears about nuclear war. As far as the American public was concerned, the Soviets could strike at any minute, for any reason, and there might not be any time to react. The American public lived in a constant state of fear, not only of nuclear assault, but of Communist infiltration at home. Communists were portrayed as unthinking robots bowing to the will of Joseph Stalin. Many Americans considered Communists to be something less than human. If your enemy is not human, he becomes much easier to detest and fear.

It is into this culture, one of fear, mistrust, and arrogance, that we try to insert our students when discussing the Cold War. While it is possible to have them read or discuss

these issues in groups, many students clearly do not have a good grasp of the fundamental problems of the time. Since readings and discussion had proven only mildly effective, a more visual medium was applied in order to give the students an experience with which they may be able connect.

The Necessity of A Multi-Media Experience

There needs to be a paradigm shift in teaching. Although most college professors have done well with the traditional classroom techniques such as learning based upon class lecture, text based research and rote memorization, these techniques are simply becoming obsolete. According to the Beloit College in Wisconsin that surveys freshmen entering college every year, the freshmen of 2000 have never lived without cable, compact disc players, and computers. They have been bombarded with multi-media almost from inception. They have little to no personal experience with many of the concepts that arise in an introduction to political science class. Most do not know who Reagan is much less have a concept of Reaganomics. They cannot distinguish between WWII and Vietnam; the Gulf war is a part of their fathers' memories not their own. The job of the professor is then to make the basic concepts of political machinations accessible to these students. And to do so, the concepts must be made immediate and clear through a medium with which they are familiar; film is a powerful tool to do just that.

Using film to build a background for particular topics and motivating student reaction and analysis is not new. And with the advent of VCRs and DVD technology, the use of film has become far less cumbersome and far more flexible. Gone are the days of "pinging" film strips and jerky eight millimeter films that taught a generation of children

to "duck and cover" in the event of nuclear attack. With new technology, the professor can introduce a concept, show a piece of film that makes that concept live for the students, stop the film, discuss the concept and then review the section of film to solidify the students' understanding. In fact according to Brian Gallagher, "one of the pedagogical tasks of the next decade may well be discovering the most efficacious ways of employing [VCR/DVD] technology." (Gallagher, 1987) Because media constantly surrounds our students, they are simultaneously more reliant on, and sophisticated about, multi-media.

The potential for the application of film in learning scenarios is far-reaching. It is applicable to various disciplines, thus lending itself to interdisciplinary studies combining political sciences with other areas such as English and the Humanities. It enables students to form clearer, more concrete concepts of theoretical politics because they are given context by the films. Film encourages the use and development of communication skills, establishes a social context for students and provides visual texts for the hearing impaired. (Lovell, 1987) But most importantly, the use of film is particularly effective in teaching the wide range of leaning styles in the common student population.

It has been an accepted truth for over two thousand years that all people do not learn in the same manner. Thinkers from such disparate areas as psychology and astronomy have tried their hand at describing categorically the mechanisms of learning. And although they have failed to reach an absolute definition for the concept of "learning styles" itself, there is agreement that learners fall into four categories, based upon their methods of perceiving new ideas and of processing that information. The physiological mechanisms that seem to place learners into each of these styles are brain lateralization

and sense preference. As each side of the brain controls different functions, those skills that fall on the preferred side of the brain have more dominance than those that do not do. Thus, the student who is left-brain dominant will understand logical implications before the right brain dominant student. However, the right brain houses emotional intelligence, so the right brained student may be more sensitive to the social implications of a topic.

The right brain dominant learners fall into two categories, the relational learner and the dynamic learner. Both of these learners need little structure in their learning environment, are social, holistic, and flexible. However, the relational learner depends on auditory and visual information, while the dynamic learner tends to emphasize auditory and tactile information. And although both are creative and interactive in group settings, the dynamic learner is more likely to assume understanding of a concept before they actually do which may lead to faulty conclusions.

