# AN ANALYSIS OF THE DEPICTION OF THE KOREAN PEOPLE IN AMERICAN POPULAR MEDIA DURING THE 1950s

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On June 25, 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea sending the United States back to war just five years after the end of WWII. The Korean peninsula would, for the next three years, be the battleground between the expansion of Soviet and Chinese communism, and Western Democracy. Combined United Nations (U.N.) troops fought combined Chinese and North Korean troops primarily for control of the peninsula, with secondary implications about the future of each side's ideology around the world. This was the United Nations' first military intervention since its creation in 1946 and was, for many Americans, their first glimpse ever into Korea and of the Korean people. These were a people who up until the 1945 surrender of Japan had been one, and were now separated to be on rival sides of the largest geo-political struggle of the day. That separation meant that the Korean people, after 1945, were simultaneously an important ally and enemy. This duality created a problem in how to portray the Korean people when giving the American public their first looks into the peninsula in news or popular media. The prevailing answer to that question, at least in the 1950's turned out to be simply: don't. During the Korean War, and in the following decade, American media was unsure how to place the Korean people in the already formed mold of East Asia, how to place the Korean people against their Chinese allies and Americans' Japanese. Additionally, fears about WWIII, Soviet intervention in other nations, and communists at home meant Americans were generally more afraid of the Soviet Union than they were North Koreans. Therefore, the easiest way to depict the Korean War was without the Korean people, and when the Korean people were included, they rarely had any sort of agency or cultural nuance in their participation in their own war.

By 1950 Americans had a conscious grasp on how to feel about Korea's neighbors, but took years to unpack the Korean people themselves. The American public saw the war in Asia as

a holistic conflict, where communist China, American-allied Japan, and Korea in bewteen were all wrapped up in the same fight. The Chinese who supported North Korea after the peninsula's separation were clearly, in the eyes of 1950's America, the enemy. They were totally communist and red in every sense of the word, which was easy to understand. Conversely, by 1950 Japan was squarely on the American side of things. MacArthur's occupation had opened enough of a cultural dialogue for the American collective conscious to decide that they actually liked the Japanese. Both of these clear-cut interpretations were adopted by American media producers in a way that, for the most part, was never available when considering how to depict the Korean people. Whether in official government or military publications, the news, or popular culture, every depiction of the Korean people during and directly following the war was unique in the level of agency and screen presence afforded. Perhaps the most common trait shared between these three most common forms of war media was that they preferred to not show Koreans all together.

The original impetus of this research was to explore that previously mentioned duality, to discover how American media handled the Korean people being both America's enemy and America's ally. The original approach to that question was through political cartoons, expecting to find updated but equally racist depictions of Kim Il Sung matching past portralys of Hideki Tojo and at best flattering caricatures of Syngman Rhee or at least heroically posed South Korean soldiers shoulder-to-shoulder with their American counterparts. None of those depictions were discovered. In searching the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library, world renowned for its collection of over 16,000 cartoons, six were found on the Korean War. Of those six, exactly one has a Korean in any depiction and the character is acting subservient to a Soviet officer. Further

research revealed that a collection of six cartoons on the Korean War was very much the rule, not the exception, and that 17% (⅙) depicting a Korean at all is in fact the exception with how few cartoons actually depict any Koreans whatsoever. The Billy Ireland Cartoon Library's small selection is not a result of a poor collection, with over 16,000 items collected across hundreds of years and the world over, it is a result of poor publication. While this initial dive into political cartoons turned out to be a frustratingly typical case study, it conversely proved how valuable the depictions of Korean people in American media were when they actually appeared.

The existing literature on how Korean people were depicted in 1950's media, while sparse in and of itself, does recognize this general lack of representation. Nancy Bernhard in *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda, 1947-1960* (1999)[1] discusses the state of televised news during the Korean War, T.V.'s first time used in war coverage. Bernhard explores a co-government sponsored news program, intended to cover the Korean War, but turns out to cover the general Cold War or anti-communist related topics just as much as the war for which it was created.[2] Here, despite television's relatively nascent place in place in the American media consumption space, the Korean people have already been pushed out of their own war by the global ideological struggle which incited it. Bernhard continues by discussing a series of journalists dispatched to Europe with the sole purpose of distracting American audiences away from Korea.[3] Bernhard's research shows a concerted effort between the White House and television stations to keep eyes off of Korea, and focused on the greater Cold War. Bernhard continues to explore the importance of covering the Korean War, and that in 1952 it promptly

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[1] Nancy E. Bernhard, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda, 1947-1960*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999
[2] Bernhard, *U.S.,* 120
[3] Bernhard, *U.S.,* 123

took a back seat to election coverage.[4] Bernhard does not, however, explore the reasons behind this underrepresentation, so much as she does the relationship between the government and the news corporations covering the war.

