

Dangerous Worlds Seen from 2021:  
American Science Fiction Literature and the Vietnam War

BY

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## Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis analyzes the unique militarism within Vietnam War era American science fiction literature. Science fiction is a powerful lens to observe American militarism because science fiction spoke the same language as American politicians and military leaders during the Vietnam war period. Many of the themes, character tropes, symbols, and narrative structures that society generally regards as singularly belonging to the pages of science fiction are actually part of America's mythology during the Vietnam war. In many respects, the stories of American science fiction are as important as the "city upon a hill" and Manifest Destiny myths to understanding America as a nation, project, and idea. There are so many ideas shared between American science fiction authors and the politicians and military leaders of the United States during the Vietnam War. Because there was so much scientific advancement that occurred between WWII and the start of the Cold War, traditional narrative techniques like journalism that spoke in terms of realism often inadequately addressed topics like technology, warfare and international conflicts. American science fiction literature, whether it supported the Vietnam war or found it immoral and expensive, almost never underestimated America's actual technological abilities or aggressive foreign policy. During the Vietnam war, American science fiction culture either served as propaganda for the U.S. State, reflecting and cultivating support for America's doctrine of conquest, or it was politically aware, and stood in opposition to the American war machine. Broadly speaking, American science fiction of the Vietnam war period era articulated either criticism or adulation for America's techno-fetishism, its cults of the superweapon and the super-soldier, and its resolution to expand its economic influence and geographic jurisdiction.

Long before the time the United States entered the period of its history most defined by its intervention in the Vietnam war and the conflict's domestic reflections (and projections), the nation was defined and organized as a capitalist, liberal democracy under the leadership of the war-time president Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In the years after WWII and the death of the visionary FDR, the USA took on the role of global police officer, or, in other words, the enforcer of colonialism in regions in Africa and Asia, which would later be known as the third world. This thesis examines the particular episode of the United States' attempt to suppress

Indochina's reach for independence from France, which had temporarily loosened its grasp on Indochina during the toils of WWII. When the United States entered the conflict in Indochina against the Vietminh, accepting the mantle of colonialism and replacing the cudgel of European armed forces with itself, the United States rhetorically adopted the policy of anti-communism.

President Harry Truman first prominently articulated anti-communism, thus creating what is now called the Truman Doctrine, the policy of containing communism where it already existed and preventing communist power and ideology from spreading into new nations.<sup>1</sup> Anticommunism persisted as the United States' central foreign policy doctrine with Truman's successor, Dwight D. Eisenhower. Perhaps the greatest anticommunism foreign policy endeavor of the later years of the Truman presidency and the first seven months of the Eisenhower administration was the Korean War. According to historians Michael H. Hunt and Steven Levine, "[t]he Korean War in turn helped push U.S. policy makers, anxious about China's seemingly aggressive communism, toward a major commitment in Indochina."<sup>2</sup> The word "war" in its most common usage could be interpreted as a misnomer when applied to Cold War conflicts, for war often denotes "the hostile contention by means of armed force, carried on between nations, states, or rulers, or between parties in the same nation or state..."<sup>3</sup> The Korean War could be a misnomer because it implies a war between the United States and Korea, when in reality the Korean War was the continuation of a brutal civil war after the entry of the United States, China, and Russia.<sup>4</sup> On one side of the conflict was North Korea, backed

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<sup>1</sup> Truman articulated his doctrine of anticommunism on 12 March 1947. He established a firm precedent that what happens domestically inside another country also concerns the United States: "This is no more than a frank recognition that totalitarian regimes imposed on free peoples, by direct or indirect aggression, undermine the foundations of international peace and hence the security of the United States". See Harry S. Truman, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress" (speech, Washington, D.C, March 12, 1947), Lillian Goldman Law Library, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/trudoc.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/trudoc.asp)

<sup>2</sup> Michael H. Hunt and Steven Levine, *Arc of Empire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Oxford English Language Dictionary, online edition, s.v "war, n.1" <https://www-oed-com.libproxy.mta.ca/view/Entry/225589?rskey=2HuPCh&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>

<sup>4</sup> Michael H. Hunt and Steven Levine, *Arc of Empire*, 121. For a history of the brutal internecine nature of the Korean War, see Phillip D. Chinnrey, *Korean Atrocity! Forgotten War Crimes 1950-1953* (United Kingdom: Pen & Sword Books, 2009).

by a coalition of China and Russia. South Korea was backed by the United States. Korea became the set for a conflict between larger powers because Japan had colonially ruled over Korea before and during the Second World War.<sup>5</sup> To give a picture of how bad Japanese colonialism was, during imperial Japan's reign, between 270,000 and 810,000 Koreans died in Japanese labor camps.<sup>6</sup> Korea was not capable of realistically fighting a war on behalf of China and Russia versus the United States, which had become a stronger warring nation as a result of WWII.

Although the China and Russia backed North Korea, the United States had nearly complete control of the skies. Consequently, the United States' slaughtered of large swathes of the North Korean combatants and the Korean civilian population.<sup>7</sup> Historian Charles J. Armstrong introduces the inequality of the conflict at the start of his essay "The Destruction and Reconstruction of North Korea", arguing that the Korean war was a limited war for the United States, but it was total war for Koreans.<sup>8</sup> The United States killed three million people, or ten percent of Korea's entire population. The majority of those killed were in North Korea, where close to twelve to fifteen percent of the population was killed.<sup>9</sup> As a result of the nearly 635,000 tons of bombs and the 32,557 tons of napalm dropped on Korea, twenty-two cities were reduced to rubble in the North.<sup>10</sup> One of the most significant legacies of the Truman and

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<sup>5</sup> Michael H. Hunt and Steven Levine, *Arc of Empire*, 128.

<sup>6</sup> R.J Rummel, "Chapter Three" in *Statistics of Democide* (Rutgers University: Transaction Publishers, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> For a heartbreaking discussion about the catastrophic impact the Korean war had on Koreans, especially civilians, see *Memory of Forgotten War*. Directed by Deann Borshay Liem, Ramsay Liem (2013: Mu Films), film.

<sup>8</sup> See Charles J. Armstrong, "The Destruction and Reconstruction of North Korea, 1950-1960," *The Asia Pacific Journal* 7, no. 0 (March 16, 2009). <https://apjjf.org/-Charles-K.-Armstrong/3460/article.html>

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion about the scale of the destruction that the U.S. inflicted upon Korea and the repercussions still felt today by South Koreans, North Koreans, and the Korean diaspora, see 서희준, Hee Jun Suh, "Comments in response to anti-DPRK propaganda", originally made in 2019, reposted April 28, 2020, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYUmUh2gpJA>.

<sup>10</sup> The statistics for the destruction of Korea come from two sources. See Charles J. Armstrong, "The Destruction and Reconstruction of North Korea, 1950-1960," See also, Conrad Crane, *American Airpower Strategy in Korea 1950-1953* (Lawrence Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 168.

Eisenhower years, the Korean War was among the first casualties of U.S.' imperialistic foreign policy of anticommunism and it set a dreadful precedent for the remainder of the Cold War.

The Korean War provides the historical context for understanding the Vietnam War, which has its beginnings as early as 1954 and became a massive conflict by 1964.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the Korean War foreshadowed the Vietnam War in many ways. First of all, at the material level, the two conflicts were the violent interventions of the United States to prevent self-determination in countries devastated by colonialism. Korea, which was supposed to unify after Japanese colonialism ended, was split into North and South Korea. Setting a precedent for the U.S.' tactics in Vietnam, Eisenhower communicated to North Korea and China with the application of force. According to Barton Bernstein, Eisenhower was willing to bomb the dikes of North Korea to say that the war should be ended on American terms.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, South Korea (at least) was economically and politically tied to the United States and capitalism at the cost of North Korean lives. It is difficult to predict how many more Koreans would have died if China and North Korea did not comply with Eisenhower's wish to have South Korea, if not all of Korea as an American foothold in Asia against communism. Class and colonial divisions of the Korean and Vietnamese populations were the political structures that legitimized the governments allied with the United States. In South Korea, the United States placed the protestant Syngman Rhee in control of South Korea, where he "suppressed leftists, labor unions, and farmer's associations at a cost of roughly 100,000 lives *prior* to the outbreak of war in June 1950."<sup>13</sup> The Rhee government parallels the Diem puppet regime in Vietnam. The two regimes had colonial ties to Europe or the United States and the governments were organized on hierarchies of class. Lastly, the Vietnam War resembled the Korean war on the American home front as well. In the early years of the conflicts, Americans at the home front seldom participated in discourses of war in Asia. When they did it was in terms of protecting

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<sup>11</sup> For more information about the precedent the Korean war set for the Vietnam war, see Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992). The central argument of Khong's work is that the Korean war defined the terms of America's intervention in the Indochina conflict.

<sup>12</sup> Barton J Bernstein, "Foreign Policy in the Eisenhower Administration," *Foreign Service Journal* 50, no. 5, (1973): 17-31.

<sup>13</sup> Michael H. Hunt and Steven Levine, *Arc of Empire*, 130.

U.S. security from the threat of international communism.<sup>14</sup> American culture during the Vietnam war, however, did not remain depoliticized. By the end of the Vietnam war, American culture was split culturally and ideologically between support and dissent for American imperialism in Vietnam.

Eisenhower publicly articulated the American policy of anti-communism on April 7, 1954 when he spoke of the Domino theory, a metaphor that predicted that if one country “fell” to communism, the surrounding nations would fall sequentially like a row of dominoes. Nineteen days later, Eisenhower compared Vietnam to the cork of a sealed bottle. If the cork, Vietnam burst, then the surrounding countries like Indonesia, Burma, and Thailand would in turn adopt communism.<sup>15</sup> Quoting from the same 7 April speech, Eisenhower phrased the spread of communism in this way:

...when you come to the possible sequence of events, the loss of Indochina, of Burma, of Thailand, of the Peninsula, and Indonesia following, now you begin to talk about areas that not only multiply the disadvantages that you would suffer through loss of materials, sources of materials, but you are talking about millions and millions and millions of people. Finally the geographic position achieved thereby does many things. It turns the so-called island defensive chain of Japan, of the Phillipines and to the southward; it moves in to threaten Australia and New Zealand. It takes away, in economic aspects, that region that Japan must have as a trading area or Japan, in turn, will have only one place to go- that is, toward the Communist areas in order to live. So, the possible consequences are just incalculable to the free world.<sup>16</sup>

Eisenhower’s response to spread of communism described in the above quote was containment. Fear of the spread of communism and calls to contain it dominated the minds of American foreign policy makers.

John Foster Dulles, the Secretary of State for Eisenhower and brother of the CIA director Allen Dulles, spoke similarly about Vietnam, arguing that if Vietnam became communist it

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<sup>14</sup> Jim Cullen *Democratic Empire: The United States Since 1945* (New Jersey: Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Fred I. Greenstein and Richard H. Immerman, "What Did Eisenhower Tell Kennedy about Indochina? The Politics of Misperception" *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 2 (1992): 582.

<sup>16</sup> Barton J Bernstein, “Foreign Policy in the Eisenhower Administration,” 29.

would start a chain reaction that would make the surrounding nations turn communist.<sup>17</sup> The Kennedy administration did not break the continuity of anticommunism. The Truman administration's policy was more similar to the administration of Eisenhower, that on one hand was more concerned with resisting the Soviet Union's efforts to take eastern European countries in which it had defeated the Nazis or that WWII had generally destabilized.<sup>18</sup> Kennedy, on the other hand, focused his attention on nationalist and communist movements in the third-world. In 1961, JFK authorized air combat missions in Vietnam, which included the use of herbicides, sent special forces to conduct counter-revolutionary operations, and placed soldiers in Vietnam.<sup>19</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, like his forbearers, continued to escalate the conflict in Indochina. By the time of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, also called the U.S.S Maddox incident, in August 1964, the U.S. was positioned to launch a full-scale war against the revolutionaries in South Vietnam. When the U.S.S Maddox accidentally and temporarily reported an attack by small North Vietnamese boats, the U.S. government interpreted the situation as a reason to enter the Indochina conflict more directly.

The United States' aggressive instigation of military conflict in Indochina has thus far been described as anticommunism. One of the best definitions of anticommunism comes from the radical revisionist historian Gabriel Kolko. He argued that "translated into concrete terms, the domino theory was a counter-revolutionary doctrine which defined modern history as a movement of Third World and dependent nations—those with strategic value to the United States or its capitalist associates—away from colonialism or capitalism and toward national revolution and forms of socialism."<sup>20</sup> As Kolko describes, there is little material difference between anticommunism and colonialism. In chapter one of this work, I will discuss the material intentions of the United States to preserve colonial rule in Vietnam. Kolko's analysis,

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<sup>17</sup> F.M. Kail, *What Washington Said: Administration Rhetoric and the Vietnam War, 1949-1969* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 66. Dulles was more fiery in his rhetoric compared to the calm Eisenhower, but nonetheless they both espoused anticommunism values.

<sup>18</sup> Campbell Craig, "Kennedy's International Legacy, Fifty Years on." *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 89, no. 6 (2013): 1370.

<sup>19</sup> Richard W Stewart, *Deepening Involvement* (Washington, D.C: United States Army Center of Military History, 2012) 44, 47.

<sup>20</sup> James Gibson, *The Perfect War* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), 26.

which considers history, national revolution, and the many possible forms of socialism borrows from a Marxist theory of society and describes the material world of the Vietnam war.<sup>21</sup>

Gibson builds a metaphorical or discursive aspect upon the foundation of Kolko's analysis. For the purposes of this essay, I am borrowing James Gibson's definition of the United States' foreign policy model during the Vietnam war era: mechanistic anticommunism.<sup>22</sup> Two concepts, commodity fetishism and the permanent war economy, are important for understanding Gibson's concept of mechanistic anticommunism. Under mechanistic anticommunism, weapons and military technologies became the most capital intensive commodities and war became the final product of the United States economy. Mechanistic anticommunism connotes several ideas at once concerning the U.S.' foreign

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<sup>21</sup> Kolko's argument resonates with the work of Harry Magdoff and William Appleman Williams. See Harry Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism: The Economics of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967) and William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Politics* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1959). Magdoff, Williams, and Kolko employ an economic perspective to understand the origins of the Vietnam war. For Magdoff and Kolko, U.S. imperialism is the most important reason the U.S. entered the conflict. For seemingly semantic reasons, Williams differs, arguing that the U.S. entered the conflict to assert a liberal capitalist world order. For the purposes of this paper, the arguments are similar enough to work together to support the idea that anticommunism materially functions to suppress nationalistic movements in postcolonial nations.

<sup>22</sup> For a similar work to Gibson's study, see Loren Baritz *Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us into the Vietnam War and Made Us Fight the Way We Did* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). Baritz's central argument agrees with Gibson's study. "A national myth showed us that we were good, that our technology made us strong, and that our bureaucracy gave us standard operating procedures. It was not a winning combination. Ethnocentric American leaders 'invented' South Vietnam and relied on a technologically based capacity to kill to achieve a vision of Pax Americana," writes Baritz. Historian Gary Hess regards these works more polemical than scholarly, but his opinion seems ideologically confused. His book admits its own inconclusive nature and I perceive its core arguments to contradict one another. Published in 2015, there is little to no reason for a book of this scope and purpose to have an incomplete thesis. The 'quagmire' or 'enigma' thesis about the Vietnam War had already been disproven decades before this was published. See Marita Sturken, "Reenactment and the Making of History: The Vietnam War as Docudrama" in *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1997). Gary Hess, *Vietnam: Explaining America's Lost War* (Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing, 2015). For a review, see Martin Grossheim, review *Vietnam: Explaining America's Lost War*, by Gary R. Hess, *Journal of Contemporary Review* 45, no. 4 (2009): 899-901, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/00220094100450040112>.

policy. Gibson's theory is rooted in Karl Marx' principle of commodity fetishism and the economic analysis which argues that the United States wartime economy of the U.S. during the WWII era was never dismantled after the victory of the allies.

Marx's commodity fetishism theorizes that society under capitalism is organized on people's relationships with objects, or commodities, rather than social relationships. A commodity described only by its market value does not include its history as a material object. A price tag does not indicate the true value of the extraction process, the refinement, nor the distribution of a commodity. Marx predicted that as scientific rationalization progressed, people would learn that knowledge is socially created and does not privately belong to individuals. According to Gibson, Marx was wrong, and in the case of the U.S., scientific rationalization guided commodity fetishism to evolve into war-production fetishism, or the permanent war economy as Seymour Melman calls it, in the years that the United States reorganized its economy to participate in WWII.<sup>23</sup> Rather than being a catalyst for the liberation of the proletariat, scientific rationalization, or the pursuit of new scientific knowledge was directed towards inventing new weapons and technology (or military commodities). Because so much capital was invested in weapons and military technology, these military commodities became intermediaries between people, defining how society was organized. This interpretation of scientific rationalization- that it did not ameliorate commodity fetishism but actually evolved into war production fetishism during the second world war- is not one shared by one of the greats of the science fiction genre, Isaac Asimov. Asimov continued to conceive of scientific rationalization in much the same way as Enlightenment thinkers. Although much of the knowledge known about radioactivity was acquired for the purpose of warfare, Asimov establishes that atomic power is "entirely benevolent".<sup>24</sup> Asimov would declare himself opposed to the Vietnam war in an advertisement, but it is clear he participated in a discourse that encouraged rationalistic and technological solutions for social problems, a system of thought that encouraged the U.S. to adopt a policy of mechanistic

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<sup>23</sup> Seymour Melman, "Twelve Propositions on Productivity and the War Economy," *Challenge* 18, no. 1 (1975): 7.

<sup>24</sup> M. Keith Booker, *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds, and the Cold War* (London: Greenwood Press, 2001).

anticommunism. Asimov, a leader of the genre, indicates that science fiction before and during the start of the Vietnam war was oriented towards supporting the use of technology to solve all types of problems, including social problems.

The creation of the U.S. permanent war economy, or the prolonged existence of the U.S. economy organized for wartime even in peacetime, is a well-established subject area of U.S. history.<sup>25</sup> The permanent wartime economy was the result of the Roosevelt-Keynesian New Deal solution to the Great Depression, which was the worst and the longest economic downturn in American history, whose problems- unemployment and the boom and bust cycle- seemed innate to U.S. capitalism.<sup>26</sup> To create the wartime economy that lifted the United States out of the Great Depression and prepared the nation to fight against Japan and Germany, Roosevelt, in charge of a powerful coalition, made agreements with labor leaders and industry leaders that cemented the relationship between the workings of the American capitalist economy, the military, and U.S. foreign policy. Roosevelt's new America was able to furnish its own army and provide arms, supplies, and loans to its allies all over the globe. This organization allowed for one of the largest military preparations in world history, but it was never dismantled and still provides the model for the U.S. economy to this day.<sup>27</sup> Gibson seems to suggest that scientific rationalization merged with the unique wartime capitalism of the United States: "This new fetishism is a kind of social physics, metaphorical transportation of Sir Isaac Newton's world of physical forces and mechanical interactions onto the social

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<sup>25</sup> Steven Horwitz and Michael J. McPhillips, "The Reality of the Wartime Economy: More Historical Evidence on Whether World War II Ended the Great Depression," *The Independent Review* 17, no. 3 (2013): 325.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas K. Duncan and Christopher J. Coyne, "The Origins of the Permanent War Economy," *The Independent Review* 18, no. 2 (2013): 221.