The left brain dominant learners fall into the structured and the analytical learners. Both of these learning types are left hemisphere dominant, learn best in structured environments and work best alone. The structured learner prefers tactile stimulation and experiential learning. The analytical learner is a visual learner who excels at memorization skills and prefers solitary study.

An organized, systematic classroom that emphasizes terms and definitions, basically the traditional classroom environment, only reaches the analytical and relational learners. And of the two, only the analytical learner excels in such a situation. And the gulf between the different types of learners and their experience in the classroom grows daily. This is primarily a function of the exponential growth in media. In fact, most

students spend twice the amount of time in front of the television as they spend in a classroom. Thus media has a powerful influence upon their lives, not only in the way they dress and behave, but also on the way that they learn. Although media has given each learning type stimulation, it does not force the primarily non-visual and group oriented types to contend with the classroom environment and learn how to function there. It is clear then, that to be effective teachers we must take into consideration the strengths and weaknesses of our students and employ methods that integrate the traditional methods of learning with media.

Film in particular is accessible to both right- and left-brain learners, those who learn best individually as well as those who excel through social discourse. The structure of film provides the analytic learner with logistical and rational questions regarding plot and character while the relational learner is provided a context in which to place the concept under class discussion. Now more than ever, students are increasingly adept at decoding visual stimuli as the dominant source of information, whether it be music videos, video games, or internet sites. Film allows a unique opportunity for this visual generation to "see" the concept, while it provides an integrated, and thus more holistic, opportunity for the students to learn from each other. Each student is unique in her/his learning style. Discussion of key concepts after viewing film allows the analytic learners to contribute to the understanding of the relational learner and vice versa.

This is also desirable as teaching paradigms shift not only toward more technology-based curriculums, but also toward more student-driven learning environments. To be effective teachers, it is vital that we acknowledge that techniques are continually evolving and technology is not always anathema to all traditional modes

of teaching. Also, we need to bear in mind that we are teaching the most media saturated generation of students ever to enter college.

***Fail-Safe* and *Dr. Strangelove*: Similar Message, Opposite Approaches**

If we accept that students of the 21st century are more effective learners when the information is presented to them using visual media such as film, the next problem becomes that of choice. There are literally dozens of films that address the fear and tension of the Cold War, from science-fiction epics attacking the arms race (*The Day The Earth Stood Still*) to allegories of Communist infiltration (*Invasion of the Body-Snatchers*). While the potential pool of films is quite large, arguably the two most critically-acclaimed films addressing the Cold War are Sidney Lumet's thriller *Fail-Safe* and Stanley Kubrick's comic masterpiece *Dr. Strangelove*.

In addition to the movies' status as two of the greatest films made by two of Hollywood's most respected directors, *Fail-Safe* and *Dr. Strangelove* use very similar plots. In *Fail-Safe*, a series of technical problems and miscommunications leads to a single US plane dropping an atomic bomb on Moscow, and the president is forced to destroy New York City with his own bombers to prevent the Soviets from starting World War III. In *Dr. Strangelove*, a crazed US Air Force general orders his nuclear bombers to attack the Soviet Union. A series of technical failures make it impossible to recall all of the bombers, and the resulting attack by the US Air Force on Soviet missile silos triggers a Soviet Doomsday Device that effectively wipes out Western civilization. While *Fail-Safe* is a taut thriller and *Dr. Strangelove* a deeply dark comedy, both films address very

similar issues, allowing students to see both the serious and ludicrous sides of the Cold War debate².

In order to assist the students in seeing both sides of the Cold War debate, we found it effective to discuss the movies in terms of parallels. Not only do the plots parallel each other in many respects, there are also many parallel characters and themes. We divided these areas into several general categories.

Parallel Characters

Although Kubrick and Lumet both claimed they developed their films independently, the number of parallel characters is remarkable. Rather than seeing these parallels as an example of plagiarism, it seems more likely that the parallels simply demonstrated the strength and clarity of the archetypal characters during the Cold War. For the purposes of class discussion, the characters were divided into three archetypes: The Hawk, The Dove, and the Patriotic Soldier³.