This sentiment that the Korean people were seemingly irrelevant in their own war was reiterated by Susan A. Brewer in *Why America Fights: Patriotism and War Propaganda from the Philippines to Iraq.*[5] Here, Brewer explores the coverage of the Korean War in the news, as well as reiterates and twists some of the same thoughts on television that Bernhard presents. More than explaining how television programs directed the American public toward anti-communism and away from Korea, Brewer explores why the government might have selected alternative targets for the American thinkspace. Brewer brings up the dilemma of "The Good Asian vs. the Bad Asian,"[6] where to 1950's Americans, Asian people were either with us, or against us. During WWII, the Chinese were America's allies but had quickly been moved into the "Bad Asian" category by the rise of communism. Brewer furthers this by demonstrating the flip the Japanese endured as well, where, by 1950, they had become firmly an American ally. Brewer connects this with media depictions by quoting the Army handbook description of North Koreans as having an"oriental disregard for human life."[7] Brewer does not, however, fully commit to connecting the  that the difficulty in creating this image, while keeping the South Koreans perceived as an American ally could be best avoided by fostering general hate for communism, instead of direct antagonism for North Korea.

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[4] Bernhard, *U.S.,* 138
[5] Susan Brewer, *Why America Fights: Patriotism and War Propaganda from the Philippines to Iraq: Patriotism and War Propaganda from the Philippines to Iraq* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009)*,* 154
[6] Brewer, *Why,* 142
[7] U.S. Army General Staff, *Korea Handbook,* 1950 September, 95

This shift of focus, and its explanation, is further explored, by Steven Casey in *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953.*[8] Casey analyzed the official stances taken on Korea by government and military officials and compared them to realize that the Truman administration's biggest public relations goal was to keep the peace in the face of a new war. Truman himself was quoted on how to handle describing the Korean war saying "don't make it alarmist," though that the primary message should be to the Korean people "you are not alone."[9] Casey goes on to reference polls which show that ~40% of Americans "expected WWIII to begin within 10 years,"[10] in 1950.

Casey demonstrates how the American public had spent approximately half of the prior decade engaged in the largest war in history, living on rations and under a considerably larger draft, a time many Americans would have prefered to move on from. It can be assumed that the Truman administration knew full well that roughly 40% of its public was actively nervous about another World War, this time with nuclear weapons. Casey brings up that the Truman administration demanded that there would be a more open dialogue about the Korean war between the military and the Public,[11] while at the same time understanding that the public was afraid. The solution to this conundrum was to temper the actual war coverage with more ideological stories which while not as "alarmist," still served Truman's agenda. For Casey, the shift demonstrated by Bernhard and Brewer was to keep war off of the minds of the American people, and that the Korean people were not worth alarming the homefront.

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[8] Steven Casey *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953* (Oxford, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) Chpt 1, 3
[9] Ibid.
[10] Casey, *Selling*, Chpt 1, 19
[11] Casey, *Selling,* Chpt 2, 19

While Bernhard and Brewer do an excellent job of presenting examples of when the Korean War was excluded, Casey is also the only author to actually discuss how the Korean people were depicted. Casey presents plentiful research, all of which confirms that the majority of the U.S. government approached the Korean people in an absolutely paternalist way.[12] Bernhard and Brewer authors use early news T.V. programs as examples and it is easy to assume that whenever these shows, *Battle Report - Washington,* or *The Facts We Face* covered the Korean War, and especially its refugees, it took a similar tone. The tone taken was, however, never discussed. In that absence lies the same issue found in researching political cartoons, for many researchers, even today, the Korean people seem to be irrelevant in the depiction of their war.

Going beyond literature which falls into the same trap of non-representation, the Truman administration's view on the Korean people during the Korean war can be used as a measuring stick to compare other forms of media. Analyzing first the official stance on the Korean people provides context for the nation which was consuming. While a detailed look at the American public's views on the Truman administration is beyond the scope of this current research, in the summer of 1950, following the official begin of the Korean War, Truman's approval rating saw a small raise before a steady drop through 1952.[13] There are numerous reasons for President Truman's sinking approval rating, but through this low approval it can be inferred that the President's view on the Korean people may have not held much sway in hearts and minds. It is therefore important not to disregard the official stance, but to understand when analyzing popular

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[12] Casey, *Selling*, Chpt 1, 7

[13] "Presidential Job Approval," *The American Presidency Project,* U.C. Santa Barbara, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/presidential-job-approval

media that the American people may have been taking these depictions of the Korean people just as gospel as what the Truman administration was publishing.