<sup>27</sup> See "Conclusion" in Duncan and Coyne, "Origins," 234.

world.<sup>28</sup> War-production systems become the units of this social physics.”<sup>29</sup> Because capitalism was thought to be grounded in science, rather than it being a social or political construction, capitalism was conceived of as nature. Consequently, any person, community, or nation that deviated from the order of capitalism economically or ideologically was seen by capitalist countries as anti-nature. Gibson extends the thinking of natural capitalism vs. unnatural communism; capitalism is inside and communism is outside, and it is understood as a foreign invader to the closed world order of capitalism. To conceive of mechanistic anticommunism, one should imagine that U.S. policy makers understood global politics as if it had to be categorized on a ledger using only the binary terms of communist and anticommunist. To U.S. policy of mechanistic anticommunism, any nation that deviated from the order of colonialism or capitalism had to be violently contained and corrected, or eliminated. From Gibson’s theory, mechanistic anticommunism isolated violence as the only

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<sup>28</sup> Seemingly over simplified, Gibson’s discusses scientific rationalization and the Enlightenment rather generally, comparing the U.S. government’s mechanistic anticommunism to the principles and ethics of the Enlightenment as personified by Sir Isaac Newton. The purpose of this footnote is not to discredit Gibson’s work upon which I am building my own but to highlight similar research that supports his argument. Importantly, Gibson mentions Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which illuminates the Protestant (especially Calvinist) articulation that salvation could be achieved by economic pursuit. Scholars before and at the same time as Gibson were making similar arguments. Jürgen Habermas, who was also influenced by Max Weber, argues on page two of his 1985 work *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* a remarkably similar point to Gibson’s analysis of scientific rationalization: “[t]he new structures of society were marked by the differentiation of the two functionally intermeshing systems that had taken shape around the organizational cores of the capitalist enterprise and the bureaucratic state apparatus.” The difference being that Gibson believed that scientific rationalization merged government, business, and the military apparatus of the state. Moreover, Gibson does not cite Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* even though their work argues precisely Gibson’s point that Enlightenment and its focus on rationality took on the characteristics of a fetish, which is a term from the colonial era, meaning that society in its language and practices obfuscates an object’s true nature and assigns it magical powers. Gibson argues that war and military technology became subject to commodity fetishism. Lastly, Feminist scholarship concerning science and epistemology (such as Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990)) would argue that scientists (and any epistemic agent) cannot develop knowledge apart from their own subjectivity. Feminist epistemologies support the theory that argues mechanistic anticommunism was the result of the discourse of American war managers not a universally moral and logical response based on the principles of the natural world. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987).

<sup>29</sup> Gibson, *Perfect War*, 20.

tenable solution to defeating communism because American society was organized according to the principle of war production fetishism. For the mechanistically anticommunist government officials, military leaders, intellectuals, and economic leaders of America, all social relationships were understood by the proxy of every individual's relationship with commodities of war production. Colonies fighting for independence and attempting to establish certain types of socialism were existing in opposition to the capitalist idea of world order. Because the United States understood all social relationships in terms of warfare production, it could only conceive of using weapons and military technology to solve social problems. Vietnam and its reach towards independence and socialism was a social problem to the United States and its capitalist associates. That is the theoretical answer of why the United States entered the war in Vietnam.

Giving numerous examples of mechanistic anticommunism from America's intellectuals and government leaders, Gibson's work is thorough in justifying his theory of mechanistic anticommunism from a top down approach. Central to Gibson's theory of mechanistic anticommunism is his analysis of Henry Kissinger, the secretary of state under Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. Kissinger is nearly a perfect source for finding examples of mechanistic anticommunism. In his 1969 book *American Foreign Policy: Three Essays*, Kissinger writes that "on the assumption that technological plus managerial skills gave us [Americans] the ability to reshape the international system and to bring domestic transformations in 'emerging countries'. A scientific revolution has, for all intents and purposes, removed technical limits from the exercise of power in foreign policy."<sup>30</sup> Kissinger, for Gibson, is the perfect articulation of America measuring power solely in technical terms. Kissinger operates under the assumption that warfare is simply the clashing of two opposing societies of production. As Gibson notes, Henry Kissinger was an influential and powerful man before and during the Vietnam war, but Gibson cites him because the "basic assumptions about power and knowledge articulated by Kissinger were shared by thousands of academics and policymakers".<sup>31</sup> Kissinger is a poignant example of an ideologue of mechanistic anticommunism.

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<sup>30</sup> Gibson, *Perfect War*, 21.

<sup>31</sup> Gibson, *Perfect War*, 14.

Gibson's approach analyses the intellectual roots of mechanistic anticommunism, but this approach, however, does not explain the massive cultural shift that took place in consequence to the massive reorganizing of the U.S.' economy and society, not to mention the continued shift that took place to justify the longest war fought by a conscript army in the history of the United States. In their 2013 study, Duncan and Coyne explain that Roosevelt made deals with labor and industry leaders that impacted the organization of the U.S. economy.<sup>32</sup> Labor leaders, in the years after the war, did not want to give up what they had perceived as gains in the wartime economy: "[t]ripartitism—the equal representation of business, government, and labor—became the guiding principle underlying the numerous agencies that the federal government established to handle defense-related matters".<sup>33</sup> American organized labor, therefore, became part of the military industrial complex of the United States. Historian of labor Edmund Wherle similarly discusses U.S. labor support for the industrialization of the military, writing that "[b]etween the late 1940s and mid-1960s, American organized labor emerged among the most enthusiastic supporters of the military-industrial complex."<sup>34</sup> Likewise, industry became entangled in the permanent wartime economy. For example, the commercial aviation industry often received generous grants from the U.S. military to advance "the state of the art", as historian Eugene Gholz writes.<sup>35</sup> According to Duncan and Coyne, industry pursued the many incentives that the Roosevelt administration offered in return for supporting the war effort. Industries that supported Roosevelt's war were rewarded and those that did not were generally outcompeted. Duncan and Coyne write that "[t]he broader implication is that private industry became increasingly entangled with military preparation and war efforts, a partnership that continues to thrive to this day".<sup>36</sup> Because American society was reorganized to create capital-intensive weapons and military technology, more civilians than previous American wars were directly involved in the

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<sup>32</sup> Duncan and Coyne, "Origins," 220.

<sup>33</sup> Duncan and Coyne, "The Origins of the Permanent War Economy," 230.

<sup>34</sup> Edmund Wherle, "'Aid Where It Is Needed Most': American Labor's Military-Industrial Complex," *Enterprise and Society* 12, no. 1 (2011): 96.

<sup>35</sup> Eugene Gholz, "Eisenhower versus the Spin-off Story: Did the Rise of the Military—Industrial Complex Hurt or Help America's Commercial Aircraft Industry?" *Enterprise and Society* 12, no. 1 (2011), 48.

<sup>36</sup> Duncan and Coyne, "The Origins of the Permanent War Economy," 234.

inventing, the production, and the distribution of these war commodities for the Vietnam war.<sup>37</sup> Civilian corporations, like the RAND corporation and many others like it, enlisted thousands of professionals also to provide logistical support to the U.S. government and military in what would be the country's longest war by war's end. Overall, the military and its industries affected society in ways never seen before.

American society was not necessarily fated to pursue a permanent war economy that adopted mechanistic anticommunism. In his 1961 farewell address, Eisenhower famously warned against this development in American society, describing it as, “the military industrial complex.”<sup>38</sup> A conservative mirroring the anti-Federalists from the eighteenth century, Eisenhower warned the American people about the military-industrial complex, fearing that it showed the state that had grown too large and was encroaching on the individual rights of Americans. Jeffrey Engel writes in this same line of thinking—“the state's reach by mid-century and beyond penetrated every aspect of society, reaching even into areas that otherwise civilized and upstanding members of society might beforehand have considered unethical and beyond the pale;” that is, Engel's conservative analysis of the effects the military industrial complex had on American society. Engel highlights the character of U.S. industry during the Cold War, commenting on Mark Wilson's study of the management of Permanente, a company that manufactured napalm during the Cold War.<sup>39</sup> For Engel, “to take the military industrial complex at its widest angle is to see the full impact of industrialized modernity. It turned Permanente executives into not only profit seekers but also as Wilson shows, as celebrants of

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<sup>37</sup> As a result of her study of technology and the military industrial complex, Jocelyn Wills argues that the merging of the military, the government, and the economy could serve as a model for the dramatic restructuring the United States will eventually undergo in response to climate change. Jocelyn Wills, “Innovation in a Cold [War] Climate: Engineering Peace with the American Military—Industrial Complex” *Enterprise & Society* 12, no. 1 (March 2011): 120-174.

<sup>38</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower “Farewell Address” (speech, Washington, D.C, January 16, 1971), C-Span, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?15026-1/president-dwight-eisenhower-farewell-address>.

<sup>39</sup> Mark Wilson, “Making ‘Goop’ Out of Lemons” *Enterprise & Society* 12, no. 1 (2011): 1-35.

wholesale human slaughter.”<sup>40</sup> America abandoned the idea of creating a welfare state like the labor party of Britain post-war society, an economy that took care of its citizens. Instead, America embraced an economy that prioritized the production of war commodities. This thesis argues in part that American society had to be convinced to support permanent war and that American society had to create a culture that justified the pursuit of permanent war. This culture is the culture that encouraged Americans to support America’s entry into the Vietnam war, sustained the American people throughout the entirety of the Vietnam war, and clouded their understanding of why the United States lost the Vietnam war.

The culture mentioned in the previous paragraph, which this thesis defines as the discourse of mechanistic anticommunism, was one that glorified and organized society around weapons and military technology. The best summary of mechanistic anticommunism discourse comes from Paul N. Edward’s 1996 work *The Closed World*, which defines mechanistic anticommunism discourse as closed world discourse. For the purposes of this essay, however, the terms are analogous. Discourse of mechanistic anticommunism includes the following list:

- *Techniques* draw from engineering and mathematics for modeling aspects of the world as closed systems.
- *Technologies*, especially the computer, that make systems analysis and central control practical on a very large scale.
- *Practices of mathematical and computer simulation* of systems, such as manufacturing process and nuclear strategy, in business, government, and the military.
- *Experiences* of grand-scale politics as rule governed and manipulable, for example by means of the power of nuclear weapons or of Keynesian economic intervention.
- *Fictions, fantasies, and ideologies*, including such visions as global mastery through air power and nuclear weapons, global danger from an expansionist “evil empire”, and centralized, instantaneous, automated command and control.

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<sup>40</sup> Jeffrey Engel, "Not Yet A Garrison State: Reconsidering Eisenhower's Military—Industrial Complex," *Enterprise & Society* 12, no. 1 (March 2011): 184.

- *A language of systems, gaming, and abstract communication and information that relied on formalisms to the detriment of experiential and situated knowledge. This language involved a number of key metaphors, for example that war is a game and that command is control.*<sup>41</sup>

As Edwards notes, the discourse of American society reflected the weapons and military technology that existed at the center of American society during the Cold War era. The fifth point, that mechanistic anticommunism generated fictions, fantasies, and ideologies is central to this thesis. The ideology of the United States, mechanistic anticommunism, in many respects conceived of the world in the language of fantasy and fiction. As war managers increasingly relied on simulations because of the destructive reality of war in the nuclear age, the world was increasingly seen as a simulation in which being a commander of the American war machine was being a controller of the world —on the assumption that America controlled the most destructive weapons and the most sophisticated technology. What this means for the Vietnam war is that the Americans believed that they would win any conflict they entered because they perceived their own weapons technology to be the most superior. Additionally, the United States believed it should enter the Indochina conflict because communism was against the capitalist world order that the United States was the leader of.

Gibson's theory of mechanistic communism in practice is what he terms technowar. The way/method by which the United States fought the war is called technowar. The overall history of the Vietnam War is that the combined communist forces of the Vietminh in the North and South defeated the United States. U.S. participation in the conflict is marked by the atrocities the United States committed against the people and the land of Vietnam, the United States' failure to establish the political legitimacy of the South Vietnamese government (by means of CORDS and operation Phoenix), and the U.S's inefficiency in operating a colonial war. CORDS, or the Civil Operations and Rural Development Support, and Operation Phoenix were the American nation building policies that sought to eliminate insurgents and win

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<sup>41</sup> Paul N. Edwards, *The Closed World: Computers and the Politics in Cold War America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996): 15.

political support from the rural population of Vietnam.<sup>42</sup> A history of atrocities and the American defeat is reflected by anti-war American science fiction literature. On the other hand, hawkish American science fiction literature reflects the outlook of U.S. war managers, government officials, and technocrats: the worldview that the U.S. could not lose a war against a technologically inferior society; the U.S. had an economic, moral, and spiritual responsibility to protect capitalism and defeat the foreign other of communism; and finally, the United States lost the Vietnam war because it had been restrained in the field combat, prevented from employing its deadliest military capabilities.

To this end, United States culture reflected the weapons and military technology that existed at the center of U.S. society. The genre of American culture that most thoroughly combines fictional story-telling and speculation about technology is science fiction. As discussed so far in this thesis mechanistic anticommunism discourse consists of several themes, including the perceived ability of weapons/technology to solve social issues, narratives of an anti-natural foreign other, and the assumed omnipotence of the American managerial world order. American science fiction from the earliest moments of the Cold War era discussed these very same themes in great detail before mainstream society and media really started to ask questions. The examination of American science fiction literature during the Vietnam war period resolves the question of how American culture justified to itself the abandonment of the welfare state, the creation of America's permanent war society, the implementation of mechanistic anticommunism as domestic and international policy, and therefore, U.S. entry and defeat in the Vietnam war. This study follows a simple structure. Chapter two establishes the nature of the Vietnam war as a colonial war and provides an overview of the historiography concerning the war. The Vietnam war is one of the most controversial episodes in American history, and it has many implications for United States and global history. Seemingly the lessons taken from the Vietnam war, depending on one's ideological convictions, justify the need for peace or the continuation of American-sponsored conflict around the world. Consequently, there are many pages devoted to the historiography of the Vietnam war in this work. Finally, chapter three dives into discussion of American science fiction literature,

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<sup>42</sup> David Anderson, *The Columbia History of Vietnam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 281.

examining the interrelated themes of mechanistic anticommunism, imperialism, racism that dominated the literature during the Vietnam war period. Chapter three additionally examines these domestic repercussions that technowar, the Vietnam war had on the science fiction literature and its culture in America. Chapter four examines *Starship Troopers*, identifying the discourses of mechanistic anticommunism and technowar and the themes of the cults of the super weapons, super soldier, and technology in American science fiction. Like all elements of American culture during the time, the American science fiction literature community was bisected into supporters of the war and the anti-war movement.

## Chapter Two: The Historiography of the Vietnam War

There are many narratives surrounding the origins and aims of the Vietnam War. The official U.S. narrative was that the United States was intervening in the Indochina conflict on the basis of preventing the spread of communism. As discussed in the previous chapter, the discourse of American war managers during the Vietnam war period reached soaring heights of mythological rhetoric that this paper identifies as mechanistic anticommunism. It is important to remember the analysis of the revisionist tradition, the narrative that the United States was continuing the colonial war that France had lost. This chapter discusses the material reality of the Vietnam war. This chapter argues that the U.S. fought a colonial war to suppress Vietnamese nationalism. The purpose of the chapter is to establish the reality of the Vietnam War before examining the myths that American science fiction literature cultivated as propaganda for the United States. Overall, the chapter will discuss the relevant historiography of the Vietnam war to understand the ideology of the United States for the ultimate purpose of seeing how that ideology surfaced in American science fiction literature.

The United States entered the Vietnam war as the defender of France's colonial rule over the Indochina region. Therefore, the Vietnam war was a war fought by the Vietnamese for their nation's independence from white imperialism and colonization. Far from singularly belonging to the unique myth of international communism that belongs to the twentieth century and beyond, the people of Vietnam, in fact, have a long history of resisting foreign imperialism and colonialism.

By the middle of the twentieth century, Vietnam as a country and its people had lived through colonial and imperial oppression under China, France, and Japan briefly, culminating in hundreds of years of resistance. In the thirteenth century, the Vietnamese defeated Kublai Khan and the Mongolians. Imperial China often extended control over Vietnam in the years 111BC to AD 43, 44-543, 603-938, and 1407-1427. As the dates indicate, Vietnam many times rebelled against China and forced the Chinese to leave Vietnam. Vietnam gained independence for a few hundred years in 1427. A sovereign Vietnam experienced internal troubles in the 1600s, however. Like the North-South divide that existed during the period that this

investigation examines, during the 1600s a partition stood a few miles north of the seventeenth parallel. In the north of Vietnam, first the Mac and then the Trinh families claimed to be the protectors of the Le dynasty, which had ruled Vietnam in some capacity since Vietnam gained independence from China in 1427. In the south of Vietnam, however, warlords of the Nguyen family had political control. The Nguyen warlords built two walls partitioning the North and South just a few miles north of the seventeenth parallel that would divide North and South Vietnam a few centuries later. Conflict between north and south escalated in 1802. In this conflict French missionaries, who had been in Vietnam since the start of the seventeenth century, lent military technology and tactics to Gia Long of the Nguyen family, which resulted in the defeat of the Tay-Son of the Trinh family in the north. Gia Long's use of French assistance disrupted a peaceful transfer of power according to the Confucian principle of the "Mandate of Heaven," which dictates that the sacred sovereignty of a monarch shall only be respected if the ruler does not and has not oppressed the people. Because of Gia Long's collusion with colonial western power of France, many interests did not observe his right to rule and revolts broke out in the north and in the far south. Gia Long was succeeded by Minh Mang in 1821. The next two Nguyen kings, Thieu Tri (r.1841-1847) and Tu Duc (r.1847-1883) experienced more trouble running the state and maintaining control. Local uprisings and tax protests continued to occur because the Nguyen dynasty did not have a "true" claim to authority. A breach in the Red River dike system, drought, locust swarms, and a small pox epidemic also applied stress to the already fracturing dynasty. Furthermore, Tu Duc did not have a clean ascension to the throne, for he "killed his eldest brother in 1854, and in 1866 killed most of his brother's family."<sup>43</sup> In 1847, the French arrived to exploit the weaknesses in the Nguyen dynasty. For several decades the French colonized Vietnam. By 1885, Tu Duc's heir, Ham Nghi, had fled for the mountains and tried to rule from exile. The French, however, placed his brother, Dong Khanh, on the throne and ruled "Vietnam as a colony."<sup>44</sup> The entire economy of Vietnam was transformed to benefit France. Land was taken from Vietnamese and given either to French or Vietnamese collaborators to produce export crops, such as rubber, rice, and tea. France transformed Vietnam into a money economy. Before taxes had been payable in rice, but under French control Vietnamese farmers had to sell their land to buy

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<sup>43</sup> James Gibson, *Perfect War*, 32.

<sup>44</sup> James Gibson, *Perfect War*, 33.

essential items and pay taxes.<sup>45</sup> As taxes forced Vietnamese farmers to sell their land, the landowning class burgeoned in size, becoming wealthier by selling the crops of the new tenant class of landless farmers.<sup>46</sup>

In 1940, the war took hold of Vietnam and would not release its grip until the Paris Peace agreements in 1972. In June 1940, Germany defeated France during World War II. Japan, an ally of Germany, took control of Vietnam as a colonial project. Although Japan was in control at the top of the power structure, French officials remained in their positions in the administering of Vietnam. Additionally, French property owners retained ownership of their property in Vietnam. The single most important difference between French and Japanese rule was that products from Vietnam had to be sold to Japan instead of the world market. Japan bought at slightly lower prices thus lowering the profit Vietnam generated for France.<sup>47</sup>

Roosevelt, in theory, rejected French colonial rule in Vietnam. In January 1943, FDR spoke to his son Elliot about the sovereignty of Vietnam after the war:

“Don’t think for a moment, Elliot, that Americans would be dying in the Pacific if it hadn’t been for the shortsighted greed of the French and the British and the Dutch. Shall we allow them to do it all, all over again?... The United Nations—when they’re organized—they could take over the colonies, couldn’t they? Under a mandate, or as a trustee—for a certain number of years.”<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, at the Yalta conference in 1945 in Crimea, Roosevelt advocated for the creation of the United Nations, which theoretically protected the sovereignty of smaller nations.

At the Cairo Conference in 1943, Roosevelt and Chiang Kai-Shek did not form any concrete policy over assisting the Indochinese in securing independence, although the two did

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<sup>45</sup> James Gibson, *Perfect War*, 34.

<sup>46</sup> Land reform around 1950 remains a controversial issue in Vietnam as late as the twenty-first century. See Alex-Thai D. Vo, “Nguyễn Thị Năm and the Land Reform in North Vietnam, 1953,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 10, no. 1 (2015): 1-62.

<sup>47</sup> For recent scholarship on French colonialism in Vietnam, see David Todd, *A Velvet Empire: French Informal Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2021).