The Hawk: The Hawk characters in both films present the arguments for military power and action. Their purpose is to argue for arms build-ups, fear of the Soviet Union, the necessity of war, and US superiority. The Hawks represent the most conservative elements of the US foreign policy apparatus, including John Foster Dulles. They believe in the inevitability of war with the Soviet Union, the only question for them is what the United States must do in order to emerge the victor.

² For those unfamiliar with *Fail-Safe* and *Dr. Strangelove*, more complete plot summaries are included in Appendix One.

³ The terms Hawks and Doves were routinely used during the Cold War to describe the militaristic Republicans (Hawks) and pacifistic Democrats (Doves).

In *Fail-Safe*, the Hawk is portrayed by Walter Matthau as Professor Groeteschele⁴. Groeteschele is portrayed as a cold, calculating character. When he discusses nuclear war, he focuses on the numbers of dead and the economic problems created. His character shows no empathy for the dead, they are simply numbers to be calculated. Accidentally caught up in a meeting of what appears to be the National Security Council, he consistently argues in favor of attacking the Soviet Union. When the NSC discovers there is no way to recall the wayward bomber about to attack Moscow, Groeteschele tries to convince the NSC and the president that this accident has presented the US with a unique opportunity to strike first.

In *Dr. Strangelove*, the Hawk is primarily played by George C. Scott as General Buck Turgidson. Like Groeteschele, Turgidson argues that the "accidental" war that is about to start is, in fact, an opportunity for the United States to rule the world. Certain aspects of the Hawk character are also embodied in the character of Dr. Strangelove, who represents the rational, calculating academic. Together these two characters effectively cover the same ideological territory as Dr. Groeteschele. In fact, both Turgidson and Strangelove take all of the hawkish Cold War rhetoric to its comedic extreme. At the end of the film, when it is clear the world is about to end, Strangelove and Turgidson argue with the president about the need to occupy as many radiation-safe mineshafts as possible in order to prevent a "mineshaft gap" with the surviving Soviets. This bizarre discussion and competition only serves further parody the "victory at all costs" approach advocated by most Hawks.

⁴ Much to our collective chagrin, Sidney Lumet goes out of his way to make it clear that Groeteschele is a political science professor--we can only assume he is an international relations specialist.

The Dove: The Dove characters in both films represent the voices of moderation and peace. They advocate caution and oppose the militaristic desires of the Hawks. They believe that war can be averted, and want to do everything possible to prevent all-out nuclear destruction.

In *Fail-Safe*, the Dove characters are primarily the President, played by Henry Fonda, and General Black, played by Dan O'Herlihy. Both characters are willing to do whatever is necessary to avert an all out nuclear catastrophe, including Black's suicide mission to drop an atomic bomb on New York City. Throughout the film, both characters serve as the primary voice of reason during a tense and rapidly-changing situation.

In *Dr. Strangelove*, the Doves are centered in the characters of President Merkin Muffley (Peter Sellers) and Captain Lionel Mandrake (also Peter Sellers). As the rather mild-mannered and ineffectual president, Muffley continually tries to calm the Soviet premier and convince him that the entire sequence of events is not an act of war. Captain Mandrake, a British liaison officer to the United States Air Force, spends most of the film trying to convince General Ripper, the insane Air Force base commander, to recall the bombers Ripper sent to destroy the Soviet Union.

The Patriotic Soldiers: The Patriotic Soldiers represent the dilemma faced by the armed forces during the Cold War. While they fear nuclear war and do not want it to happen, they are primarily driven by their loyalty to the chain of command. The Patriotic Soldiers are willing to start a war, even if it is a war in which they do not believe. Their unquestioning loyalty to the chain of command is what provides credibility to Massive

Retaliation and nuclear deterrence, but their robotic, unthinking loyalty is also the proximate cause of the impending war.