To compare against the official Korean depiction, newspapers, cartoons, and films from an array of dates and publishing biases were analyzed. For analysis, the first question became "does this media, related in someway to the Korean war, depict Korean people?" If no, then does this Korean war adjacent media depict any East Asian characters? If yes, then questions were raised about the agency, physical appearance, cultural nuance, and actions of those characters, these same questions also asked about other East Asian characters. The answers to those questions were then synthesized to summarize an instance of depiction. Those summaries then became the thesis of this research, that when depicted at all, Korean people were not given the same agency or cultural nuance attributed to similar Chinese or Japanese characters in American popular media.

The actual government stance was almost totally supported in the Truman administration, that keeping South Koreans free from communism was America's responsibility. One week before North Korea officially invaded South Korea, diplomat and future Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, in a quote to the Korean National Assembly, said "you are not alone. You will never be alone so long as you continue to play worthily your part in the great design of human freedom."[14] While not a position meant for the American public, this image of solidarity would be the one adopted going forward, especially as the war began in earnest. At the same time, Truman the day after the invasion told journalists not to exaggerate the seriousness of the attacks [15] so as not to alarm the American people. That understatement can be seen in one of the first

[14] Casey, *Selling,* Chpt 1, 19.
[15] Ibid.

official White House press releases after June 25 which "expressed concern...about North Korea," and offered "sympathy and support" for the South Korean people.[16] This early tepidity was countered by senators who used South Korea as an example of what American introduced democracy can achieve, and how it creates a target in communist eyes.[17] This point, that South Koreans were America's allies in democracy, was further used as justification for intervention. Here, however, can be seen the first instance of uncertainty about how to portray the Korean people, were they America's allies, or responsibility?

That question was exactly the one asked by the minority voices in government who felt strongly that America should remain out of Korea. While Truman was making his first statements on America's willingness to defend Korea, numerous senators openly questioned if that defense was worthwhile. Elbert D. Thomas (D-UT) voiced that "legally this was a civil war," a point of view reiterated by second-ranking Republican senator Alexander Wiley (R-WI) who openly asked whether this new war was "a fight between the Koreans or a communist assault?"[18] Other Republican senators used the invasion as evidence that the Truman administration did not truly care about Asia.[19] It is dangerous, however, to analyze quotes through the lense of personal depiction because it could be simple to assume these preferences to avoid intervention are due to some racism or personal feelings against the Korean people. These very public sentiments were most likely made for personal political gain, essentially to spite President Truman, rather than to really say anything about the Korean people's worthiness of

[16] Casey, *Selling,* Chpt. 1 22
[17] Casey, *Selling,* Chpt 1 39
[18] Casey, *Selling,* Chpt 1 23
[19] Casey, *Selling,* Chpt 1 25

defense. As much as these legislators opened their views, the much greater volume of published opinion on the Korean people came from the news.

## Print Media

### Print News

The Korean War was a test to the American newscorps on how to cover the first war in the modern era that was only partially mobilized. The White House press corps expanded to handle the Korean War in addition to the greater need for global cold war coverage, such that by 1952 Truman had personally held 324 press conferences.[20] The White House hosted so many journalists that, on average, between ten and twenty journalists accompany the President on his morning walks.[21] For reference Truman held 41.73 press conferences per year,[22] the highest of any president after WWII (Franklin Delano Roosevelt held 881 conferences at 72.66 per year, though Calvin Coolidge held the most per year at 72.90 in the modern era).[23] This accessibility was mirrored on the front line, where General Douglas MacArthur immediately opened cooperation between his office and the flood of journalists rushing to Korea. It was through these journalists that much of the American public got their first primary account of the Korean people.

Despite a few internal contrarians, pushback against the official view of the Korean people as America's worthy ally came most often from print media. Whereas the government

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[20] "Presidential News Conferences, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/presidential-news-conferences
[21] Brewer, *Why,* 142.
[22] "Presidential News Conferences" https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/presidential-news-conferences
[23] Ibid.

and military were most often portrayed the Korean people as allies in democracy, South Korean civilians appeared in news media almost exclusively as refugees. “Korean Refugees Jam Trains,”[24] “Korean Refugees Jam Roads,”[25] and even “Fleeing Koreans Abandon Children in Haste.”[26] This depiction is not unfair or unfounded, millions of South Korean refugees were displaced by fighting which created an obvious issue of mass refugee migration throughout South Korea, which was plain to see for reporters on the ground. It is, however, limited. The content of these articles often gives a brief physical description, an account of how sad each person appears, and then might detail how little compassion the Korean people seem to show for each other. These articles make bold assumptions about cultural understanding with little to no evidence besides what is immediately visible at a passing glance. To war correspondents these civilians seemed to be a pitiable footnote, rather than allies enjoying the fruits of American democracy.