<sup>48</sup> James Gibson, *Perfect War*, 45

agree on the foundational belief that the French should not be allowed to restore sovereignty over Indochina.<sup>49</sup> The disagreement was over how much influence Western powers should retain over previous colonies. Kai-Shek held that Asian peoples should have more power in the self determination of their nations. Either because Roosevelt's liberalism reached its limits sanctioning Chinese independence or because Roosevelt did not want to sever economic and political western ties to Asian nations, Roosevelt seemed to have dropped his demands to assist China as a regional leader in liberating colonies from their imperial authorities. Either way, China and the United States were at a gridlock of some kind. On the other hand, the French and the British agreed that the post-war world would be a colonial world. Uncompromising to Roosevelt's disorganized liberalism and the nationalist claims of their colonies, the French and British were able to reassert their claims to colonial territories that they had lost some control of during WWII.<sup>50</sup>

Roosevelt was ill near war's end and likely did not have the ability to lead in the way he had in years past. To maintain good relations with America's European allies, Roosevelt dismembered his previously resolute anti-colonialism. In a memo to Patrick J. Hurley in China, Roosevelt gave an implied consent to the continuation of French colonial rule in Vietnam; According to Gibson: "the President's intention at some appropriate time to ask that the French Government give some positive indication of its intentions in regard to the establishment of civil liberties and increasing measures of self-government in Indochina before formulating further declarations of policy in this respect."<sup>51</sup>

The rift between the theoretical intentions of Roosevelt and the day-to-day policy of the government can be seen in a 1 March 1944 State Department planning document: "this

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<sup>49</sup> John J. Sebrega, "The Anticolonial Perspectives of Franklin D. Roosevelt" *Political Science Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (1986), 68.

<sup>50</sup> Xiaoyuan Liu, "China and the Issue of Postwar Indochina in the Second World War," *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 2 (1999): 455. See also George C. Herring "Eisenhower, Dulles, and Dienbienphu: "The Day We Didn't Go to War" Revisited" *The Journal of American History* 71, no. 2 (1977): 343-363, for an analysis of Winston Churchill's willingness to collude about colonial holdings with the French and his gag-rule approach to the subject in meetings with the pro-independence Franklin Roosevelt.

<sup>51</sup> Gibson, *Perfect War*, 54

government is pledged to the restoration of the French empire... the President has suggested placing Indochina... under an international trusteeship.”<sup>52</sup> As previously mentioned, Roosevelt and Kai-Shek agreed that Indochina should gain independence, but they did not agree on the establishment and functioning of an international trusteeship, which was never fully defined, but sometimes compared to the relationship between the United States and the Philippines. Britain was likewise supportive of France’s intentions to retain control over their colonial empires.<sup>53</sup> Roosevelt’s intentions of establishing an international protectorate of Vietnam became of secondary importance to the state department’s wish that Vietnam be under French rule. The result was that France should take protectorate status over Vietnam in place of an international body with the intention of eventually giving Vietnam independence.<sup>54</sup> Intentions of eventual independences, rights of self-determination, and civil liberties meant little under such a formulation. Consequently, Roosevelt had to comply with De Gaulle, giving air support after the Japanese had deposed the French administrator of Vietnam.

After Roosevelt died in April 1945, Harry Truman became the president. Likewise, the State Department’s and the War Department’s position, that Indochina should remain under French control, succeeded Roosevelt’s liberalism that Indochina should eventually gain independence after a time of it being under a trusteeship. At the San Francisco Conference (25 April- 25 June 1945), several top State Department officials of the Truman administration agreed to support France’s reacquisition of Indochina in exchange for France’s agreement to

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<sup>52</sup> Xiaoyuan Liu, “China and the Issue of Postwar Indochina in the Second World War,” 456. Herring also discusses the divide in American foreign policy. He argues that the War Department advocated for the continuation of colonial rule because relinquishing control of islands in the Pacific was bad for U.S. national security in the Pacific region. According to Herring, the “Europeanists” of the state department saw hurting relations with European allies as outweighing the benefits of supporting the independence of colonies. It may be likely that Herring’s analysis is an oversimplification, for in the diaries of Edward Stettinius Jr., who is among the “Europeanists” mentioned, there is evidence that indicates Roosevelt as early as the Yalta Conference was not committed to giving immediate independence to colonies. It is most likely that the loosely defined liberal opinions of state officials like Stettinius and Roosevelt were subsumed by the overall structure of the United States, which was organized for warfare, in economic and political structure. See Edward Stettinius, *The Diaries of Edward R. Stettinius Jr., 1943-1946* (New York: New View Points, 1975).

<sup>53</sup> Gibson, *Perfect War*, 55

<sup>54</sup> Herring, “Eisenhower, Dulles, and Dienbienphu”, 100.

oppose the Soviet Union in Europe.<sup>55</sup> The San Francisco Conference was important to the United States' involvement in the Indochina conflict because it cemented the connection between pursuing a policy of anticommunism in Europe and supporting French colonialism in Indochina.

Around August-September 1945, Chinese forces occupied Vietnam north of the sixteenth parallel and a combined force of British and French soldiers occupied Vietnam south of the sixteenth parallel. The Vietminh began their counter attack on the twenty-fourth of September.<sup>56</sup> Much of Gibson's narrative owes to the account of Archimedes L. A. Patti, an agent for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), which was created by the Truman administration. Patti was assigned to the "Indochina Desk."<sup>57</sup> Patti and Ho Chi Minh began relations in the spring of 1945 and they discussed Minh's efforts to liberate Vietnam from Japanese control. Ho Chi Minh also gave Patti a "Black Book" of photographic evidence that the French administrators had neglected dike maintenance that year, thus allowing for starvation and disease, the effects of a particularly bad typhoon, to kill between one and two million Vietnamese. The Viet Minh by July of 1945 had secured control of six northern provinces, and the OSS decided to supply the Vietminh with armaments and training to support them.

The OSS also allowed for Ho to use their radio facilities to begin negotiations with the French. On July fifth, Ho sent a five-point set of demands to the French government:

1. That there be universal suffrage to elect a parliament for the governing of the country, that there be a French Governor-General as President until such time as independence be granted us, that he choose a cabinet or group of advisors acceptable to that parliament. Exact powers of all these officers may be discussed in the future

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<sup>55</sup> Herring, "Eisenhower, Dulles, and Dienbienphu", 98.

<sup>56</sup> Gibson, *Perfect War*, 55.

<sup>57</sup> Gibson, *Perfect War*, 45, 46.

2. That Independence be given this country in not less than five years and not more than ten.

3. That natural resources of the country be returned to the people of the country by just payment to the present owners, and that France be granted economic concessions.

4. That all freedoms outlined by the United Nations will be granted to the Indochinese.

5. That the sale of opium be prohibited.

We hope that these conditions may be acceptable to the French government.<sup>58</sup>

In Gibson's eyes, it was a moderate proposal, but the French never replied to the Viet Minh. France's refusal to negotiate with the Vietminh shows that the French were uninterested in relinquishing their claim to Vietnam as a colony. As shown by the rejection of this proposal, colonial rule over Vietnam meant denying the Vietnamese the rights outlined by the United Nations, moderate self-governance, and ownership of their land. Even before the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the defeat of Japan was imminent, which the Vietminh foresaw along with the power vacuum Japan's defeat would cause in the region. As Gibson words the position of the Vietnamese, "They feared the occupation by Chiang Kai-shek's troops. They also feared the French." After the failure of the Vietminh's negotiations with France to secure a better position under France's colonial rule, the Vietminh tried to appeal to the United States. The first semiofficial communications came through Patti of the OSS. The Vietminh made four requests of the U.S, including the prevention of Chinese soldiers from looting, the prevention of the French soldiers from invading Vietnam or withholding support for the French, sending technical advisors to help export Vietnam's resources, and developing the industries of Vietnam.<sup>59</sup> Ho Chi Minh also tried to gain the support of the United States by imitating the American declaration of independence in its declaration of independence. This happened in August of 1945. In the same month, more than one hundred thousand people demonstrated their support of the Vietminh in the city of Hue. For the same reasons, over half a million-people demonstrated in Saigon. The Communists

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<sup>58</sup> Archimedes L.A. Patti, *Why Vietnam? Prelude to America's Albatross* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 129.

<sup>59</sup> Gibson, *Perfect War*, 51

called for renaming the city “City of Ho Chi Minh.” The installed emperor Bao Dai also abdicated the throne on August 24 “so as not to stand in the way of national liberation and independence of my people.”<sup>60</sup> To further enforce the message to the United States and the English-speaking world that Ho Chi Minh was creating independence for Vietnam from the colonialism of the French and the Japanese, Ho again referenced and borrowed from the language of the American declaration of independence in his September second speech in 1945.

Ho Chi Minh tried to appeal to U.S. President Harry Truman, writing that the British were subverting Vietnamese self-determination over their country by suppressing the free press, giving armaments to French people, and disarming the Vietnamese police. Ho received no reply from the Americans. This was in September when the British led by Major General Douglas Gracey was making moves against the Vietminh while the Chinese took territory north of the sixteenth parallel.

Although Ho did not receive help from the French Communist Party and was not admitted into the Third International (Comintern), he already been labelled an agent of international communism, even though by the early 1950s he had received more assistance from the United States than the Soviet Union, which had not yet recognized the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. After a series of negotiations with the French in March of 1946, the Vietminh agreed to French rule to get rid of the Chinese from the north, where they had been looting and dismantling industry to send it to China. The French quickly broke stipulations of the March agreement, failing to recognize the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and reinstalling emperor Bao Dai as the head of Cochinchina, a nation separate from Vietnam. This breakdown of the agreement made war seem certain by October, and on November 23, the French navy attacked Haiphong, killing six thousand Vietnamese, marking the start of the eight-yearlong French-Indochina War.<sup>61</sup> OSS agent Patti reported that at the start of the war, Ho attempted contact with the United States, the President, the Secretary of State, the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, as well as the United Nations. Ho’s appeals rested on the

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<sup>60</sup> Gibson, *Perfect War*, 51

<sup>61</sup> Gibson, *Perfect War*, 58

principles expressed in the Atlantic Charter and on grounds of humanitarianism. Interestingly, Ho asked for the United States to encourage France to let Vietnam follow a similar track that the Philippines had followed under the United States in the aftermath of the Spanish American War and the Philippine-American War.

Ho Chi Minh, the Vietminh, and all proponents of Vietnam's struggle for independence were understood only as the enemy, or the foreign other to America's policy of mechanist anticommunism. Moreover, American fears of Vietnam's independence were associated with fears of Chinese communism. According to Herring, "[w]hen the Communist victory in China aroused profound fears in Washington of a French defeat in Indochina and the loss of all of Southeast Asia to communism, the administration in February 1950 abandoned its neutrality and made the fateful decision to support the French with military and financial assistance."<sup>62</sup> To summarize, it was during the early years of the Truman administration that Ho became an enemy of the United States and even earlier in the Roosevelt administration that the United States became organized to deny colonies –including the Vietnamese people- of their independence. United States culture in the years of WWII supported the Allied effort to defeat the Axis.<sup>63</sup> Almost immediately after WWII, U.S. culture shifted its focus to justify and cultivate support for the United States' blossoming war against communism. Employing the discourse of mechanistic anticommunism, American culture continued to support the oppression of colonies because the administrations of Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon continued to escalate the use of force in Vietnam until the end of the war in 1975.

Eisenhower liked to claim that not a single member of the U.S. armed forces died during his administration, and while that is true, it does not mean that his administration did not act aggressively on the international stage of politics.<sup>64</sup> Eisenhower's administration contributed to the escalation of America's involvement in the Vietnam conflict for three main reasons: it was during his office that the puppet regime of Ngo Dinh Diem was placed in

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<sup>62</sup> Herring, "Eisenhower, Dulles, and Dienbienphu," 115.

<sup>63</sup> The National WWII Museum, "World War Two and Popular Culture," August 10, 2018, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/world-war-ii-and-popular-culture>

<sup>64</sup> Andrew Rotter, *The Path to Vietnam: Origins of the American Commitment to South East Asia* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1987).

control of South Vietnam or the Democratic Republic of South Vietnam;<sup>65</sup> the Eisenhower administration provided economic and military aid to the Diem regime;<sup>66</sup> the administration blocked elections that would have most likely reunified the nation and did not observe the 1954 Geneva Accords after the Vietnamese victory at Diem Bien Phu.<sup>67</sup> These decisions of Eisenhower contributed greatly to American involvement in the Vietnam war in the future. Edward Cuddy has argued that Eisenhower bears the most responsibility for entangling the United States in the conflict, for if the Geneva Accords had been observed then Vietnam could have unified and there would not have been a war. For Cuddy, 1954-55 could have been a time for the United States to make a clean break from Vietnam.<sup>68</sup>

Eisenhower and his administration, however, chose to enact policy that committed the United States to preventing the spread of communism in South East Asia, starting with Vietnam.<sup>69</sup> Eisenhower seemed to commit publicly to the accords, yet his administration poured economic and military aid into the Diem regime, who cancelled the 1956 elections, which would have undoubtedly indicated the people's desire to unify the northern and southern zones under the government of Ho Chi Minh.<sup>70</sup> According to Cuddy, Eisenhower blocked reform governments from forming in Iran and Guatemala, so Eisenhower's election-blocking in Vietnam is consistent with the entire scope of his foreign policy. Eisenhower's ideology and policy were not fully formed, but, simply put, it was about preventing communism and self-determination in former-colonial nations.

Eisenhower's policy concerning the Geneva Accords and the puppet regime of Diem is akin to policy known today as nation building, according to David Anderson and Lloyd

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<sup>65</sup> Campbell Craig, "Kennedy's International Legacy, Fifty Years on," 1371.

<sup>66</sup> Kevin Gray, "U.S. Aid and Uneven Development in East Asia," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 656 (2014): 53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24541762>. Also see abstract for concise summary.

<sup>67</sup> See footnote eight in Edward Cuddy, "Vietnam," 354.

<sup>68</sup> Edward Cuddy. "Vietnam," 353.

<sup>69</sup> See James Arnold, *The First Domino* (New York: William Morrow, 1993) for an analysis of how Eisenhower in 1955 established America's commitment to the Vietnam conflict.

<sup>70</sup> Edward Cuddy. "Vietnam," 355.

Gardner.<sup>71</sup> Nation building under Eisenhower was different than the nation-building ideology the United States pursued during the years of Kennedy and Johnson. For Anderson and Gardner, nation building policy put into place in Vietnam was the product of an incomplete ideology. Nation building was a messy initiative, and it demonstrated Eisenhower's failure to develop a coherent ideology and consistent foreign policy regarding former colonies, such as Vietnam.<sup>72</sup> At face value, nation building appears to be the age-old tactic of the carrot and the stick, which has long been used by colonial nations to suppress malcontent subjects. Nation building, as opposed to traditional colonialism, differs because it has the seemingly benevolent edifice of liberal capitalism. On the one hand, nation building is about guiding the development of a society to be organized a certain way. On the other hand, as in the case in Vietnam, nation building meant destroying social institutions, social relationships, and social movements that

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<sup>71</sup> Anderson, David. *Trapped By Success* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991). According to Christopher Fisher, nation building policy developed alongside modernization theory. Christopher Fisher, "Nation Building in the Vietnam War" *Pacific Historical Review* 74, no. 3 (August 2005). One could also picture nation-building evolving out of modernization theory, but such discussion would be for intellectual history. See also, Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory and Cold War America* (Washington, D.C., 2004); David Engerman, Nils Gilman, Mark Haeefele and Michael Latham, eds., *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (Amherst: University of Mass. Press, 2003); Mark T. Berger, "Decolonization, Modernisation and Nation-Building: Political Development Theory and the Appeal of Communism in Southeast Asia, 1945–1975," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 34 (2003), 421–448; Marc Frey, "Tools of Empire: Persuasion and the United States Modernization Mission in Southeast Asia," *Diplomatic History*, 27 (2003), 543–568; David Ekbladh, "'Mr. TVA': Grass-Roots Development, David Lilienthal, and the Rise of the Tennessee Valley Authority as a Symbol for U.S. Overseas Development," in *ibid.*, 26 (2002), 335–374; Donald Blackmer, *The MIT Center for International Studies: The Founding Years, 1951–1969* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002); Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Ron Robin, *The Making of the Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Industrial Complex* (Princeton, N.J., 2001); Nick Cullather, "Development? It's History," *Diplomatic History*, 24 (2000), 641–653; Jonathan Nashel, "The Road to Vietnam: Modernization Theory in Fact and Fiction," in Christian G. Appy, ed., *Cold War Constructions: The Political Structure of United States Imperialism, 1945–1966* (Amherst, Mass., 2000); Dean Tipps, "Modernization Theory and the Study of National Societies: A Critical Perspective," *Comparative Study in Society and History*, 15 (1973), 199–226; and Ali Mazrui, "From Social Darwinism to Current Theories of Modernization: A Tradition of Analysis," *World Politics*, 21 (1968), 69–83.

<sup>72</sup> David Anderson, *Trapped By Success*.  
Lloyd Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam: From WWII to Diem Bien Phu* (New York: WW Norton and Company, 1991).

stood in the way of American policy makers visions becoming reality. When nation building ideology reached its full stride during the Kennedy administration, it took the form of the Peace Corps (founded in 1961) and the Strategic Hamlet Program (1962), which placed Vietnamese peasants into enclosed living spaces that resembled the living conditions of concentration camps for the purpose of bisecting rural society from the National Liberation Front. At once the Kennedy program sought to help foreign societies and tear apart their social fabrics, which is why many scholars view nation-building policy as paradoxical. According to Noam Chomsky, the paradoxical foreign policy of nation-building was the result of the Kennedy administration viewing independence as unthinkable but knowing that Ho and the Vietminh received the political support from the majority of the Vietnamese population.<sup>73</sup> To gain enough popular support for a pro-America South Vietnamese government, the U.S. foreign policy makers had to mimic the popular land reforms of the communists and at the same time eliminate the communists.

Before Kennedy's time, however, nation building did not have such actionable foreign policy. Instead, nation building seemed contradictory and functionless, almost just a waste of money. Eisenhower seemed neither to retreat nor enter the fight as demonstrated by his unclear handling of the Geneva Accords. The central argument of Anderson and Gardner is that between retreating and fighting is nation building.<sup>74</sup> Eisenhower's conception of nation building, according to Anderson, had three objectives that were passed down to Kennedy and Johnson— "to hold the line against communism, to ensure a democratic government, and to keep the nation invested in global capitalism...crippling obligations that even Eisenhower could not have honored."<sup>75</sup> Nation building in Vietnam appeared to be a broken ideology because of how little the Eisenhower administration understood Vietnamese politics and culture. To build a democratic, liberal, and capitalist society out of Vietnam was an impossible task, for the Vietnamese people did not want capitalism, the majority of the population, who were rural farmers, wanted ownership over their own land after years of French and Japanese colonialism.

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<sup>73</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Rethinking Camelot: JFK, The Vietnam War, U.S. Political Culture* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015), 49.

<sup>74</sup> Anderson, *Trapped By Success*, 203.

<sup>75</sup> Christopher T. Fisher, "Nation Building in the Vietnam War" *Pacific Historical Review* 74, no. 3 (August 2005), 445.

In other words, for Americans to create a capitalist society in Vietnam, it was first necessary to eradicate or convert large swathes of society that were nationalist and seeking forms of socialism.

Building upon Anderson and Gardner's argument that Eisenhower's decisions regarding Vietnam were contradictory, Christopher Fisher implies that nation building was soon to be a more coherent ideology in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Eisenhower did not send soldiers in the same manner to Vietnam as did Johnson, but he committed the United States to the impossible task of the destruction of nationalism and the maintenance of global capitalist order in Vietnam. Eisenhower's nation building at its core was a rhetoric of anticommunism. As Fisher writes "[C]ultural and political forces were already gathering, and Eisenhower's refusal to formulate an ideology hurried the impending disaster along." For Fisher, "[c]old war mantras --containment and rollback--...", were the justifications that the Eisenhower administration gave for ignoring the Geneva Accords and providing economic and military aid to the Diem regime.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, Eisenhower not only passed down obligations of intervention in Vietnam, but also the ideology of nation building.