In *Fail-Safe*, the Patriotic Soldiers are portrayed by General Bogan (Frank Overton), the commander of the Strategic Bomber Command, and Colonel Grady (Ed Binns), the pilot of the bomber that eventually destroys Moscow. Both men are fiercely loyal to their country, and they are willing to sacrifice their lives and the lives of the people under them if needed. General Bogan is forced to send several fighter pilots to their deaths in a failed attempt to shoot down the US bombers heading to Moscow, and Colonel Grady willingly takes his bomber in so low over Moscow that he knows the plane will be destroyed while completing the mission.

In *Dr. Strangelove*, the Patriotic Soldier is primarily embodied in the character of Colonel Kong, played by Slim Pickens. Kong is willing to do whatever he has to do in order to drop his nuclear weapons, including, in the final scene, riding a bomb like a bucking bronco as it plummets towards its target. A secondary character, Major Guano, represents the inflexibility of the military. He is reluctant to allow Captain Mandrake to call the President to stop the bombing, even though it is clear that Mandrake has information that is vital to preventing the impending nuclear war.

Parallel Themes

Along with the striking similarities in characterization, both *Fail-Safe* and *SRS* have several parallel underlying themes. Again, as with the characters, it is more likely that these themes represent the core threads Cold War ethos rather than one director simply copying another. While not all of the themes are similar, the similarities between the thematic elements of the films are striking.

The one theme that is most obvious in both films is the fear of our reliance on technology. In both films, the impending nuclear disaster is a result of technological advances, errors, and malfunctions. In both *Fail-Safe* and *Dr. Strangelove*, the bombers leave their fail-safe points to bomb the Soviet Union because of malfunctions in a critical piece of communications equipment on board the bombers. In both *Fail-Safe* and *Dr. Strangelove*, the Soviet Union is unable to destroy all of the bombers because of advances in US technology.

Kubrick takes this fear one step further in *Dr. Strangelove* with the addition of the ultimate technological McGuffin, the "Doomsday Machine," a machine designed to destroy the world in case of nuclear attack that is unstoppable once started. The Doomsday Machine in *Dr. Strangelove* is, at its core, a physical manifestation of Mutually Assured Destruction theory. Even a single nuclear detonation can set off the Doomsday Machine, and once it is triggered, the only outcome is the end of the world. In both films, the directors are clearly apprehensive about our reliance on technology and the fragile nature of the technology that keeps the United States and the Soviet Union from destroying each other.

The second dominant theme is the set of new issues raised by the transition from conventional to nuclear war. In a conventional war, the leaders of the warring nations can continue to negotiate with each other, for months if needed, while the war progresses. In a nuclear confrontation, the time frame is reduced to a matter of minutes, and the leaders are often forced to make snap decisions without complete or accurate information. The limited time frame forces the leaders to consider massive retaliation as an option.

In addition to the condensed time frame, both directors make a point of addressing the unfathomable destructive power of nuclear devices. Even the massive armies of Hitler's war machine needed months to conquer western Europe. The destructive power of the atom means that even a single accidental attack can result in the deaths of millions of people. Even though border skirmishes can expand to atomic annihilation in a matter of minutes, both directors clearly feel that the military establishment of the time was not prepared for this new style of warfare.

Finally, both directors express a clear apprehension about the entire bureaucratic structure surrounding the nuclear arsenal. In *Fail-Safe*, the pilots of the stray bombers have orders to ignore all incoming radio transmissions, and thus the pilots ignore recall commands from the president and pleas from the pilots' wives to return. In *Dr. Strangelove*, base commander General Ripper, acting on his own crazed ideas about Soviet conspiracies to poison his bodily fluids, starts a war without the president's approval or knowledge. Even when Captain Mandrake is willing to try and stand up to the bureaucratic authority to prevent war, he is stymied at every turn by rigid bureaucratic regulations. It is clear that both Lumet and Kubrick feel that there are too few safeguards to prevent war.

Both *Fail-Safe* and *Dr. Strangelove* provide unique insights into the Cold War. Whether through tension or humor, Stanley Kubrick and Sidney Lumet capture much of the essence of the Cold War, the arms race, and the major theoretical perspectives on Cold War foreign policy. That such complex sociopolitical issues are deftly handled in films meant for popular entertainment reinforces their use in a curriculum aimed at a

generation accustomed to decoding visual images ranging from music videos to soft drink commercials.