As the war progressed these stories were, however, met by articles recounting the autonomy and success of South Korean troops. If civilians were portrayed unanimously as confusing refugees at the mercy of troop movements, the South Korean military was most often conversely depicted as heroes to their homeland in the face of communism. Articles detailing the South Korean military were absolutely the majority of those published relating to the Korean War, which dwarfed those on Korean civilians by comparison. These were headlines that read “South Korean Troops Drive to 38th Parallel,”[27] “South Koreans Rout Chinese in Fresh Assault,”

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[24] “Korean Refugees Jam Trains,” Delphos Daily Herald (Delphos, Ohio) 1950 July 21, 1.
[25] “Korean Refugees Jam Roads,” Baltimore Daily Sun (Baltimore, Maryland) 1950 August 2, 2.
[26] “ Fleeing Koreans Abandon Children in Haste,” The Evening Star (Washington D.C.) 1951 January 2.
[27] “South Korean Troops Drive to 38th Parallel,” Republican and Herald (Pottsville, Pennsylvania) 1950 September 29.

[28] and "15,000 South Koreans Wounded in Defense of Their Homeland."[29] These depictions of South Koreans fell much more in line with what the Truman administration had been saying and additionally contributed an understandably better depiction of the Korean people into the American thinkspace. For a journalist, it is much easier to quickly see how a soldier has more agency than a refugee, but it is equally as easy to never look beyond the role as a "soldier."

This heroic depiction did come, however, at the cost of cultural nuance. Keeping in line with the government's picture that the Korean people were America's allies in democracy, these depictions painted the South Korean military as essentially American soldiers with a different skin color. Rarely, if ever, in these articles were any description of what makes these soldiers unique as a people. While these headlines read as flattering, there is nothing in the content that wouldn't be equally true if the "American" were replaced with "South Korean." When there were distinctions made about Korean troops actually being Korean they were often to represent the failures of Korean troops[30] when compared against their American counterparts. Further differentiations were made to separate the association between American and South Korean troops. The United Press (U.P.) reported regularly on incompetence of South Korean troops, one reported that "[i]f WWIII broke out, South Korea would be safer than New York City,"[31] meaning that South Korean troops are too incompetent to cause any damage, to illustrate how ineffective in combat the Korean troops were. These depictions of gross incompetence seem, however, to be the minority view, even among journalists. These same characterizations were

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[28] " South Koreans Rout Chinese in Fresh Assault," The Evening Star (Washington D.C.) 1952 October 25
[29] "15,000 South Koreans Wounded in Defense of Their Homeland."The Town Talk (Alexandria, Louisiana) 1950 September 14
[30] "The South Korean Army Has Good, Bad Points," The Baytown Sun (Baytown, Texas)
[31] Casey, *Selling,* 43

mirrored for the North Korean people in the same print media. Journalists readily depicted in the same unanimously pitable way as the South Korean refugees.[32] North Korean troops were either portrayed as fierce, but only negligibly different than Chinese or Soviet troops,[33] or, if not incompetent, then much more barbaric than their Chinese counterparts.[34] It is should not be expected that each article about troop movements or battle results should contain a section of ethnography or cultural details when the facts of combat are the real details. It should, however, be expected that there be something more about culture when discussing civilians, or more differentiation between troops other than outlining the shortcomings of the South Koreans. Regardless of the depth of depiction, news media is the one place that can be relied upon to regularly include Korean people in the Korean War coverage.

**Cartoons**

More visually striking than the articles they accompanied, political cartoons offered quick and opinionated glances into the Korean War. Political cartoons have, for centuries, provided a humorous and often cutting look into contemporary events, a tradition which held mostly for the Korean War. When it came to publishing cartoons, the Korean War seems to have gotten lost among the greater Cold War. Image 1,[35] seen below, was published July 17, 1952 by Paul Berdanier in United Features Syndicate, is a safe generalization of an Anti-Korean War political cartoon, if a safe generalization exists. It depicts a U.N. soldier, the Korean peninsula, and the