Alongside nation building obligations, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations inherited the discourse of mechanistic anticommunism and the material reality of the military industrial complex. In a sense, nation building is a paradoxical policy- what Gardner and Anderson call unfinished ideology- because it results from trying to appease the somewhat contradictory elements of mechanistic anticommunism, the military industrial complex, and American liberalism. Mechanistic anticommunism pushed American leaders to adopt aggressive foreign policy. At the same time, the military industrial complex –or the idea that the United States was organized for permanent war- additionally incentivized leaders to pursue such wars against "communist" states because it satisfied the economic wants of the most powerful industry and labor leaders. The liberalism of Eisenhower and Kennedy, however, was not always comfortable with waging the brutal and expensive colonial wars of dying European empires.

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<sup>76</sup> Christopher Fisher, "Nation Building and the Vietnam War," 445.

Nonetheless, aggressive nation building foreign policy and the military industrial complex was at the core of American society during the Cold war, and militarism dominated American politics in the Kennedy and Johnson years, or as historian Michael Sherry writes, “military language and imagery... infused American politics at every level.”<sup>77</sup> This political culture overpowered any morals issues Eisenhower and Kennedy may have felt about leading America as a permanent war society. Their final speeches lament America’s hyper-fixation on capital-intensive military technologies and armaments. As I discussed in the introduction chapter, Eisenhower concluded that U.S. politics had become overwhelmed by the interests of the military and its industries.<sup>78</sup> Kennedy reached a similar conclusion as result of what he experienced during his first two years in office. Kennedy’s first two years of office escalated the Cold War during two crises, the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Berlin Crisis of 1961, which almost plunged the entire world into nuclear war.<sup>79</sup> Seemingly learning from these near-catastrophes, Kennedy, like Eisenhower before him, lamented that war had become the center of American politics. Neither Kennedy nor Eisenhower would frame it this way, but it is possible to argue from a marxist perspective that the presidents were speaking on the topic of

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<sup>77</sup> Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930’s* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1997), 498. Sherry argues that America’s preoccupation for war emerged on the eve of WWII. This quote refers to this preoccupation since shortly before WWII. It could likely be argued that America’s fascination for war formed far earlier, but for the purposes of this work, it is important that America’s fervent militarism was present during the Cold war.

<sup>78</sup> It should also be remembered that it was Eisenhower who said, “every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children... This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense.” Eisenhower, “The Chance for Peace,” 1953, quoted from Engel, "Not Yet A Garrison State: Reconsidering Eisenhower's Military—Industrial Complex," 195.

<sup>79</sup> According to Stephen Rabe, the Cuban Missile Crisis was part of the Kennedy administrations larger anticommunist agenda in South and Central American and the Caribbean. Rabe’s history, among other revisionist works, illuminates that the Kennedy years were marked by aggressive foreign policy in the name of anticommunism, thus disproving the sentiment that Kennedy was a peace-loving president.

Stephen Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

For a useful review of Rabe’s work, see John McNeill, "The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 14, no. 2 (2013): 203-08.

war-commodity fetishism. Kennedy and Eisenhower felt that politics, or the relationships between people had become dominated entirely by capital-intensive war commodities, which is what I argued had happened during the New Deal and the Second World War in chapter one.

To be clear, Kennedy did not see American society and the proliferation of militarism through a marxist perspective. Kennedy took issue with mechanistic anticommunism's greatest symbol, the nuclear bomb. Kennedy expressed his frustration with the way military industrial politics, as epitomized by the bomb, in his commencement speech at American University in 1963, shortly before he was assassinated that year. According to Craig, "underlying the speech was Kennedy's recognition that nuclear weapons had changed everything," and that war was inevitable and could be avoided.<sup>80</sup> Kennedy appeared to have recognized that if nuclear war broke out, then "[a]ll we have built, all that have worked for, would be destroyed in the first 24 hours."<sup>81</sup> Publicly, at least, Kennedy recognized the need for peace. This would be a strong change in policy for Kennedy, considering he campaigned against Eisenhower's VP Richard Nixon in 1960 on a now-disproven, fear-mongering platform that claimed there was a sizable missile gap between the Soviet Union and the United States in favor of the Soviet Union.

Kennedy did not develop an ideology committed to peace in the last year of his life and office. Moreover, Kennedy could not break free from mechanistic anticommunism and the military industrial complex. Under Kennedy, America's ideology of nation building in Vietnam continued to develop. Although Kennedy declared to the public that he wanted peace, his escalation of the Vietnam war shows that his quest of peace was part of a larger ideology of nation building, which included the violence of technowar, or the kind of warfare that the discourse of mechanistic anticommunism produced for the Vietnam war. Rather than reduce the likelihood that the United States would have to enter the Indochina conflict, Kennedy instead continued to grant even more economic and military aid to the failing South Vietnamese government than the Eisenhower government. At the start of Kennedy's first year

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<sup>80</sup> Campbell Craig, "Kennedy's International Legacy, Fifty Years on," 1376.

<sup>81</sup> John Kennedy, "American University Commencement Address" (speech, Washington, D.C, June 10, 1963) C-Span, [c-span.org/video/?153206-1/american-university-commencement-address](https://www.c-span.org/video/?153206-1/american-university-commencement-address).

in office, there were 700 military advisors in Vietnam. By the end of 1963 that number had swelled to 16,700.<sup>82</sup> Eventually, Kennedy was forced to accept the irreparable Diem regime and signed his approval of the coup that deposed him. Shortly afterward, Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. It is impossible to know if Kennedy would have escalated the war further. After the Gulf of Tonkin incident, which occurred less than a year after Kennedy's death, Johnson received a blank check from Congress to send ground troops to Vietnam and start the intensive bombing of Indochina that would last for decades.

Although the Vietnam war is often called Johnson's war, Johnson was not entirely responsible for the war, for it has its roots in the Roosevelt years. Even before Kennedy died, the NLF, or National Liberation Front, was winning more battles against the advantageous Southern forces (who were receiving U.S. aid). Moreover, Vietnamese culture was against the Southern government, which was obviously propped up by the U.S. government. Therefore, by the time Johnson entered the office, all the work to prepare the United States for war had already happened, which is why Congress gave him unanimous support to wage war in Vietnam. It is possible to think that Johnson's 'great society' indicates a possible reason for Johnson to be reluctant to support involvement in Indochina. It is more likely, however, that war in Indochina promised Johnson the ability to extend his great society into Asia, as demonstrated by the idea to use the framework of the Tennessee Valley Authority in the Mekong Delta region.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, Johnson can be seen as a president who was not inclined to deviate from the ideology of nation building that the presidents before him had pushed into creation.

The historiography of the Vietnam War is important for understanding American science fiction on the Vietnam War period because it shows that the United States was attempting to nation build a capitalist state that would be subject to the command of the U.S. To do so, the United States was willing to bomb cities, conduct massacres all over Vietnam's countryside, create a massive sex work economy for the sexual desires of U.S. soldiers, subject the population to lethal terror programs and destroy the natural landscape with chemicals,

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<sup>82</sup> Gibson, *Perfect War*, 81

<sup>83</sup> Christopher Fisher, "Nation Building and the Vietnam War", 450.

plows, and bone-melting fires. The history of the conflict shows that Ho in the mid-fifties was far from the Soviet agent under the thumb of Moscow that Americans imagined. In reality, he was a nationalist, anti-colonial leader.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, it was absurd for the United States to claim that it was there to prevent Soviet totalitarianism, at least in the origins of the war. It was additionally absurd for the United States to claim that it was protecting democracy in Vietnam, for it was the United States that blocked elections and placed an autocrat in Vietnam. Almost every single point in the U.S. government's explanation of why it was in Vietnam was a fallacy that indicated the U.S' intent to protect American and European economic interests in Asia and Oceania at any moral cost. In the following chapter, I will discuss how the absurd logic of mechanistic anticommunism surfaced in American science fiction literature and how new wave authors revolted against American Cold War ideology.

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<sup>84</sup> Archimedes L.A. Patti, *Why Vietnam? Prelude to America's Albatross*, 373.

### Chapter Three: An Overview of Mechanistic Anticommunism and Technowar in American Science Fiction Literature

American science fiction literature undertook the burden of discussing some of the most pertinent issues of the Cold War. Susan Sontag's essay "The Imagination of Disaster" examines the genre of science fiction in America, arguing that science fiction is not strictly about the science of the future. Rather, Sontag writes, "science fiction is about disaster".<sup>85</sup> Sontag mostly discusses the disaster of nuclear war, but her argument is true that science fiction in the post war era was a medium to discuss disaster. According to Sontag's analysis of popular science fiction film, the disaster that supposedly threatened America the most during the Cold war was internal and external communism. Her argument, however, can be applied to American science fiction literature too. The disaster science fiction literature imagined was the destruction of American life, freedom and prosperity if communism spread internationally or rise inside the U.S. American science fiction best characterized Cold War era paranoia for Sontag. Sontag's argument resonates with later critics as well. For instance, David Biskind in his *Seeing is Believing* argues that science fiction best captures the anxiety of America at the start of the Cold War.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, cultural historian David Seed, in his *American Science Fiction and the Cold War*, argues that science fiction discussed the important issues of the time, such as nuclear war, invasion, and totalitarianism. Seed further argues that American science fiction was able to describe and comment on the fast-paced social, technological, and political changes that were taking place during the Cold War.<sup>87</sup>

Science fiction, a genre that incorporates more imaginative thinking than most genres, was uniquely prepared to discuss the discourse and often epic metaphors that American leaders employed to discuss nuclear technology, ideological conflict, and the postcolonial world. For the historian of science-fiction Mike Ashley, "science fiction and fantasy were the best media for writers to put such turmoil in context and speculate on cause, effect, and solution. To some

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<sup>85</sup> Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster", *Commentary*, October 1965, 42.

<sup>86</sup> David Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Macmillan Publishers, 2000).

<sup>87</sup> David Seed, "Introduction: Approaching Science Fiction" in *A Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. David Seed (New Jersey: Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2005), 1-6.

writers... and perhaps to some readers, this fiction was cathartic.”<sup>88</sup> The Cold War was a precarious political moment, and as Sontag argued, disaster seemed around the corner.

Although technology and America’s preoccupation with war were the causes of the looming disaster, Americans believed that the solution laid in developing more weapons and military technology. Therefore, when the disaster of communism appeared to be knocking at the door of Vietnam, America invented new weapons and military technologies. More realistic genres could articulate the anxiety of the post-WWII era, they did not always have the language like pulp science fiction literature did to generate excitement and spectacle for the wave of new technology that swept through American life and culture. Historian Alasdair Spark enumerates the inventions created for the Vietnam war:

Vietnam was an ultra-technological war, a perception intensified by an acronymic language as arcane as the space programme. Two of the agencies charged with wartime research and development were the Defense Advanced Research Products Agency and the Limited War Laboratory, and ‘product laboratory’ was an apt description: in 1967 the Pentagon’s director of research told congress that ‘the Vietnam conflict is testing almost all of the tactical military equipment and concepts developed in the last twenty years of R&D’. Defense agencies and military contractors produced an exotic and complex war zone composed of jungle defoliation, troop-detecting ‘sensors’ and ‘people sniffers’, night vision ‘look down’ radar, ‘psy-war’ propaganda, instant satellite communication between battlefield and the pentagon, a computerized body count and Hamlet Evaluation System, and even attempts at weather control. More orthodox military technology produced weaponry such as mini-guns capable of firing thousands of rounds per second... laser guided ‘smart’ bombs, ‘claymore’ anti-personnel mines, napalm, riot gas, space age M-16 rifles (made by Mattel, troops joked), ‘fleshette’ mortar rounds –and perhaps most transformative of all- fleets of helicopter transports and gunships offering air-mobility, medical evacuation and firepower previously considered fantastic.<sup>89</sup>

Sparks’ concludes that these “perverted” technologies did not produce victory. In the science fiction community, however, there were hundreds of voices that argued these were the tools to save western civilization from the Communist threat. As will be discussed in this chapter,

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<sup>88</sup> Mike Ashley, *Gateways to Forever: The Story of the Science Fiction Magazines from 1970-1980* (England: Liverpool University Press, 2007). 94.

<sup>89</sup> Alasdair Spark, “Vietnam: the War in science fiction” in *Science Fiction, Social Conflict, and War* ed. Philip John Davies (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), 118.

behind the justification that the West was the victim of Communist aggression, there was a latent bloodlust and desire for conquest in many American sci-fi stories. The weapons that science fiction writers described and extolled were the devices that American soldiers used to massacre thousands of Vietnamese peasants and revolutionaries.<sup>90</sup> Sparks argument is similar to the central thesis of the fifth chapter of Gibson's *The Perfect War*.<sup>91</sup> Gibson argues that the military technologies developed for the Vietnam war, which American leaders glorified, did not produce a victory for the United States. Moreover, these technologies multiplied the magnitude of the atrocities that the United States committed in Vietnam because the weapons and technologies used were so lethal.

American leaders who dropped real bombs in Vietnam and the science fiction writers who sold stories about dropping bombs on the 'other' were ideologically linked. This essay has discussed at length how war commodity fetishism and the military industrial complex supplied American leaders with the means of technowar in the early years of the Cold War, a question not yet addressed is who had the ideology to use the capital-intensive and immensely destructive weapons that American society was devoted to producing? The answer is the American technocracy. A technocracy is a society that is governed by an elite of technical experts.

The American technocracy during the Kennedy and Johnson years goes by a few additional names such as the 'Camelot School' or the 'best and brightest of America', a phrase which Kennedy campaigned on, arguing that he and his administration could perform better than the Eisenhower administration because he had assembled a team of the most skilled and qualified Americans.<sup>92</sup> According to historian David Halberstam, the Kennedy administration was hubristically "determined to solve difficult Cold War problems by means of modern social

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<sup>90</sup> Alasdair Spark, "Vietnam," 119.

<sup>91</sup> James Gibson, *Perfect War*, 93.

<sup>92</sup> Campbell Craig, "Kennedy's International Legacy, Fifty Years on," 1368. Craig provides two important citations. The first, *A Thousand Days* by Arthur Schlesinger, in the words of Craig, "portrayed JFK as the King Arthur of a vibrant Washington court that could do no wrong." For a more biting, revisionist history of the Kennedy Administration, see Seymour Hersh, *The dark side of Camelot* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1997), 412-37.

science.”<sup>93</sup> Some notable technocrats during the time of the Kennedy administration were Henry Kissinger, Henry Cabot Lodge, Walt Rostow, and above all, Robert McNamara, the Ford Motor Company whiz kid. Gibson discusses the thinking process of technocrats. Technocrats considered themselves as akin to businessmen, whose profit motive was the production of war, in which loss of allies forces was a credit and the killing of enemy forces was a debit.<sup>94</sup> For the technocrats in charge of the Vietnam war, Vietnam could be reorganized into a society compatible with American-led capitalism if the correct scientific principles were applied. Therefore, to American technocrats, Vietnam became the “laboratory for weapons development and military science,... the laboratory for ‘social systems engineering’,... the laboratory for economic modernization...It was the ‘test case,’ and that scientific status subsequently became mapped onto the political world,” according to Gibson.<sup>95</sup> Giving an example, Gibson quotes Maxwell Taylor, an advisor to Kennedy, who said that Vietnam was “the first real test of our determination to defeat the communist wars of national liberation formula...”. The goal of the technocrats was to demonstrate to the North Vietnamese, the National Liberation Front, and the South Vietnamese that the U.S’ technological and managerial superiority would eliminate enough opposition to prove that American victory was guaranteed.

Faith that the ‘best and brightest’ were in control of America and its wars in Asia was central to much of American science fiction published during the Cold War. American technocracy and its technowar received generous support from many parts of the American science fiction literary community. Indeed, many of the characters, conflicts, and themes of American sci-fi literature mirrored the discourse of mechanistic anticommunism that the technocrats cultivated to justify the Vietnam War to the American populace.

Frequent contributor for *Analog* Magazine Joe Poyer wrote many stories that exemplify the attitudes of the technocrats in charge of the Vietnam war. For instance, Poyer wrote

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<sup>93</sup> This quote is Craig’s summary of Halberstam’s *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972).

<sup>94</sup> Gibson, *Perfect War*, 121

<sup>95</sup> Gibson, *Perfect War*, 81.

“Challenge: The Insurgents vs. The Counterinsurgent”. In this work Poyer confidently claimed that guerrilla insurgents were no match for the technological capabilities of the United States. Poyer’s fanatic endorsement mirrors the attitudes of real life White House officials and military leaders that believed they could mold Vietnam into a new nation if they killed enough of the NLF.<sup>96</sup> The fallacy of such thinking is that as long as Vietnam was occupied, there would be more insurgents to fight for freedom. Additionally, Joy Poyer had his short story “Null Zone” published in *Analog* in 1968. Null Zone is a story about a lone warrior deep in the forests of Indochina. His mission is to gather information about the NLF insurgents and report it back to his base in Thailand. The protagonist concludes that a ‘null zone’, in this case a gigantic lake of radioactive waste, had to be created to block supplies and soldiers from traveling on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The idea that the natural landscape was a malleable object for U.S. war managers to contort at will reflects the same opinion held by real U.S. policy makers, who commissioned deadly defoliants, napalm, and Rome plows to be used to make the landscape of Vietnam more amenable for American victory.<sup>97</sup> Famously, Ronald Reagan while campaigning to be Governor said that all of Vietnam should be paved over and painted with parking stripes.<sup>98</sup>

Another science fiction writer and supporter of technowar in Vietnam was Jerry Pournelle. When Pournelle died in 2017, he was remembered by the technology and science fiction website Gizmodo as a “Tireless Ambassador for the Future”, for his achievement in the craft of science fiction writing.<sup>99</sup> Although a rather glowing memorial, the article correctly documents Pournelle’s widely-read works, such as *The Mercenary*, *The Mote in God’s Eye*, *Lucifer’s Hammer*, and Pournelle’s column in *Galaxy Science Fiction*. Pournelle was among

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<sup>96</sup> Bruce Franklin, *Vietnam and Other Fantasies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 157.

<sup>97</sup> To this day, people in Vietnam experience birth defects, cancers, and illnesses due to exposure to the chemicals dropped in Vietnam. Drew Brown, “4 Decades After the War Ended, Agent Orange Still Ravaging Vietnamese,” McClatchy D.C, July 22, 2013, <https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article24751351.html>.

<sup>98</sup> James Lindsey, “The Vietnam War in Forty Quotes,” Council on Foreign Relations, April 30, 2015, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/vietnam-war-forty-quotes>

<sup>99</sup> James Whitbrook, “RIP Jerry Pournelle, A Tireless Ambassador of the Future,” Gizmodo, <https://io9.gizmodo.com/rip-jerry-pournelle-a-tireless-ambassador-for-the-futu-1803143871>.

the giants of the industry, and he was even friends with ‘the Dean of science fiction’ Robert Heinlein.

Pournelle is an interesting figure to examine in the American science fiction literary community because, in addition to his science fiction writing and journalism career, Pournelle was involved in the development of Cold War weapons technology and the strategy of the United States. His writing career and experience in Cold War weapons research and development illustrates the connection between the sci-fi world and the civilian-led effort to develop weapons and military technology for the American military. Sometimes militarism is only examined in military contexts, such as parades, war memorials, or advertising directly from the government or military. Since western societies industrialized, militarism has encroached steadily into areas typically imagined as civilian spaces. By the end of WWII, however, it was clear that convincing the home front to continue fighting was as important as convincing the soldiers on the front to fight. In the introduction to this thesis, I argued that war after the end of WWII has become increasingly dependent on the resources and labor from home front to produce the most expensive supply of weapons in world history. Consequently, the production of war commodities dominated American lives. To sustain civilian commitment to America’s permanent war economy and to the permanent conquest needed to sustain the material for such a society, large swathes of American culture began to idolize the superweapon, the super soldier carrying it, and the technocrat at the helm of the American project. Jerry Pournelle, with one foot in weapons development and another in popular culture, as a figure reveals the often-hidden connection between the stories that entertain Americans and the wars Americans believe are good and necessary.