The Classroom Experience

Both *Fail-Safe* and *Dr. Strangelove* were used during the summer of 1999 in a course for upper-level political science, social science education, and history majors. The course, *Film and Politics*, was designed to provide students with a broad background on the use of film in the classroom to explain politics and political events. In addition, the course was also intended to help students find the political symbolism under the surface of many popular films.

Before either film was shown, in-class discussion demonstrated a general lack of knowledge about the Cold War among the students. Some felt that the Cold War was mostly about McCarthyism, while others focused on discrete events (the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Berlin Blockade) as the centerpieces of the era. While most of the students understood the nuclear arms race of the 50s and 60s existed, none of them showed any real grasp of the meaning or consequences of it.

To provide the students with a proper backdrop for *Fail-Safe* and *Dr. Strangelove*, they read several short articles on the arms race, the fear of Communism, and the lack of adequate technology to monitor what the Soviet Union was doing during the time period. Even after the readings, the students did not indicate they had been able to synthesize all of these Cold War themes together. Instead, they appeared to treat them as isolated and discrete arguments about various aspects of the era. On the day before the first film was shown, the instructor talked about the Cold War, the arms race, and the two directors (Lumet and Kubrick) without specifically discussing the upcoming films.

The films were shown on consecutive days, *Fail-Safe* first and *Dr. Strangelove* second. The order was set by two motivating factors. First, since *Dr. Strangelove* is a comedy, the instructor felt that the strong satiric nature of *Dr. Strangelove* might lessen the impact of the serious and taut film *Fail-Safe*. Second, *Fail-Safe* tends to produce a much more visceral gut reaction from audiences. The ending, in which New York City is destroyed and the screen goes blank, is extremely powerful. Lumet wanted the audience to leave *Fail-Safe* stunned and shocked by his ending, and he succeeded. *Dr. Strangelove*, on the other hand, ends with the ballad "We'll Meet Again" sung over footage of a series of nuclear explosions. Much of the impact of *Dr. Strangelove* is not realized until the film is over and the audience members are able to go back over what they have seen in their minds. Given these reasons, *Dr. Strangelove* seemed the more appropriate choice to for the second film.

After both films, the in-class discussion was clearly more informed and lively. Many of the students commented on the obvious fear of technology expressed by both directors. Although the students could not completely relate to the lack of technology, the films did help bring the issue into focus for the students. Much of the later course discussion surrounded the character of Dr. Strangelove himself as an archetype for "pointy-headed intellectuals" and as a repudiation of the US willingness to recruit for Nazi scientists after World War II. Overall, it was clear that the films provided the students with a improved and more accurate background in the Cold War. The post-film discussion showed a much clearer understanding of the nature of the Cold War and the uncertainties that drove it forwards.

Conclusions

We would not begin to presume that introducing films into the classroom is the panacea for getting students involved. While there is little question that films can act as a catalyst for discussion, it cannot be the only source. Films offer today's students a medium with which they are the most comfortable--a visual one. It is much easier for them to relate to the material at hand when they are able to make the connections between the history and a visualization of it. In addition, both *Fail-Safe* and *Dr. Strangelove* offer students a perspective they simply cannot get from a book or a classroom lecture. These two films also offer the direct contrast of the tragedy of *Fail-Safe* and the biting political satire of *Dr. Strangelove*. This contrast helps clarify the debates and bring a sharp focus to the issues.

That said, the ease with which students accept films as a basis for understanding history also raises some serious issues that are beyond the scope of this paper. For example, most historians agree that Oliver Stone's movie *JFK* is far more fiction than fact, yet many current students may be willing to accept the premise and conclusions of the film without checking the facts. As students become more willing to accept what they see on the screen as history, we may well raise a generation of adults who only know history through the eye of a camera.

Film can be a powerful medium through which to transmit messages. We as educators can help them to understand eras they could never comprehend and never experience. When used in conjunction with discussion, readings, and lecture, film can help open the eyes of our students.

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