[32] "Reds Show Sings of Making Stand," The Lincoln Star (Lincoln Nebraska) 1950 October 24 Image 1
[33] "Number Slain as Prisoners Placed Higher," Daily Republican-Register (Mount Carmel, Illinois) 1951 November 16
[34] Cpl. Howard Couldn't Come So He Sent Hyun Kui Lee" Clarion-Ledger (Jackson, Mississippi) 1952 April 3
[35] Paul Berdanier, "The Rocky Road to Nowhere," United Features Syndicate, 1952 July 17

perceived tension between them. Conversely, Image 2,[36] seen below, represents a safe generalization, again if possible, of a pro-war cartoon. "'Peace' Movement in Korea," by Daniel Fitzpatrick in the 1950 June 27 in the St. Louis Post Dispatch, published only two days after the North's invasion, depicts a weaponized, Soviet, dove rolling over a Korean village. Both of these depictions, and the numerous other cartoons they can represent, all draw the struggle between ideology more than specific peoples. Image 1 argues that peace is impossible in the face of logistical issues, whereas Image 2 argues that peace is impossible because of the enormous Soviet threat, that communism is the real enemy. These examples fit squarely into the idea that American media producers were unsure how best to depict the Korean people, even when they needed to depict the Korean War. Each has a dove symbolizing peace, which everyone understands, the hammer and sickle are obvious, and the shape of the Korean peninsula is a fact, not up to interpretation.

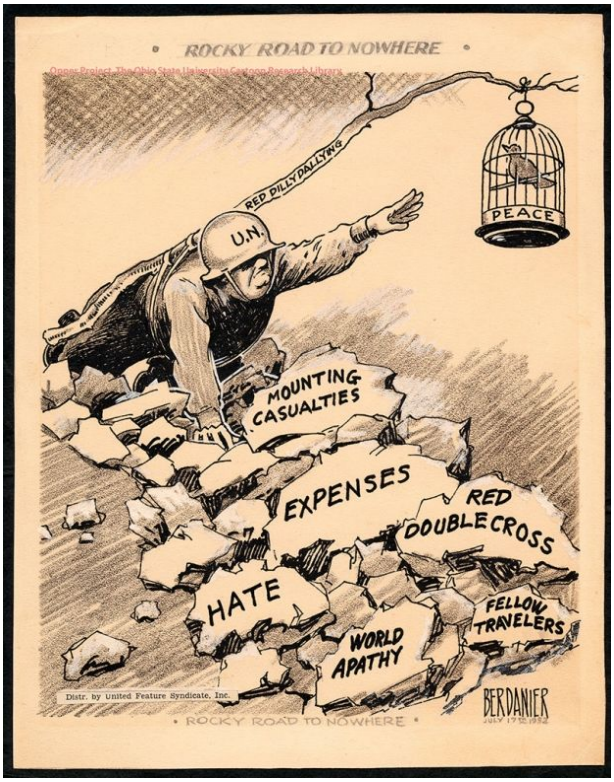


Image 2

How then, can a Korean person best be drawn, if these recently divided people are simultaneously America's ally and enemy? The predominant answer became to depict them

[36] Daniel Fitzpatrick, "The Peace Movement in Korea," St. Louis Post Dispatch, 1950 June 27

alongside their ideological benefactor. Image 3,[37] seen to the below, by Pulitzer prise winning cartoonist Herbert "Herblock" Block, published in The Washington Post, 1950 August 22, was Block's first cartoon, despite publishing daily, to include a Korean person of either alignment. No political cartoon is created with subtlety in mind regarding its characters, here though, nearly two months after the beginning of the war that a Korean person is finally included and he is plainly labeled "North Korean," despite already taking orders from a Soviet officer in the shadow of U.N. flags. It isn't until the December 19, 1950 issue of the Washington Post that Korean soldiers appear again, though in essentially the same way as in Image 3, North Koreans taking orders from Soviet officers.[38] To expand on Block's body of work, that December 1950 cartoon was his last until another nearly identical cartoon on July 10, 1951,[39] and then nothing. He never again depicted a Korean person in any of his cartoons through the end of the war on July

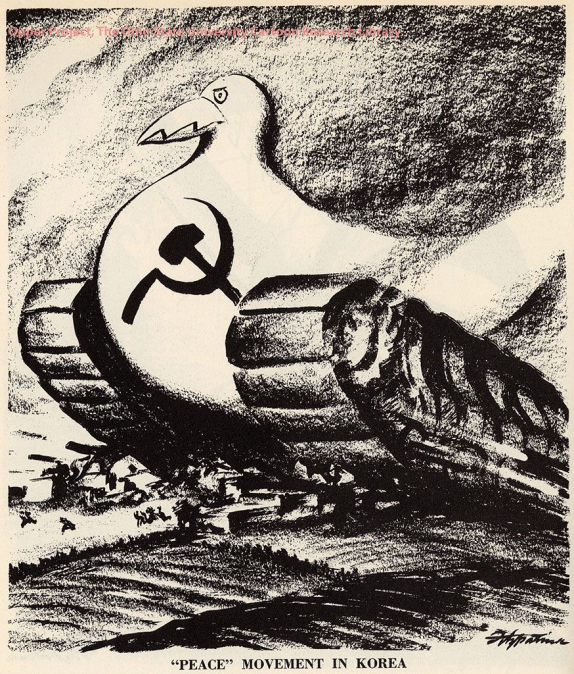


Image 2

Image 3


[37] Herbert Block, "Those Are the Flags of Various Gangs Up" The Washington Post, August 22
[38] Herbert Block, "Hear Anything about Where We Volunteer Next?" The Washington Post, 1950 December 19
[39] Herbert Block, "I Hear We Might get to Volunteer to Go Home Soon" The Washington Post 1951 July 10

27, 1953, despite publishing daily for the war's duration. This is not to say that Block never again covered the Korean War, on the contrary he did so regularly, just without including Koreans in their own war. These sparse depictions of Koreans include nothing more than barest characterization and provide close to now commentary, only broaching that the North Korean military serves Soviet interests.