Dr. Jerry Pournelle earned his bachelor’s degree in engineering, his master’s in statistics and systems engineering and his PhD in political science from Seattle University. Pournelle worked for Boeing for many years as a Human Factors Engineer, an Aviation Psychologist, and led Boeing’s human factors laboratory. Pournelle later worked as a systems analyst, a position involved in the strategic analysis of proposed new weapons systems. In 1964, he joined the Aerospace Corporation, a corporation created to provide information to assist the U.S. government in its goal of developing intercontinental ballistic missiles. At

Aerospace Corporation, Pournelle was the editor of Project 75, a 1975 USAF study of all ballistic missile technology. The study identified and recommended USAF investment in technologies required to build the missile force.<sup>100</sup> Although it is beyond the timeline of this work, it must be at least referenced that Pournelle was a chair on the American Citizen's Advisory Council on National Space Policy, which helped the Reagan administration develop their Strategic Defense Initiative, which was later pejoratively called 'Star Wars', referencing the blockbuster movie series.<sup>101</sup> Occupying important positions in the fields of weapons and military technology development, Pournelle and his ideas about technology had real influence on how America fought its wars during the Cold War. For the most part, Pournelle can only be described as a loving-defender of weapons, for he devoted his life to making them and convincing Americans they should love them too.

Within the scope of this thesis' time period of study is Pournelle's *The Strategy of Technology* (1970), co-written by Stefan Possony and Francis X. Kane, the military researcher accredited with inventing GPS. Although *Strategy* was published as non-fiction source, intended to be a framework for American foreign policy, historian Bruce Franklin writes that the work "may best be comprehended as science fiction" because the strategy provided is fantastical. The work shows how ridiculous American strategies of technology had become at the height of the Vietnam War. An illustrative quote mentions the battle of Khe Sanh, which in 1968 was part of the U.S' attempt to destroy the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Pushing Poyer's argument even further, Pournelle suggested using several nuclear bombs against the North Vietnamese forces in Khe Sanh: "B-52s smashed the Communist positions and inflicted heavy casualties," he argues; "The B-52s dropped about 30 megatons of TNT munitions. If we had used some 3 megatons of small nuclear bombs with a strong neutron flux, we could have lifted the siege of Khe Sanh in one or two hours and we could have crippled the North Vietnamese divisions for a

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<sup>100</sup> Jerry Pournelle, "About Me," July 2017, [www.jerrypournelle.com/chaosmanor/](http://www.jerrypournelle.com/chaosmanor/)

<sup>101</sup> Norman Spinrad claims that Pournelle came up with the name and it was poorly received, but Pournelle denied this claim, arguing that opponents to the defense system titled it star wars. <https://mondediplo.com/1999/07/14star>. For a discussion about the Strategic Defense Initiative, see Lisa Yaszek and Doug Davis. Introduction to *Configurations* 20, no. 1 (2012): 1-6. doi:10.1353/con.2012.0002.

long while to come.”<sup>102</sup> The Khe Sanh region of Vietnam is a small rural area, and Pournelle’s plan suggested dropping more than “fifteen times the total tonnage dropped by the United States throughout World War II.”<sup>103</sup> It is fantastical thinking to believe that using nuclear weapons in a single battle would have made nationalistic insurgents change their mind about their colonial oppressors. To suggest that this excessive display of destruction could have won the war is an absurd claim, considering nearly all of Indochina supported nationalist independence movements over the American-supported governments. Although absurd, a similar kind of logic motivated the United State’s air power policy.<sup>104</sup>

The idea to win wars by using nuclear weapons was an idea all over science fiction. A famous example was in the 1964 Hugo Award winning *Glory Road* by Robert Heinlein. In this work, the main character claims that the Korean War could have been won if America had dropped nuclear bombs on Korea or China or both. For the hero, the United States only lost because it had been held back— a theme that would be important for after the Vietnam War as well. Because the tradition of idolizing the superweapon has deep roots in American culture, Pournelle’s *Strategy* can be seen as a poignant example of a long-standing trend in American culture.<sup>105</sup>

In chapter four of *Strategy*, Pournelle addresses a possible critique of technowar, which is that technology as the primary strategy for war would be “...akin to allowing the munitions manufacturer to decide the conduct of the war“, Pournelle writes. His solution is that the most skilled weapons technicians must create strategy for war, not the people who make the weapons: “Proper conduct of the Technological War requires that strategy drive technology;

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<sup>102</sup> Franklin *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 200), 158.

<sup>103</sup> Bruce Franklin, *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies*, 159.

<sup>104</sup> The United States never dropped nuclear weapons on Vietnam. Copious amounts of bombs, missiles, and chemical agents were dropped from U.S. planes and helicopters. Airpower was a central piece of the U.S’ counterinsurgency strategy. For historiography on this subject, see Matthew Adam Kocher, Thomas B. Pepinsky, and Stathis N. Kalyvas. "Aerial Bombing and Counterinsurgency in the Vietnam War." *American Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 2 (2011): 201-18.

<sup>105</sup> Franklin discusses the history of the superweapon in American culture at length in the chapters “Victory Through Air Power“ and “Chain Reactions“ in *War Stars*.

that there be an overall strategy of technology, not merely strategic elements which make use of the products of technology. Instead of the munitions designer controlling the conduct of the war, it must be in the hands of those who understand technological warfare; and this requires that they first understand the nature of war.”<sup>106</sup> Pournelle, however, embodied a contradiction in his own argument, for he was a member of the munitions industry advising that peace could only be achieved with more deadly weapons. His argument fails to consider the fact that knowledge of weapons technology in the United States is inseparable from the production of weapons because the military industrial complex is a vast system that educates people to make weapons, provides the capital and labor necessary to produce weapons, and directs the application of military force. There is no knowledge of superweapons without a society engineered to make and use them.

Pournelle’s faith in the ability of nuclear weapons to solve foreign relations problems likely came in part from the influence of John Campbell, the editor of *Analog* magazine, one of the most popular science fiction magazines of the twentieth century in America. Campbell defended many conservative values and some controversial opinions, and Ashley quotes him as saying that pollution and resource allocation problems could be resolved easily by “getting rid of eighty percent of the human population of the planet”. On peace in Vietnam, Campbell said that “all the misery of South Vietnam could also be stopped, even more quickly, by a thorough, saturation, overlapping hydrogen bombing of the area. That would leave no one alive to complain.”<sup>107</sup> A racist, Campbell said that he believed that Black children had lower IQs than white children and learned at a slower rate.<sup>108</sup> In an email to Ashley, Pournelle said that he had been reading Campbell’s work since he was in high school and that he was in agreement with most of Campbell’s work.<sup>109</sup> Campbell, however, managed the narrative of one of the most influential science fiction magazines of American during the Cold War. During sci-fi’s highest

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<sup>106</sup>Jerry Pournelle, Stefan Possony, and Francis Kane, “Chapter Four” in *The Strategy of Technology* (New York: Dunellen, 1970).

<https://www.jerrypournelle.com/slowchange/Strat.html>,

<sup>107</sup> Mike Ashley, *Gateways to Forever*, 8.

<sup>108</sup> Mike Ashley, *Gateways to Forever*, 9. Ashley writes that Campbell was not racist, however. I would disagree on the account of what Ashley quotes him to have said.

<sup>109</sup> Mike Ashley, *Gateways to Forever*, 11.

readership, only a few other magazines could compete with it.<sup>110</sup> Campbell shows how conservative, pro-American values often led the sci-fi industry during the early years of the Cold War and certainly throughout the Vietnam War.

Pournelle was so invested in the culture of science fiction that he supplied his own writing; sometimes he contributed writing to *Analog* magazine during Campbell's time. Pournelle's science fiction, like his non-fiction writing, glorified military weapons technology and promised it was the solution to America's social problems inside and outside the U.S. Pournelle's *Mercenary* (1972) demonstrates that American militaristic propaganda often took the form of entertaining popular culture. *Mercenary* is analogous to the discourses of mechanistic anticommunism and technowar that dominated American politics during the Vietnam War period. The story is about the mercenary army commander John Christian Falkenberg and his experience suppressing a rebellion in a mining colony. Pournelle's story does not accurately recount the history of the Vietnam War, but the narrative is parallel to the history that the U.S. government holds to be true. In Pournelle's story, Hadley, the mining colony planet where the novel is set, is run by a democratically elected president who heads the Progressive Party regime. The stability of the regime is threatened by a group of insurgents (the equivalent to the Viet Cong) and the Freedom Party (the equivalent to Ho Chi Minh's liberation party) who supposedly represent a minority of the population. Another connection between the Vietnam War and *Mercenary* is that the original counterinsurgents are French and the current ones are American. Falkenberg is hired to suppress the rebel forces because the police and the President's guard are not powerful enough to defeat the guerrilla forces—a dynamic that parallels the failed nation building attempts of the Strategic Hamlet Program and the puppet regime initiated by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

There is more symmetry between *The Mercenary* and American political discourse during the Vietnam war. For one, the Progressive Party's platform, mirroring the nation building ideology of Kennedy and Johnson, is to enlist the old colonial political structures to industrialize Hadley. The President of Hadley says to Falkenberg that the Progressives are

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<sup>110</sup> See "...Long Live the King" in chapter one of Mike Ashley, *Gateways to Forever*, for a summary of Campbell's career as a writer and editor of science fiction.

benevolent, and that they want to modernize Hadley, developing agriculture and transport alongside industry. The final goal for the Progressives is to create a self-sustaining Hadley that can rejoin “the human race as equals”.<sup>111</sup> The Freedom Party, on the other hand, make fake promises of progress and plan to sabotage Hadley for the profits of the party elite. This premise is a pro-American propagandistic expression of Cold War politics. Capitalism is the good guy of *Mercenary* while communism is the bad guy. Beneath it all, as indicated by the quote about the “human race”, there is a racist implication that colonized nations are not equal to western nations. Moreover, *Mercenary* implies that a colony’s only hope for parity with western nations is with western aid. The work implies that colonized nations should not be trusted with self-determination, seemingly suggesting that they are not capable of self-governance. This sentiment parallels the racist paternal liberalism of Roosevelt.

Deviation from capitalism and the misappropriation of technology are explanations Pournelle gives for the poor living conditions and political instability of a planet or nation. While explaining the societal failure of Hadley, the marine in charge of giving Falkenberg a tour of Hadley Lieutenant Banner tearfully laments that Hadley is not organized upon the free market principles of capitalism. Although the population was nearly starving to death, they refuse to work and eat government provided food. One of Falkenberg’s soldiers asked, “Why’n’t you tell ‘em to work or starve?”<sup>112</sup> For the straight-talking American boys of Falkenberg’s army, the answer is clear, starvation is the most incentivizing punishment for the idle.

If people were put to work, there would be little to no rebellion, suggests Pournelle. Falkenberg arrives at this conclusion while comparing the crime on Hadley with the crime on Earth. The lawlessness on Earth is in fact the same system recreated on Hadley. “The intelligence reports mentioned lawlessness, but this was as bad as Welfare Island on Earth,” said Falkenberg upon witnessing a crime in Refuge, the capital city of Hadley.<sup>113</sup> The Welfare Islands of Earth in Pournelle’s universe “were lumps of concrete buildings and roof parks,

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<sup>111</sup> Jerry Pournelle, *Mercenary* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1972), 99.

<sup>112</sup> Jerry Pournelle, *Mercenary*, 90.

<sup>113</sup> Jerry Pournelle, *Mercenary*, 89.

containers for the seething resentment of useless lives kept placid by Government furnished supplies of Tanith hashpot and borloi and American cheap booze.”<sup>114</sup> When Pournelle writes the “Welfare Islands” it is clear he is referencing the poor racialized and the working-class communities of American cities. Although never referencing race, Pournelle generates an age-old racist narrative that defectors from the capitalist and colonial world order -namely people who live in colonies and the people who live in ghettos- are inferior and incompetent members of the global society. Such a narrative justifies for the exploitation of colonialized people inside and outside the United States. The discourse that justifies conquest and global racism in *Mercenary* Cold War American politics is mechanistic anticommunism. In *Mercenary* and American politics, white capitalists viewed colonized people, racialized and working class people in the United States as a problem for global society, and only capitalist social scientific principles and military technologies could recreate a functional civilization.

In the discourse of *Mercenary*, there are weapons and technologies available for social scientists to use to ensure that society continually progresses to a form of utopia. A civilization’s relationship with and understanding of technology determines its success, *Mercenary* suggests. In the prologue of *Mercenary*, Pournelle records a U.S-Russia treaty that banned weapons research and development as one of the most important historical events to his space adventure next to the 1969 moon landing. Seemingly the entire conflict of the novel could have been avoided if the United States had been able to win the Cold War and establish a global empire. If the United States had been allowed to dominate the entire world, then there would have been peace. This argument rests on the premise that technology is an ideology almost like a religion in that it must be properly practiced. The lynchpin of the argument that the arms-treaty started the conflict is that Americans know how to tend to technology and the Russians do not. Under capitalism, there is supposedly more intellectual freedom, more industrial resources, and the ideal national character to develop benevolent technology. Under capitalism, technology is tended to correctly and its technocrat worshippers can embark on scientific pilgrimages and bring back enlightenment and prosperity for society. Under Soviet supervision, the path of the technocrat is blocked by bureaucratic red tape and backwards

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<sup>114</sup> Jerry Pournelle, *Mercenary*, 61.

policies like welfare. Navy admiral Sergei Lermontov, whose character can be summarized as ‘the good Russian’, wishes that “we had not suppressed scientific research. But that was done in the name of peace. Prevent development of new weapons. Keep control of technology in the hands of the government, prevent technology from dictating policy to all of us; it had seemed so reasonable...”<sup>115</sup> The treaty and its “suppression“ of science explains why the original colonizers left for Hadley— they were the true worshippers of science fleeing persecution like the colonizers of the new world (according to some interpretations). The second wave of colonists were involuntary immigrants. These people resemble workers in Soviet labor camps. For these reasons, Hadley had the potential to be great, but because America curtailed its owned military strength, Hadley now lives “primitively” and in a state of “feudalism” due to the influence of Soviet communism that was never contained or destroyed.<sup>116</sup>

Just as the conflict could have been prevented with violence, Pournelle resolves the conflict on Hadley with violence. At the end of the book, Falkenberg gathers thousands of Refuge City residents into a stadium and brutally massacres the insurgent force and many civilians in a Soviet-like grand-works stadium— a symbol for Soviet hypocrisy in the eyes of Pournelle. Pournelle glorifies violence. He appeals to emotions associated with speed and spectacle. Like a twentieth-century Clausewitz or a Cold War futurist, Pournelle unites the passion of violence with the noise of a sports car and the stinging chemical smell of a factory. The effect of Pournelle’s idolization of the weapon and Falkenberg’s army is that he normalizes excessive violence. Pournelle’s philosophical justification for war is Falkenberg’s theory of war: war is the ‘normal state of affairs’.<sup>117</sup> Falkenberg himself is briefly appalled by the violence, but he quickly remembers that it is necessary for peace, and therefore good.

The violence is deemed necessary at that point, but recall that Pournelle established early in the novel that it could have been avoided if technology had not been suppressed. Lermontov reminds the reader that Falkenberg needed to bring his army to Hadley because of the inhabitants’ own ignorance of how to manage a civilization. Falkenberg’s violence is a

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<sup>115</sup> Jerry Pournelle, *Mercenary*, 37.

<sup>116</sup> Jerry Pournelle, *Mercenary* 92.

<sup>117</sup> Mike Ashley, *Gateways to Forever*, 10.

corrective measure to revive the vitality of the state of Hadley, and therefore Falkenberg's tactics are benevolent. The responsibility for the destruction is on the victims of Falkenberg's violence it seems to Pournelle. "Not many of the colonies will survive without us. It is too soon. If we did not suppress science and research it might be different... We created their problems with our colonial governments. We gave them no chances at all to live without us. We cannot let them go suddenly", writes Pournelle, justifying the violence with a form of white-man's-burden liberalism.<sup>118</sup> This last quote, found early in the novel, ties together two ideas related to the near-prophetic discourse of mechanistic anticommunism: that capitalism would bring prosperity and freedom to humanity and that weapons and military technology could and should be used to crush any opposition. Pournelle's *Mercenary* is an allegorical narrative that closely resembles the official narrative of the U.S. government for why the United States waged a war of counterinsurgency in Vietnam and how the military thought it could create a capitalist state out of a post-colonial nation.<sup>119</sup> His story is equally horrifying and telling because Falkenberg's method of violence is strikingly similar to the United State's strategy of counter insurgency in Vietnam—kill insurgents until there are none remaining and do not worry about the people who get in the way. In summary, Pournelle was a technocrat and a propagandist in effect for U.S. imperialism during the Cold War because he believed that technology could solve the problems of the twentieth century and usher in a liberal-capitalist utopia.

Another professional who wrote science fiction, although not as well known as Pournelle, was Roy L. Prosterman. Prosterman was a law professor at the University of Washington.<sup>120</sup> The United States developed a carrot and stick form of counter insurgency in Vietnam known as 'Winning Hearts and Minds'. Prosterman developed the legal basis for the land reform system that served as the carrot part of the strategy. The stick was Operation

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<sup>118</sup> Jerry Pournelle, *Mercenary* 47.

<sup>119</sup> The allegory of the mercenary soldier is strengthened by the research of Laura A. Dickinson, who argues that America started to outsource to private contractors at significant levels starting in the Vietnam War. Laura A. Dickinson, "Key Moments in U.S. Military and Security Outsourcing: From Vietnam to Iraq," in *Outsourcing War and Peace: Preserving Public Values in a World of Privatized Foreign Affairs* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2011), 23.

<sup>120</sup> Bruce Franklin, *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies*, 160.

Phoenix, a terror program that ‘neutralized’ (killed, converted, or erased) more than eighty thousand people suspected of being or helping insurgents.<sup>121</sup> Prosterman published a story in *Analog* in 1973 called “Peace Probe”. Prosterman’s story is an exhibition for a new kind of American empire. His vision for the future of American foreign policy in “Probe” is that the United States should be able to probe into the affairs of any nation to investigate if it has weapons that could interrupt the global sovereignty of the U.S. Prosterman’s story also suggests that the United States should have the power to use chemical and psychological technologies to influence the mind of foreign populations. In effect, “Peace Probe” mirrors the history of the tactics and mission of Operation Phoenix, which used “advanced computer data management systems in the attempt to ‘neutralize’ NLF leadership,” writes Jeremy Kuzmarov.<sup>122</sup> “Peace Probe” highlights the tendency for American science fiction literature to encourage readers to believe that advanced weapons and social control mechanisms produce global peace, ignoring the history of human rights violations that policies like Operation Phoenix committed.<sup>123</sup>

For many American science fiction writers, the absurdity of the Vietnam War and the culture in the United States that sustained the war was deeply unsettling. One author who discussed the war and cruel absurdity of American politics was Kate Wilhelm. Wilhelm wrote “The Village” the day after the news of the My Lai massacre reached the U.S.<sup>124</sup> The My Lai massacre was the massacre of the village My Lai in the Quang Ngai province of Vietnam. The story attracted significant media attention in the United States and caused many Americans to

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<sup>121</sup> Jeremy Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression: Police Training and Nation-Building in the American Century* (Amherst: University of Mass. Press, 2011), 54. See also *Hearts and Minds*, directed by Peter Davis. (1974: The Criterion Collection) film. For a full history of Operation Phoenix, see Dale Andradé, *Ashes to Ashes: The Phoenix Program and the Vietnam War* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999).

<sup>122</sup> Jeremy Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression*, 55.

<sup>123</sup> Jeremy Kuzmarov, *Modernizing Repression*, 56.

<sup>124</sup> According to Wilhelm, she did not sleep the night after hearing about My Lai and she could only sleep after she vowed to write this story. When she awoke the next day, the story was in her head and she wrote it without any revisions. Kate Wilhelm, “The Village” in *Bad Moon Rising*, ed. Thomas Disch (New York City: Harper and Row, 1973), <https://faculty.atu.edu/cbrucker/Amst2003/Texts/Village.pdf>.

believe that the war was unethical.<sup>125</sup> The premise of “The Village” is that American soldiers unknowingly travelled through an unexplained worm hole of some kind. They arrived in an American town. There, they murder innocents, sexually assault women and children, butcher animals, use infants and small children for target practice, and burn homes to the ground—the same acts of violence that U.S. soldiers committed in My Lai and in seventy percent of the towns in the Quang Ngai province.<sup>126</sup> The soldiers in “The Village” are indoctrinated killing-machines—either full of hate, numbed to indifference, or bullied into complicity—to the point that they do not notice that they are killing Americans. Wilhelm is a talented writer, and her story telling style makes the heat of an American summer feel like a jungle in Vietnam. The blurred geographic boundaries between Vietnam and North America reflect how the discussion of the Vietnam War and the production of war had become the center of American society. The story is gruesome and somber. In effect, it leaves the reader begging for America to remember empathy and stop the violence.

Joe Haldeman, Norman Spinrad, and Ursula Le Guin are three more important American science fiction authors who criticized America’s discourse of mechanistic anticommunism. Joe Haldeman published *The Forever War* in 1974, an autobiographical account of his service in Vietnam disguised as a science fiction work. The forever war of Haldeman’s work is a thousands of years long conflict that starts with a Gulf of Tonkin like scenario. In *Forever War*, civilians are turned into killers, whose desire for murder makes them seem more monster than human. For instance, the first scene of the novel is an introduction into “eight silent ways” “you” can use to kill a man.<sup>127</sup> This commentary on American militarism is counter to the pro-war science fiction that dominated the genre for decades. For example, in *Mercenary*, Falkenberg is suave and just, but in *Forever War* the military and government leaders are fanatical killers and business managers without care for human life.

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<sup>125</sup> Ron Ridenhour, “My Lai and Why It Matters” (lecture, Tulane University, New Orleans, March 15, 1998), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gG0ULk6yxvA>. For a discussion about the U.S. military’s history of the My Lai massacre, see Lawrence Rockwood P. “Chapter 9. The Lesson Avoided: The Official Legacy Of The My Lai Massacre,” in *The Moral Dimension of Asymmetrical Warfare*, ed. Ted van Baarda, 179-210. 2009.

<sup>126</sup> Franklin, *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies*, 160.

<sup>127</sup> Joe Haldeman, *The Forever War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2009), 5.

The soldiers of *Forever War* are sent to combat where they are more or less conducting the genocide of a population on a faraway planet. The war drags on for so many years that no one knows why the war is being fought anymore. In pro-war sci-fi, war is often a beautiful but necessary evil that ensures the progress of civilization. In *Forever War*, on the other hand, war is a regressive social activity, and when the protagonist returns home, he cannot recognize it as the home he left.<sup>128</sup> In this way, Haldeman highlights the change soldiers returning from Vietnam perceived upon returning home. To furnish the Vietnam War- a long, expensive, and controversial war- the United States changed greatly, which soldiers often wistfully noticed returning from war. In conclusion, *The Forever War* is an antiwar novel that depicts technowar as a dangerous fantasy for the American imagination to hold.<sup>129</sup>

Taking a humorous approach to criticizing American technocracy, Kurt Vonnegut published “The Big Space Fuck” in Harlan Ellison’s new wave science fiction anthology *Again, Dangerous Visions* (1972). “The Big Space Fuck” is about how the technocratic elite of America are a hierarchal cabal of crude, arrogant, and destructive men who destroyed the world. “Everything had turned to shit and beer cans and old automobiles and Clorox bottles,” writes Vonnegut.<sup>130</sup> The conflict of the story is that Earth is no longer inhabitable, but there is nowhere for humanity to go. As a last resort, the American elite have filled a spaceship full of freeze-dried semen to be fired into the Andromeda galaxy in hopes that it will impregnate something or someone. Everything about the story is an ironic insult directed at the American elite: to have one’s semen selected for the ship, one must have an IQ above 115 or be an exceptional athlete or musician; the ship is named after Arthur C. Clarke, the author of *2001: A Space Odyssey*; the American politicians in charge of the project have started to wear codpieces shaped like rocket ships; even the freeze-drying process was invented by the University of Chicago. The problem in the first place was created by the elite, and the solution does not even fix the problem. The work has the reader wondering, ‘if the elite are really so

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<sup>128</sup> Franklin, *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies*, 164.

<sup>129</sup> Franklin, *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies*, 167.

<sup>130</sup> Kurt Vonnegut, “The Big Space Fuck” in *Again, Dangerous Visions*, ed. by Harlan Ellison, (New York: Double Day, 1972), 760.

smart and talented, how did they get humanity into this spot in the first place?’ The only logical answer is that the people in charge are not as great as they claim to be.

Another story that comments on America’s fascination with weaponry and technology is *The Big Flash* by Norman Spinrad (1969). It is an antiwar science fiction short story about a rock band comprised of the literal Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse whose mission is to convince the American population to destroy the world and all of humanity in one glorious nuclear explosion. The story begins with a bang. After a sexually charged first show that ended in special effects depicting an atomic bomb, a jaded music industry agent signs the band into a contract knowing they will be more popular than the Beatles. Spinrad continues to build the tension of the story, escalating steadily the threat of apocalypse as the Americans of the story become increasingly entranced by the sexy image of nuclear weaponry. The agent, working with a million-dollar contract his superiors gave him, says that “there was no choice” other than to promote the Horsemen. The grim irony is that the agent is making the Horsemen more popular, and he could help protect America and the world from the nuclear apocalypse if he so decided. Spinrad ironically plays with free will and predestination throughout the story. Fearing the worst, Spinrad warns that Americans might not use their free will to avoid nuclear apocalypse.

The theme of nuclear predestination persists in the second part of the story, where the perspective shifts to a U.S. general in charge of nuclear bomb testing. The general and his superior are given orders from the Secretary of Defense to start testing nuclear bombs despite the test-ban treaty signed with Russia. The president gives them these orders after he notices the bomb gain popularity because of the Horsemen. Spinrad’s discussion highlights that much of American society wants to die and kill the whole world with it. Because America was in the unique position of having thousands of nuclear bombs during the Cold War, if American society wanted to destroy the world, it could. But also equally true, Spinrad implies, is that if enough Americans become disillusioned with militarism and technowar, then perhaps there is hope. Except in Spinrad’s story, American society, including the munitions industry, the

government, the military, and the people want nuclear bombs to be dropped.<sup>131</sup> Spinrad sets up his story in a way that resembles the reality of American society during the Cold War. All the people in power are so obsessed with themselves that they are willing to destroy the world to attain more power, fame, money, and sex.

In the third section of Spinrad's story, the narrative is told by a sailor on board submarines armed with nuclear bombs and "orders" to go watch the Four Horsemen show. Again, the theme of nuclear predestination arises. Spinrad, by the second half of the story, has the reader wishing someone would just have the courage to say no to it all, and stop the cycle of escalation that can only end in apocalypse. Except for an intern at the music office in the first part, no one in Spinrad's America says no to the bomb. Therefore, Spinrad seems to suggest that Americans as a collective entity have the freedom of will to choose between the survival of humanity and nuclear apocalypse. The sailor describes what he feels as part of the American hive-mind and its fixation on the bomb. As the "music got faster and wilder, ecstatic... the hull of the Blackfish seemed unreal... the crowd was swaying to it around me... the distance between myself and the crowd seemed to dissolve... I was there... they were here... We were transfixed... 'Oh yeah, we are all in here together... together...'", writes Spinrad.<sup>132</sup> In the final part of the story, all the collective components of American society converge when all the bombs are dropped to create the nuclear apocalypse. Breaking his story into four different narrators, Spinrad comments that American society works collectively to create the dystopia "The Big Flash" warns of. Ending on a note of horror, the story's message is clear: America's chauvinism will be the death of humanity.<sup>133</sup>

Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five, or The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death* also discusses free will and predestination, providing an ironic and deeply thoughtful criticism of America's militaristic culture during the second half of the twentieth century. To criticize American militarism, Vonnegut highlights the fallibility of the American technocracy

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<sup>131</sup> Norman Spinrad, "The Big Flash" in *Beyond Armageddon*, ed. by Walter M. Miller and Martin Harry Greenberg, 47-69 (Winnipeg, Canada: Bison Books, 2006), 58.

<sup>132</sup> Norman Spinrad "The Big Flash" in *Beyond Armageddon*, 61.

<sup>133</sup> Norman Spinrad "The Big Flash" in *Beyond Armageddon*, 69.

and the absurdity of the American imagination. *Slaughterhouse-Five* is ironic like many of Vonnegut's works. The irony at the core of *Slaughterhouse Five* is that although the leaders of America confidently claim to be experts who have all the answers, they are just violent and ignorant children who do not take responsibility for their actions. This message takes the legitimacy of the technocracy and turns it upside down. The first indication that the hierarchy of technocracy is a farce is the title of the work. The children's crusade was either a real historical event or a fable in which some thirty thousand children led a crusade to Jerusalem. The crusade was a failure. The children either died at sea or were sold into slavery. The Vietnam War can be seen as a failed crusade. The United States and its allied capitalist nations were trying to retake Vietnam before the 'heresy' of communism spread globally. The Vietnam War was a failure, and like the Children's Crusade, a predictable one. But this line of thinking is not all that Vonnegut intended to communicate. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, violent behavior comes naturally to people who do not or cannot reflect on the morality of their actions, or in other words, children. The message of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is that American wars, such as the Vietnam war, are childish ideological wars.

The main character of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is Billy Pilgrim, whose name means young, strong willed pilgrim, for Billy is the nickname for youths named William, or 'strong willed warrior'. In other words, Billy Pilgrim means 'child crusader'. Billy Pilgrim was born in irony in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, for he survives the U.S' firebombing of Dresden, an event that killed a quarter of a million people, because he was protected by a swine slaughterhouse, a building designed for killing. Billy Pilgrim represents an average American in the post war era; he married, had children, and found a job. An optometrist, Pilgrim is part of the educated class of Americans. Vonnegut, however, uses Pilgrim's profession to make it ironic how blind Pilgrim is to the world, for Pilgrim like many Americans cannot see that the United States was possibly the greatest evil to the world after the Second World War. Pilgrim was abducted by a civilization of aliens called Tralfamadorians, who comprehend the past, present, and future simultaneously. After living on their planet as a zoo attraction for many years, Pilgrim eventually learns how to think like a Tralfamadorian and can relive all his memories. Pilgrim becomes "unstuck" from time and can no longer assign meaning to his life or choices because there is no narrative. He is like a bug frozen in amber. His ability to see time differently allows

him to watch a WWII movie backwards, so he sees planes snatch bombs out of the air as buildings reassemble themselves. The planes deliver the bombs to disassembly centers, and miners bury the dangerous minerals deep below the ground where no one can find them. Billy keeps watching the movie until all of humanity shrinks until it is only two perfect humans—Adam and Eve.<sup>134</sup> The backwards movie suggests that Pilgrim thinks he lives in a fallen world. The fallen world is western civilization after the Second World War. Pilgrim, unable to make meaning out of the horrors of WWII, represents the American mind in the second half of the twentieth century.

For Pilgrim, there is no longer any narrative or order to his actions, and therefore he sees himself as without free will. While existing on the night Pilgrim is abducted by the aliens, he waits on his living room couch patiently until they come and disable his “free will” with their stun guns.<sup>135</sup> Like Norman Spinrad’s “The Big Flash”, Vonnegut satirizes the American consciousness that thinks it does not have the agency to behave differently. America wages violent ideological wars abroad and acts like it has no other choice. This is not true in the eyes of Vonnegut, however. *Slaughterhouse-Five* as a satire serves to illuminate the ridiculousness of America or even western civilization’s core belief that war and destruction are essential elements to the human experience. Considering his entire body of work, including “The Big Space Fuck”, Vonnegut as science fiction author suggests that the idea of the predestination of war is a lie or a misleading idea meant to distract westerners from caring about the elite profiting on the production of war. Therefore, *Slaughterhouse-Five* can be seen as a Vietnam War era American science fiction work that identifies and criticizes the American discourses of mechanistic anticommunism and technowar on the account that they mislead Americans into depoliticizing themselves to the point they become people without agency.

Written three years after “The Big Flash” and four years after *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Ursula Le Guin wrote the Hugo award winning novella *The Word for World is Forest* in direct response to the Vietnam War. In just a few years, American culture had changed so much.

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<sup>134</sup> Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five, or, The Children's Crusade: a Duty-Dance with Death* (New York: Dial Press, 2005), 105.

<sup>135</sup> Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-five*, 106.

Americans had become more aware their nation's political structure and its destructive footprint in global politics. The satires, dystopias, and social criticisms that science fiction created helped awaken the American consciousness. Using the metaphor of a children's crusade to describe how students in the U.S. changed the political scene of America, Steven Roberts wrote in February 1969 that the "campus today harbors a trained and tempered cadre of student activists who now know by experience, gained both on the campus and off, how to make their protests effective. The radical, the violent demonstrations shake things up, and in this respect they are useful."<sup>136</sup> In this quote, Roberts comments on the rapid political awakening American students had at the end of the 1960s and how it "shook" things up for the whole country.

Eloquent and strong-willed political thought was also seen in the science fiction writing of Ursula Le Guin. In Ken Macleod's introduction to Le Guin's work, he writes that it is a "reflection on invasion, exploitation, and oppression, and on the necessity and cost of resistance" during the Vietnam War era.<sup>137</sup> The strongest themes of *The Word for World is Forest* are ecology, sexism, militarism, and the spirituality. Like many other sci-fi works of the time, space colonization is a metaphor for colonialism on Earth. *Forest* is a part of Le Guin's Hainish cycle, a collection of stories that are set in the Hainish universe that Le Guin invented.<sup>138</sup> The Hainish universe is not told all at once, but Le Guin provides readers information about the universe throughout several of her novels. In the Hainish cycle, humans originally evolved on the planet of Hain and eventually colonized several planets, including Terra (Earth) and Athshe.<sup>139</sup> The civilization of Hain collapsed and contact between the planets stopped. After about a million years apart, the Terrans re-discovered space travel and started to colonize other planets including Athshe. *Forest* is about a conflict between the Terrans and the Athsheans because the Terrans are logging the sacred forest of Athshe. The Terrans are on

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<sup>136</sup> Steven V. Roberts, "The Children's Crusade-What Now?" *Change in Higher Education* 1, no. 1 (1969), 21.

<sup>137</sup> Ursula Le Guin, *The Word For World is Forest* (London: SF Master Works, Orion Publishing Group, 1976), 7.

<sup>138</sup> David Seed, introduction to *A Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. David Seed.

<sup>139</sup> Warren G. Rochelle, "Ursula K. Le Guin," in *A Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. David Seed, 410.

Athshe because they have exhausted Earth's resources. Although the Athsheans can recognize that the Terrans are humans, calling them "yumens," the Terrans, including the antagonist Captain Davidson, call Athsheans the derogatory term "creechies."<sup>140</sup> The narrative that Le Guin creates is parallel to U.S. imperialism in Asia, including Vietnam.

The main characters of the work –Selver, Don Davidson, and Raj Lyubov- represent Le Guin's discussion of the exploitation of colonized nations, women, and the environment. Her work serves as a criticism of U.S. involvement in Indochina. *Forest* is a criticism of ecological destruction, gendered violence, and imperialism for any time, but since it was realized during the Vietnam War, it criticized that war as the timeliest example of the ideas Le Guin brought forth. In *Forest*, Don Davidson speaks as the representative of the colonial, misogynistic, and spiritually stunted ideology, in other words, he seems to speak for the United States. Davidson is a crude and violent man, who claims that

"the only time a man is really and entirely a man is when he's just had a woman or just killed another man. That wasn't original, he'd read it in some old books; but it was true. That was why he liked to imagine scenes like that. Even if the creechies weren't actually men."<sup>141</sup>

For Davidson, misogyny, militarism, and ecological destruction are part of a larger ideology, which seems to be the same ideology as American imperialism.<sup>142</sup>

Selver, a native Athshean, and Lyubov, a romantic anthropologist, view the natural world differently than Davidson. For them, Selver especially, there is no distinction between the environment and humanity, for everything is interconnected and humans depend on the Earth too much to live without it. Violence disturbs this connection. As the name of the work suggests, the Athshean word for world is forest; Selver explains that the word for "dream" is also "root".<sup>143</sup> Le Guin seems to suggest that the ideology of imperialism is morally corrupt

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<sup>140</sup> Ursula Le Guin, *The Word For World is Forest*, 101.

<sup>141</sup> Ursula Le Guin, *The Word For World is Forest*, 138.

<sup>142</sup> Heather Marie Stur, *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam Era* (England: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 161.

<sup>143</sup> Ursula Le Guin, *The Word For World is Forest*, 166.

and violent because the Terrans, like Americans, have disrupted the connection between people and the land even in the metaphysical sense of dreams. An ambitious and successful novella, *The Word For World is Forest* served in the period of the Vietnam War as an anti-war piece of sci-fi that connected the destruction of the Earth, the oppression of women, and the oppression of colonized nations.

Just a few years before *The Word For World is Forest* won the Hugo award, American science fiction was dominated by fantasies of the super soldier and the superweapon. How did American culture change in such a short amount of time? To answer this question, I will again employ Jurgen Habermas's critique of technology as ideology. In the sixth chapter of Habermas' *Toward A Rational Society: Student Protest, Science and Politics*, Habermas builds upon Max Weber's concept of "rationality", which this thesis also employs to understand the relationship between the scientific rationalization process (of the Enlightenment) and mechanistic anticommunism/technowar discourses (of the twentieth century). According to Habermas, Max Weber's rationality defines the "form of capitalist economic activity, bourgeois private law, and bureaucratic authority."<sup>144</sup> During the WWII and the Cold War, the rationality that Max Weber identified evolved into the American technocracy and the military industrial complex. According to philosophers William Rehg and James Bohman, "by reducing practical questions about the good life to technical problems for experts, [the elite of the American technocracy and the military industrial complex] eliminate the need for public, democratic discussion of values, thereby depoliticizing the population."<sup>145</sup> In the science fiction of pro-war authors, technocrats and technowarriors are made to look like philosopher kings, wholly knowledgeable of the latest scientific achievements, charismatically intelligent, and morally superior. Anti-war science fiction literature does the opposite. Anti-war science fiction authors like Vonnegut, Spinrad, Wilhelm and Le Guin wrote satire, invented realistic

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<sup>144</sup> Jurgen Habermas *Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 81.

<sup>145</sup> James Bohman, William Rehg, "Jürgen Habermas", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), =<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/habermas/>>. In place of "contemporary elites", I wrote the elite of the American technocracy and the military industrial complex because that is the elite that I am using Habermas's work to discuss.

dystopias that seemed possible, eliminated geographic boundaries to make Americans ponder their country's massacres, and created parables to serve as frameworks for resistance. Consequently, the anti-war new wave of American science fiction literature discredited the legitimacy of American technocratic elite. Therefore, anti-war new wave sci-fi politicized the American population to discuss democratically their personal and national values. Moreover, the new wave let Americans decide for themselves the nature of a good life.

The politicization of American science fiction is a documented process. The primary source that best illuminates the politicization of science fiction literature was an advertisement in the June 1968 issue of *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*.<sup>146</sup> The advertisement is two pages. Page one is headed by this statement: "We the undersigned believe the United States must remain in Vietnam to fulfill its responsibilities to the people of that country". Below the statement is a list of ninety two names, including Robert Heinlein, Jerry Pournelle, John Campbell, and Joe Poyer. On the opposing page, there is this statement: "We oppose the participation of the United States in the war in Vietnam".<sup>147</sup> The undersigned includes Kate Wilhelm (who organized the advertisement), Harlan Ellison, and Norman Spinrad among eighty-one other writers. The advertisement shows that American culture was consumed by discussion of the Vietnam War. America had to discuss the war because enough people chose to recognize and question the morality of an American organized to produce constant war. Interestingly, the editor who oversaw this issue, Frederick Pohl, did not understand the controversy, for he believed that the solution for the Vietnam was a choice of "tactics". Franklin argues that Pohl discussed the Vietnam War this way because he was a sci-fi author who believed in the power of technology to solve any problem.<sup>148</sup> For Pohl, the morality of the Vietnam War was a question for technical experts to solve with weapons and computers. Pohl's reaction shows that as late as June of 1968, the technowarriors were still invested in the myths of the superweapons and super-soldier. Pohl, like American political and military leaders, had faith in the technowar strategy, even after years of technowar had produced no

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<sup>146</sup> Kate Wilhelm and Judith Merrill, "Paid Advertisement," *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, June 1968, 4-5.