1950 to 1953 was a busy time for political cartoonists and the greater Cold War seems to have drawn the focus of the Korean war away from the Korean people. Again, taking Herbert Block as an example, the most common figure included in Korean War related cartoons is either Joseph Stalin, or a generic Soviet stand-in. Stalin most regularly is depicted as the mastermind of the Korean war, always working on some new form of propaganda or laughing at some American domestic issue Block feels is particularly important. In addition to depicting Stalin's interaction with Korea, Block publishes cartoons on Soviet interests in China with more frequency than Korea, and includes Iran, India, and Egypt just as much. Here, it can be seen that to Block, and more importantly his audience, was just as, if not more concerned about the ideological implications of the Cold War than the specific Korean War, especially so for the Korean people.

These numerous soviet inclusions are, however, not to say that political cartoons in the early 1950's were afraid of having any East Asian caricatures. Taking Block's resume further, behind Stalin and American politicians, Mao Tse Tung and Chiang Kai Shek were the most commonly depicted political figures. During same time-frame as the Korean War, war with China over Formosa was absolutely a real concern in the minds of the American public and

politicians alike, which Block regularly depicted.[40][41] These cartoons are interesting indicators of what Americans were interested in, in and of themselves, they also serve to indicate what American people apparently were not interested in. Throughout these numerous depictions of Mao and Chiang, never once does Block depict Kim Il Sung or Syngman Rhee, the respective leaders of North and South Korea, who America war actually at war against and with. These cartoons indicate that at least Block believed that the Korean War was a single facet of a much larger issue, and the lack of depiction shows that despite American hostile engagement, it was not even the most important facet.

Print media suffers from its static presentation format. In a single political cartoon it is difficult to show more than a single snapshot of a scene, where characters get one line of dialogue and one action. In that abbreviated time artists were faced with the dilemma of how to make a cartoon which would sell, and most often that meant appealing to the lowest common denominator in the public conscious. Kim Il Sung and Syngman Rhee, as seen through Truman's own administration and the prevalence of news stories about Stalin and Mao, were absolutely not the first men who came to mind when Americans thought of the Cold War. Beyond these limited publications, audio-visual media provided Americans a live look into Korea

**Audio Visual Media**

**Television**

[40] Herbert Block "Chief, I think Next Year We Can Take Washington!" The Washington Post, 1950 November 22

[41] Herbert Block "Always Happy to Lend My Neighbor A Shovel" The Washington Post, 1951 November 26

While newsreels before and after movies brought WWII back to the homefront, the Korean War was the first war brought into the home through television. The commencement of the Korean War coincided with the beginning of in-home television ownership. This growth was so dramatic that while in 1950 just 9% of U.S. households owned a T.V., by the end of the war in 1953 up to 44% of homes had a television.[42] For the first time Americans could see the war with their own eyes at home instead of in news photographs or in cinema newsreels. For many Americans these programs may have very well been the first time seeing a real Korean person. In 1950 the Korean population in America was still in the low tens of thousands, most of whom lived in coastal cities.[43] It is possible that select Americans knew their Korean neighbors, and their customs, though statistically most of America would not have. Early television networks capitalized on this curiosity, with additional support from the White House.

NBC began this trend with *Battle Report -- Washington,* a weekly report intended to keep the American public up to date on the Korean War. Beginning in the summer of 1950 and running for eighty four episodes,[44] *Battle Report -- Washington* exemplified the seeming irrelevance of the Korean people during the Korean War. The show was devised to keep the American people updated on the war through interviews with generals, admirals, and State Department officials, though its inaugural episode failed to mention the Korean War even once.[45] That first episode covered a student-communist rally in Berlin and extolled the American effort

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[42]American Memory, The Library of Congress, *Television, https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhhtml/awmi10/television.html*

[43]"History of Korean Immigration to America, from 1903 to Present," *Boston University,* http://sites.bu.edu/koreandiaspora/issues/history-of-korean-immigration-to-america-from-1903-to-present/

[44] Bernhard, *U.S. Television.,* 123.