<sup>147</sup> Franklin, *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies*, 153.

<sup>148</sup> Franklin, *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies*, 152.

success, as proven by the Tet Offensive in January of 1968.<sup>149</sup> The advertisement overall shows that American science fiction writers were conscious of America's immoral foreign policy and they were organized to convince people to stop supporting the war. Part of their strategy to discredit the technocracy and implore Americans to take control of their country to pursue policy that they believed to be moral.

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<sup>149</sup> For a discussion about how America military leaders defied all logic to view the Tet Offensive as a victory for America, see Gibson, *Perfect War*, 155.

### **Prelude to Chapter Four: the path to *Starship Troopers***

Before the left-leaning New Wave of sci-fi started criticizing mechanistic anticommunism discourse, before sci-fi became politicized, and before pro-military authors like Heinlein and Pournelle started writing, American authors, since the nineteenth century, have written fantastical stories about invasion and have championed a high-tech military as the only feasible protection. The purpose of this brief chapter is to demonstrate that American literature has a long history of discussing the fear of invasion, particularly about American fears about future military conflicts with Russia and other Asian countries (often allied with Russia). The other purpose is to provide context for the in depth look at Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*.

Authors like Heinlein, Pournelle, Prosterman, and Campbell were certainly not the first American authors to start beating the war drum, and this chapter seeks to show that they were continuing a legacy of American imperialism. The genre of imagining military conflicts that could possibly take place is called future war literature. In the context of this study, a relative of future war literature is the "yellow peril" genre, which can be defined as a work that imagines a future military conflict with an Asian nation. Although future war literature might not be considered "hard" science fiction, which would become more important in the 1950s, future war literature of the late nineteenth century can be considered as one of the cultural predecessors to the genre of science fiction most people imagine, much as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus* is not stereotypical science fiction but is often given the title as the first science fiction novel. The "yellow peril" genre became most popular around the end of the nineteenth century. Works of the "yellow peril" genre reflect certain white people's fear of Asian people and nations gaining enough power to contest the European colonial control of Asian countries, or put more simply, having the power to challenge global white supremacy. According to historian Bruce Franklin, author of *War Stars*, the first work of the "yellow peril" genre in America was Pierton Dooner's 1880 *Last Days of the Republic*<sup>150</sup> The plot of Dooner's work imagines the disaster that would befall America if China were to

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<sup>150</sup> Bruce Franklin, *War Stars* (New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988), 33.

rise to power. The visions of disaster, Franklin writes, contributed to the anti-Chinese prejudice that resulted in the Chinese exclusion act of 1882. Works published near the turn of the nineteenth century like King Wallace's *The Next War: A Prediction* (1882), Willian Ward Crane's "The Year 1899", and M.P Shiel's *The Yellow Danger* all present the reader with a similar narrative. In essence, the genre fears that given the chance, racialized people will start an uprising and kill all white people. Narratives like these, as Franklin writes, "blatantly convert the victims into the invader", and these stories were told during the "very period in which European world powers were ruthlessly conquering what remained on the uncolonized white world"<sup>151</sup> Franklin writes that the racism of these narratives exists outside the pages of future war literatures, and writes that "yellow peril" literature has "shaped some of the ugliest features of American history: the savage exploitation of 'coolie' labor; the World War II incarceration of Japanese-Americans in concentration camps and expropriation of their property; the incineration of Japanese cities with incendiary and atomic bombs; the genocidal assault on the Vietnamese rural population, using everything from extermination raids on villages to indiscriminate poisoning of the countryside with chemical weapons."<sup>152</sup> Anti-Asian science fiction continued to persist into the twentieth century with works such as Marsden Manson's 1907 *The Yellow Peril in Action*, Ernest H. Fitzpatrick's 1909 *The Coming Conflict of Nations; Or the Japanese American War*, and General Homer Lea's 1909 *The Valor of Ignorance*, which was so influential that it was republished in 1942 a few months after the attacks on Pearl Harbor.<sup>153</sup> Lea's work is important to understanding the history of speculative war fiction and the genre of the "yellow peril" because it reveals the racist and proto-fascist tendencies of the genre. For instance, Lea believed that America was menaced by feminism, commercialism, and a racially heterogenous population due to the number of immigrants from Cuba, the Philippines, Puerto Rico and the large amount of Black people in the United States because of slavery. Immigrants, for Lea, could not be trusted to be patriotic Americans because they had already abandoned their home country. In terms of what was beneficial for a nation, Lea saw military activity as an essential element of a nation's natural health and progression.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Bruce Franklin, *War Stars*, 36.

<sup>152</sup> Bruce Franklin, *War Stars*, 37.

<sup>153</sup> Bruce Franklin, *War Stars*, 40.

<sup>154</sup> Bruce Franklin, *War Stars* 41.

Adjacent to the "yellow peril" genre was also future war literature about Russia, Germany, and Britain. The future war literature about Russia is most relevant to understanding Cold War paranoia in America. The fear of Russian invasion was central to America's policy of mechanistic anticommunism. Fear of Russia, however, sometimes seems like an excuse for Americans to act upon their fears of Asian nations in the most violent ways possible.

While Franklin concludes his discussion of "yellow peril" somewhere near the start of the first world war, Edward James presents evidence that indicates that American science fiction writers continued to produce "yellow peril" literature throughout 1920s and 1930s.<sup>155</sup> The editor of *Air Wonder*, Hugo Gernsback, noted in 1930 that writers and readers assumed the magazine most wanted to print stories about air banditry, men who wanted to control the world, and "aerial warfare between the yellow races and the white."<sup>156</sup> The future war genre was part of the science fiction genre by the Cold War period. For example, Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* is about the occupation of America by German and Japanese forces.<sup>157</sup>

An indication of how widespread and influential these narratives were in the United States is that an avid reader of future war literature was President Harry S. Truman. Sometimes it may appear that future war literature belongs singularly to the colonial period of the nineteenth century. In this instance, however, periodization is not helpful. Many people who were economic, military, and government leaders (like Truman) during WWII and the start of the Cold War, including Harry Truman, consumed and participated in discourses that were congruent or the same as the discourses from the peak time of when European and North American nations were colonizing racialized people. In a 1913 letter to Bess Wallace, Truman

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<sup>155</sup> Edward James, "The Race Question in American Science Fiction," in *Science Fiction, Social Conflict and War* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), 28.

<sup>156</sup> Edward James, "The Race Question", 29.

<sup>157</sup> The legacy of *Castle* persists into the twenty-first century with the Amazon Prime 2015 television special that was on the air for four seasons over four years. The popularity and acclaim of *Castle* shows the prominence that future war narratives still have in the present day. *The Man In the High Castle*, created by Frank Spotnitz, originally released 15 January 2015, Amazon Prime, television.

wrote that he would have to renew his subscription to *McClure's* magazine, which frequently published future war and yellow peril literature like the other publications Truman read, such as *Saturday Evening Post* and *American Magazine*.<sup>158</sup> The theme of disaster as caused by nuclear war, invasion, and communism can be seen in Truman's frantic reaction that he expressed upon learning that Russia acquired nuclear technology in 1949, "Are you sure? Are you sure? This means we have no time left."<sup>159</sup> Seemingly Truman believed that the only thing holding together the world was the United States' military superiority. If that supremacy was every lost, then it would be the end of America. Truman's apocalyptic understanding of world politics is best demonstrated by the poem President Truman carried in his wallet since 1910, Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Locksley Hall". Truman recited some verse from the poem while traveling to the Potsdam conference in July of 1945.<sup>160</sup>

For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,  
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;

Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,  
Pilots of the purple twilight dropping down with costly bales;

Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain'd a ghastly dew  
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue;

Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind rushing warm,  
With the standards of the peoples plunging thro' the thunder-storm;

Till the war-drum throb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were furl'd  
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.

There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe,  
And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law.<sup>161</sup>

Tennyson was British and published this poem in 1842 about the peace and prosperity Tennyson believed the world would experience after the British had finished conquering the

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<sup>158</sup> Bruce Franklin, *War*, 53.

<sup>159</sup> Robert Torry, "Apocalypse Then: Benefits of the Bomb in Fifties Science Fiction Films," *Cinema Journal* 31, no. 1 (1991), 10.

<sup>160</sup> Bruce Franklin, *War Stars*, 153

<sup>161</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Locksley Hall," Poetry Foundation, Accessed April 19, 2021, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45362/locksley-hall>

world. Therefore, the quote is not directly about an American prophecy. It does, however, indicate how the attitudes of the colonial world persisted into the middle of the twentieth century. Specifically, ideas of empire and conquest were still on the minds of European and American leaders. Quotes from the poem like rains of “ghastly dew”, “the war drum throbbed no more”, and “lapt in universal law” seem to suggest that peace is acquired by a victorious military action. These lines of verse in the context of Truman’s close personal possession indicate that Truman held the idea that peace can be achieved by violent means. Moreover, the poem in Truman’s wallet illuminates the fantastic quality that discourses of American imperialism and militarism took on during the Truman administration at the start of the Cold War. Such a poem illuminates the unique power that fantastical language --the kind that often emerges in science fiction-- has on people regardless of their position in society.<sup>162</sup>

Culture that zealously defended the righteousness of U.S. imperialism, prophesied the apocalyptic disasters of future wars, and provoked fears of Asian nations and people was at the center of mechanistic anticommunism discourse. In this habitat, American science fiction literature was the most suitable and permissive cultural space for extreme ideas about American militarism to be cultivated and reach large audiences. This has been a lengthy introduction to the most important work of Robert Heinlein’s collection to this thesis. It is necessary to understand the history of the genre to which *Starship Troopers* belonged, for it then makes the themes of the work even more important to understanding the American Vietnam War era imagination as the novel resonates with the works that came before it. Consequently, *Starship Troopers* is perhaps the best novel in which to examine the discourses of mechanistic anticommunism and technowar, and I will discuss it in the next chapter.

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<sup>162</sup> Truman and Robert Heinlein are also linked by the Pendergast political machine, which put Harry Truman in the Senate and Heinlein in the naval academy at Annapolis. This demonstrates that American leaders and science fiction writers often come from the same background, so it makes sense that they shared the same political opinions. Jeff Riggenbach, “Was Robert Heinlen a Libertarian?” last modified on 06/02/2010, <https://mises.org/library/was-robert-heinlein-libertarian>

## Chapter Five: *Starship Troopers* By Robert Heinlein

*Starship Troopers* and Robert Heinlein's identity as an author exemplifies the American discourses of mechanistic anticommunism and technowar. *Starship Troopers* participates and renews the American cultural tendencies to glorify the capabilities of weapons and military technology to solve social problems that American leaders perceived inside and outside the United States. In the case of America's war in Vietnam, discourses of mechanistic anticommunism and technowar led the United States to pursue a bloody and expensive conflict that resulted in the destruction of thousands of Vietnamese lives, the Vietnamese environment, and the Vietnamese nation's production capabilities to support itself. As shown earlier chapter, by 1959 the U.S. was ramping up its involvement in Vietnam, sending military and economic aid to the puppet government in the South. In 1967, Heinlein was an adamant supporter of the war in Vietnam, touting "America first" and "the U.S. must win."<sup>163</sup> In 1968, Heinlein signed his name in the support side of the Vietnam War.<sup>164</sup> Even so, it would have been easy to guess that Heinlein supported the war, for the ideology of *Starship Troopers* is analogous to the United States' discourse of mechanistic anticommunism and its ideology of nation building.

Heinlein's best-selling and most controversial work, *Starship Troopers* was originally published in 1959. The novel is about the conflict between human civilization and an insect civilization as told by the soldier Juan "Johnny" Rico. The novel is primarily a device for Heinlein to muse about the responsibilities that citizens have to their state. Overall, the novel is Rico's telling of the importance of the military to the survival of the human race.<sup>165</sup> The military of *Troopers* is under the control of the Terran Federation, the government that represents all the humans of Earth and the space colonies. Although the book frames the world as a unified civilization, it gives the impression that the state is in essence a neo-American empire. In effect, the novel is Heinlein's argument for the benefits and necessity of militarism in the United States. Incorporating themes of social Darwinism, the centrality of the citizen, and the necessity and inevitability of war into his work, Heinlein glorifies technological

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<sup>163</sup> Bruce Franklin, *Vietnam & Other American Fantasies*, 154

<sup>164</sup> Kate Wilhelm and Judith Merril, "Paid Advertisement," 4-5.

warfare and the military to the extent that *Troopers* exemplifies the discourses of mechanistic anticommunism and technowar of the Vietnam war period.

Except for the first chapter, the narrative of *Troopers* is chronological, progressing through the end of Rico's high school education, his decision to join the armed forces, his training for the M.I., and his education and combat experience as a commanding officer in the Mobile Infantry. Therefore, the reader is immersed in the indoctrination of a young person to the military.<sup>166</sup> The central message of the indoctrination pressed upon Terrans is that state-controlled violence is the answer to all problems. This message comes in the second chapter of the book from the schoolteacher and veteran Mr. Dubois, who teaches the mandatory course History and Moral Philosophy saying, "violence, naked force, has settled more issues in history than has any other factor, and the contrary opinion is wishful thinking at its worst."<sup>167</sup> Violence is the answer to all the problems of the Terran Federation. All citizens of the Federation know and believe violence to be the solution to all problems. The most significant problem that the Federation faces is the insubordination of the insect civilization the Arachnids, a society described as communist.

Citizens, distinct from civilians, are the only people eligible for government work on the account of their military service. Citizenship has special significance in *Troopers*. To become a citizen, however, gaining citizenship is a near-metaphysical transformation similar to that of becoming a Christian. The indoctrination of Rico reveals an ideology of imperialistic Christianity like that which fueled the Crusades. This ideology belongs to the Terrans but also seemingly to America, for so much of *Troopers* hints that the Terrans are Americans. To the Terran, war is divine providence. Resigning oneself to war is righteous and the only real choice that young people have. To fully believe that this is true is an act of faith. This can be seen in two quotes from Mr. Dubois. Shortly before Rico gave the definition of a citizen, Mr. Dubois complained that he could lead students to knowledge, but he could not make them think. He said he was a failure because a girl on the last day of class reiterated her mother's lesson that

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<sup>166</sup> In the Terran Federation, men and women serve in the military.

<sup>167</sup> Robert Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, (New York, NY: Berkley Medallion Books, 1959), 24.

‘violence is never the answer’ even though the purpose of his class is to teach young people the righteousness of war.<sup>168</sup> It is the choice of the individual to recognize the universal truth that war is necessary. As aforementioned, the only freedom one has is to choose to join the military. The Terran ideology of war resembles Christianity with its focus on acts of faith. According to Rico, who can quote directly from the History and Moral Philosophy textbook (i.e the war Bible of the Federation), a citizen ”accepts personal responsibility for the safety of the body politic of which he is a member, defending it, if need be, with his life. The civilian does not.”<sup>169</sup> The greatest virtue that a citizen has is the willingness to fight and possibly die for their country. Rico knows this, but Mr. Dubois asks, ”Do you believe it?”<sup>170</sup> Not yet, but by the end of the novel Rico starts believing, becoming an ideologue as dogmatic as Mr. Dubois. Because citizens of Terran consider themselves virtuous for participating in warfare, their culture resembles the discourse of mechanistic anticommunism. The opponents of the Terran Federation and capitalism- the bugs- are in essence bad and dangerous to humanity.

The novel begins in a combat situation that Heinlein uses to show off the main draw of the work, the profile of the mobile infantry soldier. In the first scene, Heinlein shows off the futuristic powers of his imagined soldier of the future. The Mobile Infantry soldier embodies the ideal super soldier. Encased in a special nuclear-powered exoskeleton suit of armor, the M.I soldier is a specialized commando that has extreme speed and jumping ability, nearly impregnable defense, and destructive, often nuclear weaponry. The M.I soldier is also equipped with advanced communications technology that links all the members of a fighting unit to a centralized command structure. Heinlein speaks highly of the M.I soldier. Like Rico says about himself, the reader, too, is meant to fall “in love with powered armor” Heinlein suggests.<sup>171</sup> The superhero-like abilities of the M.I soldier mirrors the tenet of American Vietnam-war-era militarism that believed the U.S. soldiers could deliver unlimited destruction.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, 24.

<sup>169</sup> Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, 24.

<sup>170</sup> Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, 24.

<sup>171</sup> Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, 84.

<sup>172</sup> The soldiers of *Troopers* can still be killed, however. It was an element of the story that was essential to make the bugs a dangerous and worthy foe.

There are seemingly no problems that the M.I soldier cannot solve. Although Heinlein is clearly a fan of superweapons as demonstrated by the shock-and-awe rhetoric he employs to describes weapons, the super-soldier receives special attention from Heinlein in *Troopers*. Early in the novel, Heinlein differentiates between the superweapon and the super-soldier, and explains the importance of an elite army. “There are a dozen different ways of delivering destruction in impersonal wholesale, via ships and missiles... [but what the M.I does] is entirely different. We make it as personal as a punch in the nose... We can be selective, applying precisely the required amount of pressure at the specified point at a designated time—we’ve never been told to go down and kill or capture all left-handed redheads in a particular area, but if they tell us to, we can. We will.”<sup>173</sup> In this quote, Heinlein describes how the super-soldier is a perfect weapon for waging wars of counterinsurgency. *Troopers* serves as propaganda for U.S. technowar in Vietnam, for Heinlein makes the M.I, who resemble the U.S. Marines, appear to be able to have the competence to wage a counterinsurgency war. In the actual war in Vietnam, however, U.S. violence was not able to discriminate between innocent people and insurgents.<sup>174</sup> Part of the mythology Heinlein crafts about the M.I is that they are all experts in math in addition to their military skill. This builds into the idea that the veteran-only government of the Terran federation. Seemingly the government is also a government of mathematicians. Far from the truth of the matter, Heinlein suggests that the mathematician geniuses form the ranks of the American military and the government.

Although the society of *Troopers* that Heinlein created appears to be a racially harmonious civilization, for there is no mention of racial conflict and the protagonist is a racialized man who never mentions any experience of racism. In fact, the singular incidence of prejudice that Rico experiences is only the jealousy of merchant marines (who do not become citizens). *Troopers* participates in a general trend of American science fiction considering itself to have successfully solved racial conflict in society. The absence of any overt discussion of race, however, does not mean that a novel does not participate in metanarratives about race or colonization. Edward James provides several examples of American science fiction literature

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<sup>173</sup> Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, 80.

<sup>174</sup> Gabriel Kolko, “The Nature of the Vietnam War” *Australian Left Review* (June-July, 1970), 13.

handling the question of race as a matter already resolved: the only earthling of Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* is dark skinned and flat nosed, in William Hjortsberg's *Grey Matters* the main character uploads his consciousness to a Black body for its perfection, and lastly, the authors of a general book about sci-fi, Robert Scholes and Eric Rabkin praise the "science fiction writer, collectively, on having moved well in advance of public opinion on race."<sup>175</sup> Despite such post-racial narration, American sci-fi, like American culture at large, had not solved racial tensions in the United States in the Vietnam War era.

Some authors considered American sci-fi to have moved past issues of race because many authors, Heinlein included, had confronted prejudice in their work to varying degrees of success. Cultural historian Fred Erisman examined four of Heinlein's works, *The Star Beast* (1948), *Tunnel in the Sky* (1955), *Time for the Stars* (1956), and *Double Star* (1956), which all discussed civil rights issues of their time.<sup>176</sup> For *Star Beast*, the message of the work is against prejudice and that to have prejudice against others is natural but illogical and harmful to society. The main character in *Tunnel in the Sky* is a Black woman and the captain of the armed forces of the Amazons. The main character for *Time for the Stars* 'Uncle' Alfred McNeil, "on the other hand, is, outwardly, Uncle Tom reborn," according to James. The message of *Double Star* is that one has the ability to overcome prejudice and should tolerate other people, realizing tolerance is what makes America a strong nation.

Heinlein's racial tolerance, however, expires when Heinlein confront Communism inside and outside the the boundaries of the United States. In one of his earliest novels, *The Day after Tomorrow*, Heinlein depicts Asians in a racist way, writing that they "speak in a meaningless sing-song." In the novel, the character Ardmore reflects on "this crazy new world—a world in which the superiority of western culture was not a casually accepted 'of course'".<sup>177</sup> During the Vietnam era, language of the communist foreign other often merged with the literary and fantastical antagonists of American science fiction. *Troopers*, although it is based

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<sup>175</sup> Edward James "The Race Question" 28.

<sup>176</sup> Fred Erisman, "Robert Heinlein's case for racial tolerance, 1954-1956," *Extrapolation*, 29, 1988: 216-26.

<sup>177</sup> Edward James "The Race Question", 30.

on the premise of a post-race society, exemplifies the trend of American sci-fi literature metaphorically connecting the communist foreign other to an often disgusting, other-worldly, and dangerous antagonist.<sup>178</sup> In some cases, American science fiction literature was a parable for how the American public should conceive of the threat that the enemies of mechanistic anticommunism posed to America. In general, many of the fantastical creatures of sci-fi are stand-ins for the foreign other, or marginalized people, of real society. Giant bugs, cyborgs, robots, and aliens often became the people American society deemed as other, such as racialized people in America, women in America and abroad, and colonized people, who were often considered residents of the Third World, a term that sounds like it was borrowed from science fiction.<sup>179</sup>

Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* is certainly no exception from this trend, and the narrative of *Troopers* can be easily grafted into the metaphorical space of mechanistic anticommunism that saturated American culture during the Vietnam War period. The discourse in *Troopers* about the conflict between the neo-American empire and the Bug civilization mirrors the discourse of mechanistic anticommunism pertaining to third-world nationalism. Similar in the way proponents of mechanistic anticommunism suppose that capitalism is as much a part of nature as Newton's laws of physics, *Troopers* suggests that war is part of the natural order of the universe. Seemingly *Troopers* establishes the metaphors that the Terran Federation is the United States and the Bug civilization comprises colonies revolting against their colonial oppressors, those the Americans called communists. These metaphors are made more obvious when Rico was considering the number of Bugs that the Terran Federation would have to kill to defeat them, "We were learning, expensively, just how efficient a total communism can be when used by a people actually adapted to it by evolution."<sup>180</sup> In this quote, Heinlein states obviously that the Bug civilization of *Troopers* is analogous to

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<sup>178</sup> Edward James "The Race Question", 28 and 29.

<sup>179</sup> For a discussion about women and gender in science fiction, see Jacqueline Pearson, "Where no man has gone before: sexual politics and women's science fiction" in *Science Fiction, Social Conflict, and War* ed. Philip John Davies, 8-25 (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990).

<sup>180</sup> Robert Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, 121.

communism. The quote may even imply that communists will evolve into bugs. Additionally, the quote indicates that *Troopers* self identifies as an anticommunist work.

In the same chapter located midway through the book, during his training as an officer, Rico, possibly speaking for Heinlein again, ponders the moral justification for the war between the humans and the bugs, ultimately refuting peace as a possible course of action, employing the same style of social Darwinist thinking first referenced in the previous quotation:

[I]et's assume that the human race manages to balance birth and death [by means of planned parenthood], just right to fit its own planets, and thereby becomes peaceful. What next? Soon (about next Wednesday) the Bugs move in, kill off this breed which "ain'ta gonna study war no more" and the universe forgets us. Which still may happen. Either we spread and wipe out the Bugs, or they spread and wipe us out—because both races are tough and smart and want the same real estate.<sup>181</sup>

*Troopers*, mirroring the discourse of mechanistic anticommunism, describes the conflict between the Bugs and the Terran federation as part of how Rico understands the life-or-death competition for survival in which only the fittest survive. Evolution, for Rico, is like a computer simulation in which competing forces are pitted against each other and only the

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<sup>181</sup> Robert Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, 147. The quote "ain'ta gonna study war no more" is a line Heinlein repeated from page 81: "Maybe someday we'll have that thing we sing about, when 'we ain't a-gonna study war no more'. Maybe. Maybe the same day the leopard will take off his spots and get a job as a Jersey cow, too." The quote seems to allude to "Ain't Gunna Study War No More", a song on Nat King Cole's album "Everytime I feel the Spirit", which was published by Capitol Records several months before *Starship Troopers* was published in November 1959. Heinlein appears to allude to Nat King Cole to suggest that Cole contributed to the juvenile delinquency and crime problem described in *Starship Troopers*. Because Heinlein's solution to crime and disobedience proposed in *Starship Troopers* is the application of social Darwinist principles and brutal violence as symbolized by the whip, Heinlein seems to argue that America must re-learn how to discipline citizens to defend itself against communism, forcibly correcting the people represented by "ain'ta gonna study war no more". For information about racial segregation and anti-communism, see George Lewis, *The White South and the Red Menace: Segregationists, Anticommunism, and Massive Resistance 1945-1965* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004). For information about Nat King Cole and how white violence targeted him, see Brian Ward, "Civil Rights and Rock and Roll: Revisiting the Nat King Cole Attack of 1956" *OAH Magazine of History* 24, No. 2, Popular Culture (April 2010): 21-24.

statistics of the species' military capabilities (their adaptations) determine the outcome of the conflict. Because humans are subject to the principles of evolution, civilizations are always in competition with one another. The boundaries of a single civilization, species, or race are always expanding because of "population pressure."<sup>182</sup> According to Rico, all wars are a result of the relationship two groups have with one another due to the material circumstances of evolution and the scarcity of resources. Since boundaries are the markings between two different entities, which must expand, conflict is inevitable according to *Troopers*. Heinlein's Malthusian appeal to nature is a logical fallacy, for war and nature are subjectively understood concepts, and to say that because something is "natural" it must be good is not a valid justification. Moreover, war is the application of violence to serve political motivations, or as Carl von Clausewitz once defined it, "war is the continuation of politics by other means."<sup>183</sup>

Neither war nor Heinlein's conception of evolution are as foundational to the laws of the universe as *Troopers* indicates. War, Mosely argues, is not determined by the natural, material world. Instead, it is the product of human choice.<sup>184</sup> The fallacy of the natural necessity of war in *Starship Trooper* is equally far from the truth as the formulation in mechanistic anticommunism that capitalism is part of nature, not a social construction. As mentioned in the first chapter, the permanent wartime economy of the United States merged with the ideology of anticommunism. Capitalism, or at least the tenet of private property, is also central to Rico's understanding of war, for he argues that "real estate" is scarce and can eventually supply only a single civilization. Therefore, the justification for the annihilation of the Bug civilization is parallel to the justification that the theory of mechanistic anticommunism gives for war—to secure resources and guarantee survival for the people of a single nation or civilization.

The discussion of the evolutionary fates of humankind and the Bugs arises because Rico is given the homework assignment of proving that "war and moral perfection come from

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<sup>182</sup> Robert Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, 146.

<sup>183</sup> Alexander Mosley, *A Philosophy of War*, (New York, NY: Algora Publishing, 2002), 13.

<sup>184</sup> Alexander Mosley, *A Philosophy of War*, 39.

the same genetic inheritance.”<sup>185</sup> *Troopers* seems to indicate war is morally justified as long as it achieves the continuance of the victor’s genetic heritage. The mention of genetic inheritance in this quotation brings race into discussion in an otherwise “colorblind” story. In *Troopers*, the overarching theme regarding race is punishment. The punishment of political dissent at home and abroad is delivered by means of physical force in *Troopers*. The most cogent articulation of war being a form of punishment happens again in the classroom of bootcamp when a cadet asks why scientists do not push a button to eradicate the Bug civilization using nuclear weapons.<sup>186</sup> Sergeant Zim answers the question with a rhetorical question, “if you wanted to teach a baby a lesson, would you cut its head off?... Of course not. You’d paddle it. There can be circumstances when it’s just as foolish to hit an enemy city with an H-bomb as it would be to spank a baby with an ax; war is controlled violence...the purpose of war is to support your government’s decisions by force... the purpose [of war is]... to make him do what you want him to do.”<sup>187</sup> This quote is a clear summary of racial paternalism or something like the white man’s burden theory, which is the idea that racialized civilizations do not have the capability to self-govern, and therefore white nations must rule over colonies in a form of benevolence.<sup>188</sup> Nuclear bombs are not used because there would be no one left to have learned the lesson. In the narrative of *Troopers*, the war between the Terran federation and the bug civilization is justified on the rationale that the bug civilization needs to be disciplined into subordination. In fact, Rico calls attacks on the Bug home world “punishments”.<sup>189</sup> If the bugs do not comply in due time, eradication is always still an option, and Rico suspects it might be the only option considering the bio-political order of the Bug civilization.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Robert Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, 145.

<sup>186</sup> Many of Heinlein’s works take the form of a coming-of-age story. Rico at the start of the novel is an innocent youth, who is unsure about war and civic responsibility, but as he becomes exposed to the Terran propaganda, so, too, does the reader.

<sup>187</sup> Robert Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, 52.

<sup>188</sup> Oxford English Language Online Dictionary. “white man’s burden”. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/228621?redirectedFrom=white+man%27s+burden#eid309491374>. See, Stuart Creighton Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation: The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1984).

<sup>189</sup> Robert Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, 107.

<sup>190</sup> Robert Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, 108.

The bug civilization is divided into three types classes: warrior bugs, worker bugs, and brain bugs. In *Troopers*, the Terran strategy is to eliminate all the warrior bugs and reach deep enough into the ground to access the brain bugs who control the ‘communist’ hive-mind of the Bug civilization. The workers do not harm the M.I soldiers but the warriors are dangerous. The Terran Federation is organized upon similar grounds. There are three types of people in the Terran Federation: civilians, soldiers, and military-government leaders. It is ironic that the pro-America, pro-free world Robert Heinlein thinks that a hierarchal form of neo-feudalism is the natural state of humanity. As Heinlein writes in *Glory Road*, “Democracy can’t work. Mathematicians, peasants, and animals, that’s all there is—so democracy, a theory based on the assumption that mathematicians and peasants are equal, can never work”.<sup>191</sup> In this anti-democratic assertion Heinlein replaces warriors with animals because he was talking about a foreign civilization. Those who use violence in one’s own camp are glorious warriors while those who use violence in another are animals worthy of extermination. War, in the discourse of mechanistic anticommunism, is the conflict between two nations organized for the production of war. Supposedly the nation with the greatest capacity to produce war will win, which is why American leaders thought defeat in Vietnam was impossible. Heinlein’s tripartite organization of society is also how American technocrats viewed the United States and Vietnam. The ambassador to the Diem regime, Henry Cabot Lodge, exemplified the technocratic understanding of politics, when he wrote to Kennedy that they needed to win the support of the Vietnamese landing owning class, who were in charge of society, “the educated class in and out of government service.”<sup>192</sup> The belief that politics was a top-down hierarchy was at the core of America’s foreign policy approach to the Vietnam war. At the top, there were the elite who had to be convinced to support America. The rest of the population fell into two groups. There were working class people who did not oppose the South Vietnamese government. Finally, there were insurgent members of the Vietnamese populations and members of the NLF who had to be eliminated. The American technocratic formulation of any given society was also shared by Robert Heinlein. The society *Starship Troopers* is organized with the same principle. There are workers who do not fight, warriors who must be killed, and brain bugs who have to be indoctrinated. Therefore, the technocracies of Washington and the

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<sup>191</sup> Bruce Franklin, *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies*, 155.

<sup>192</sup> Bruce Franklin, *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies*, 156.

Terran Federation imagined politics similarly. *Starship Troopers* seems to indicate that science fiction as a dominant field of popular culture during the Vietnam War period had the serious potential to serve as propaganda for the United States and its aggressive foreign policy.

As I mentioned before, there is also the chance that communism or any form of insubordination might appear within the internal boundaries of the state, whether it be the United States or the Terran Federation. To the discourse of mechanistic anticommunism, internal insubordination cannot be allowed to exist because it limits the industrial capacity of the state to produce warfare.<sup>193</sup> Not only that, but internal opposition delegitimizes the entire hierarchy of capitalism. Technocrats, solving problems within the framework of mechanistic anticommunism, always employ violence. In *Troopers*, the suppression of internal insubordination is always conducted by means of administrative punishment. During training, Rico accidentally puts the life of another soldier in danger, so the military punishes him with ten lashes. The significance is that violence is completely owned by the state. The individual does not have the right to act violently for any reason. The theme of a state-monopoly on violence happens again when a soldier punches an officer after the officer hit him for not following an order. The soldier was publicly flogged for his insubordination.

The most transparent example of state-sanctioned violence committed on a human was the execution of N.L Dillinger, a deserter who “killed a baby girl”.<sup>194</sup> Rico describes what it felt like to have this happen in his regiment: “Our regiment had been dishonored; we had to clean it”.<sup>195</sup> This quote illuminates that Heinlein saw violence as a cleansing or redeeming process for individuals and whole groups of people to perform. Rico, although approving of the violence, could not grasp the logical justification for the state’s killing of a man, so he recalls a lesson from Mr. Dubois. To discuss juvenile delinquency and crime, Mr. Dubois uses the metaphor of physically disciplining a disobedient dog. But before Mr. Dubois teaches the class how law and order were established on Earth, he explains what life was like before corporal

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<sup>193</sup> Although I am still using Gibson’s concept of mechanistic anticommunism, I should note that his book focuses on the Vietnam war and does not analyze the U.S. home front during the Vietnam War using the framework of mechanistic anticommunism.

<sup>194</sup> Robert Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, 88.

<sup>195</sup> Robert Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, 90.

punishment. In North America during the “XXth century... murder, drug addiction, larceny, assault, and vandalism were commonplace... Law abiding people... hardly dared go into a public park at night. To do so was to risk attack by wolf packs of children, armed with chains, knives, homemade guns, bludgeons...” Mr. Dubois claims that America during the twentieth century never disciplined juvenile delinquents and then waited to imprison or execute criminals once they reached adulthood. Suggesting that young law-breakers should be punished like dogs, Mr. Dubois defends his position saying that there is no such thing as “cruel and unusual punishment” if it is done in the criminal and society's best interest. To Dubois, the “puppy” or the juvenile criminals were never disciplined because twentieth century America talked endlessly about their “rights”. If it could not be more obvious, Heinlein is talking about urban racialized and working-class people in America, but Heinlein would probably identify them as communists. More specifically, given that Heinlein focuses so much on the moral power of the whip, it seems that Heinlein in this chapter of *Troopers* is defending a predilection for Jim Crow laws and cultural practices in America, for the whip is a standard symbol of racial oppression in the United States.

To Mr. Dubois, it is “mathematically demonstrable” that the American government could have used state violence as a form of man-made “evolution” to guide the ‘criminal’ population into becoming moral and law-abiding citizens.<sup>196</sup> The Terran Federation is supposedly a utopia because it has used violence to evolve its national character into a state of near moral perfection. America’s permissiveness of the crime, according to the Terran histories that Heinlein invented, directly preceded the “Russo-Anglo-American Alliance and the Chinese Hegemony.”<sup>197</sup> In this quote, Heinlein connects the many layers of his story. As I have indicated, *Starship Troopers* is actually a defense of American mechanistic anticommunism in the disguise of science fiction literature. Therefore, Heinlein directly says the world of *Troopers* is exactly like the twentieth century. Therefore, *Troopers* is Heinlein’s warning to America of what will happen if it does not militarize and crack down on internal “lawlessness”. The history that *Starship Troopers* expanded upon is that America lost the Cold War because it did not have a morally homogenous national identity: this is the disaster Heinlein fears.

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<sup>196</sup> Robert Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, 95.

<sup>197</sup> Robert Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*, 91.

Eventually, China dominated the Earth. It is not explained how America revived itself, but it is probably by means of moral evolution that American values eventually dominated Earth again. *Troopers* is in essence the Cold War being played out several hundred years in the future. The humans have become super humans because capitalism has guided them through evolution to perfection. The communists, on the other hand, have evolved into giant bugs. According to Heinlein, the same problem- people who do not fight in war and people who do not give their lives for the production of war— threaten "the human race" of *Troopers* and America in the twentieth century.<sup>198</sup>

Because *Troopers* warns of the impending disaster from internal and external communism, the novel can be seen as an example of the discourse of mechanistic anticommunism in American science fiction literature. Moreover, because *Troopers* was written right before the Vietnam War conflict started rapidly escalating, it can be seen as an example of yellow peril literature, for Heinlein's work sets up a metaphorical struggle between the United States (Terran Federation) and the Russo-Asian threat (the Bug civilization). The narrative of *Starship Troopers* was dangerous for the world because it advised Americans to support excessively violent and imperialistic wars such as the Vietnam War. According to the logic of mechanistic anticommunist works like *Starship Troopers*, the very fate of humanity rests on the ability of superweapons and super-soldiers to eradicate the anti-natural foreign other. Additionally, the novel has the potential to manufacture consent for Americans to support the carceral and surveillance state's crackdown on racialized and working class people living inside America. In 'yellow peril' literature and American mechanistic anticommunism science-fiction literature, history of colonialism and capitalist white supremacy is completely pushed out of view in the name of "western progress". *Troopers* as a piece of propaganda for the U.S. empire, served to condition Americans to think using only binary metaphors of nature vs the unnatural, survival vs extinction, and civilization vs chaos. Additionally, literatures like *Troopers* provides understanding for the historian today as to what the significance was when revolutionary leaders around the world such as Ho Chi Minh were assigned the prefix

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<sup>198</sup> I think it should be noted that every time Mr. Dubois gives a lesson from the heart it is after unnamed women fail to justify the goodness of violence. In every scene, too, Rico redeems the class having memorized the correct answer.

‘communist’. It is probably likely that for the Americans who read or watched science fiction, liberation movements all over the world looked like evil aliens, rogue robots, or revolting bugs. In this way, American science fiction literature had the capacity to serve as propaganda for the United States.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> *Starship Troopers* has been listed on the suggested reading for new recruits and officers in the U.S. Marine Corps. Robert Neller, “Research Guides: CMC Professional Reading Program 2020: Archives,” CMC Professional Reading Program 2020: Archives (Lejeune Leadership Institute at Marine Corps, 2017), <https://grc-usmcu.libguides.com/usmc-reading-list-2020/archives>.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

This thesis examined American science fiction literature during the Vietnam War. My analysis of the literature is that it either served as propaganda for the U.S. or it criticized the U.S. Linking the criticism and the support of the U.S. war machine were the discourses of mechanistic anticommunism and technowar. The discourse of mechanistic anticommunism is a collection of ideas and ideological opinions that the world is split between the capitalist world order and the communist threat. Under mechanistic anticommunism, capitalism is the natural order of the world as determined by scientific principles like evolution. On the other hand, communism is a threat to the prosperity and freedom that capitalism promises. Therefore, to protect capitalism and the “free world”, the most specialized experts equipped with the most advanced technologies and weapons must violently eliminate all communist threats. The process by which communism would have been eradicated is technowar. During the Cold War, the war managers, who oversaw the crusade against communism, comprised the American technocracy. In fictional form, they were also central characters to American science fiction stories. The sci-fi, according to my findings, either served as propaganda for the U.S. or it was criticism against the U.S. and its technocracy. In general, authors were technocrats who believed in America’s ability to nation build a capitalist state in Vietnam, or they were counter-cultural writers who believed that the U.S. foreign policy was marked by the incompetence of the American military and government and the atrocities they committed against innocent people in Vietnam.

The implications of this thesis are seemingly unending in my imagination given the continued reality of American imperialism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While American bombs have continued to fall on the rooftops of colonized people, Americans at home have been entertained by space adventures and stories of cosmic redemption like Star Wars and Star Trek. In the twenty-first century, Americans are continually subjected to fantasies of the superweapon and the super-soldier to fix the world’s problems. Meanwhile, the violence continues overseas and within U.S. borders. America has militarized itself even more than when American new waves authors satirized the United States or predicted apocalypse to befall its people any day, but there is seemingly a general acceptance of bloodshed in most of American discourses. American society nearly tore itself apart when it confronted itself in the

60s and 70s, but this study of American science fiction and the Vietnam War raises concern about what will happen if America does not take the revolution further than those who came before.

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