[45] Ibid.

against Soviet Communism with the narrator describing the rally as "one of the saddest and most frightening spectacles in the post-war world.[46] *Battle Report* continued the trend of depicting the Korean War as a minor element of the greater Cold War, at least partially at the behest of the White House.[47] The Truman administration, in an effort to counter its falling approval rating, looked to the up and coming medium of television to help convince citizens that the Korean War was a necessary conflict to stop the spread of communism. That goal of placing the Soviet communism as public enemy number one through in-home screens further prohibited the possibility of Korean people from getting the spotlight in their war. Regularly, *Battle Report -- Washington* dedicated segments to describing Soviet leaders as "power-drunk atheists," "bloodthirsty barbarians," and being full of "diabolical cunning."[48] China's entry into the Korean War was characterized as "the barbarous aggression of the Chinese hoards,"[49] though similarly intense language was never used in describing North Korean forces. This rhetoric continued weekly into 1952 when coverage of the Eisenhower-Stevenson presidential race became more profitable.[50] *Battle Report -- Washington* broadcast weekly into the public's homes that whatever was going on in Korea, and to the Korean people, was a symptom of a larger issue: the Cold War.

The Truman administration targeted CBS as well to produce *The Facts We Face*, which ran for a year between August 1950 and 1951.[51] *The Facts We Face* began as a five week presentation of the Korean War, but was soon expanded to show how Americans fought

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Bernhard, *U.S. Television,* 116.
[48] Bernhard, *U.S. Television,* 122.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Bernhard, *U.S. Television,* 133.
[51] Bernhard, *U.S. Television,* 116.

communism around the world.[52] This show, with its White House-approved scripts, asked questions "that the people wanted to know," about the Korean War. These questions were written by the White House, and just as often as they asked about the situation in Korea, they asked questions about the implications and actions of communism around the world.[53] *The Facts We Face* was only intended to run for those first five weeks, but was expanded as the Truman administration realized they had another audience who could be distracted from the Korean War by communism on the whole. This trend continued on CBS when on the September 10, 1950 episode of *Diplomatic Pouch* Secretary of State Dean Acheson presented the Cold War as a global conflict, pointing out hotspots of communism on a map in the Middle East, Asia and Europe. Acheson discussed the Korean War through the lense of Chinese involvement, and then that it would be up to the U.N. to decide what would happen at the 38th Parallel.[54] Despite the White House's apparent investment in these shows, it should still be remembered that at their commencement, television was still a highly niche form of entertainment in America.

Despite the rapid growth of television in America, there were still only >10% of American households with a T.V. at the beginning of the war. That first episode of *Battle Report* which covered a communist rally instead of its intended Korea was only broadcast to at most 1.5 million people.[55] The depiction of Korean people on television was absolutely negligible, though it could be said that so was the effect of any television broadcast in 1950. Where in print media and political cartoons there are a few definitely identifiable tropes like a refugee or heroic

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[52] Ibid.
[53] Brewer, *Why,* 154.
[54] Brewer, *Why,* 156.
[55] "Pop Culture 1950," *U.S. Census Fast Facts,* U.S. Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/fast_facts/1950_fast_facts.html

soldier, there are no such depictions of Korean people on television during the Korean War. There were simply not enough characterizations of the Korean people on the whole to even attempt to generalize them, which is indicative of television's place in the 1950's media sphere. In its nascience, television was more of a government tool than it was the primary producer of A/V entertainment that it is today. This total absence of Korean people is a bigger indicator of the Truman administration's priorities than it is of any producer's feelings on the Korean people. In 1950 it was very possible for the White House to govern what was shown on America's two biggest networks, because there was very little content at all to govern. The Korean War, and its people, were not enough of a priority to make it on air.

**Film**

While in the decade surrounding the Korean War television was on the rise, going to the movies was far and away still king in American entertainment. The American Census Bureau reports that while the trend was falling, 60 million Americans went to see a movie in 1950.[56] In these movies can be seen the best, and some of the most trendingly average, depictions of the Korean people. Films like *The Steel Helmet* (1951),[57] which includes a South Korean main character who fights American stereotypes, presented American audiences with a character who controls his own perception. The Navy's *This is Korea!* (1951)[58] shows the Korean people both as refugees who rely on American soldiers' generosity, while also going about their daily life in

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[56] Thomson Gale, "The American Film Industry In The Early 1950s," *History of American Film* (1990, https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/culture-magazines/american-film-industry-early-1950s)
[57] *The Steel Helmet,* directed by Samuel Fuller, (Lippert Studios, 1951)
[58] *This is Korea!,* directed by John Ford, screenplay by James Warner Bellah (Republic Pictures, 1951)

their own setting. Then, again mirroring newspring media, come movies like *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* (1954),[59] and *Pork Chop Hill* (1959),[60] which depict the Korean War in contexts that characterize Chinese and Japanese characters. This longform content provides, and delivers on, the best opportunity for depictions of Korean people with agency and cultural nuance. It is much more feasible to show a person's motivations and feelings over the course of an hour or two than can be done in a single political cartoon or thirty minute television show. This is, however, not to say that these deeper depictions were common, just that they were present in films in a way they were never elsewhere.

*The Steel Helmet* tells the story of an American G.I. rescued by a South Korean orphan, who in their hunt for safety teach each other about their respective cultures, if not in blunt ways. The film begins with Zach, the protagonist, being freed from North Korean prisoners by a young South Korean who he immediately calls a "gook."[61] Where other depictions of Koreans would predict that this character would remain silent, this character who later goes by "Short Round," promptly fires back "Not Gook! South Korean!"*Steel Helmet* from go breaks molds with its racial dialogue, though then plays into traditional roles where the Korean character immediately relies on the American soldier which might be seen as reinforcing American paternalism. This scene does, however, perhaps represent a greater situation of power where a child relies on an adult, rather than as racial dialogue.

Additionally when the group of American soldiers, with Short Round in tow, arrive at a Buddhist monastery for R&R, the film presents a previously unseen level of Korean cultural

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[59] *The Bridges at Toko-Ri,* directed by Mark Robson (Paramount Pictures, 1954)
[60] *Pork Chop Hill*, directed by Lewis Milestone (Melville Productions, 1959)
[61] Fuller, *The Steel*, 3:10

inclusion. Immediately after entering, a tableau is established where the soldiers stand in awe at the foot of a giant statue of the Buddha.[62] This scene is a similarly mold breaking representation of Korean culture, where most often Korean religion is either ignored or acknowledged as Christian through western missionaries. The film's cultural inclusions continue when one soldier plays "Auld Lang Syne" on a piano which Short Round recognizes as the Korean National Anthem[63]

and then sings alongside much to the soldiers' amusement. The film continues its racial awareness after the group captures a North Korean prisoner who engages in dialogue with a number of American soldiers before being taken to prison. First, the North Korean speaks about racial inequality with the African-American medic, referencing the moral quandaries of fighting for a country which legally segregates the medic's own race.[64] The North Korean prisoner then asks similar questions to the Japanese-American soldier, questioning why a soldier would fight for a country who just five years prior incarcerated that soldier's race in prison camps across the country.[65] Both men respond to the prisoner by claiming that American freedom sometimes comes at a cost, but in the end America is a great nation, claims which the North Korean takes dubiously. These deeply thought provoking questions should not signal that the film was wholly racially sensitive, as the men of the unit call that Japanese-American soldier "Buddha-Head," more often than his actual name, Sgt. Tanaka. It is, however, worth asking whether that

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[62] Fuller, *The Steel,* 36:00
[63] The South Korean National Anthem "Aegukga," was sung to the tune of "Auld Lang Syne" until 1935 when its modern melody was adopted. Here, although short round would have been born sometime after 1935 he would have been raised by a community who learned the "Aegukga" to "Auld Lang Syne," and as such most likely would have recognized both tunes. Dates taken from "South Korea," http://www.nationalanthems.info/kr.htm
[64] Fuller, *The Steel,* 57:00
[65] Fuller, *The Steel,* 60:00

nickname signals the racial insensitivity of the writer, or the writer's perception of American soldiers in 1951.

Despite those mold-breaking inclusions, the film industry still often used the same mold used earlier to favor grander depictions of the Cold War through Chinese and Japanese characters in movies like *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* and *Pork Chop Hill.* The first note to be made about these movie's lack of Korean characters is that they're logically largely absent. *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* takes place mostly in Japan during a shore-leave and the real battle of *Pork Chop Hill* was fought between American and Chinese troops, though with a small contingent of North Korean soldiers as well. While those situations make it unfair to criticize these films for their lack of inclusion, their depictions of Chinese and Japanese characters can, however, absolutely be analyzed.

*The Bridges at Toko-Ri* is an excellent demonstration of the Japanese' turn in perception following WWII, where many of the characters are native Japanese partaking in western culture. If one of the Truman administration's goals was to demonstrate the value of American intervention and democracy, then this movie does incidentally (the White House had nothing to do with the film) exactly that. The Japanese characters in this film are shown either in the context of a party or in a hotel, where they work as both employees and consumers. With the exception of a few characters whose job it seemingly was to be as Japanese as possible in hinderingly ornate attire,[66] all Japanese characters were western finery, i.e. tuxedos and evening gowns. They played jazz, drank champagne, and swing-danced with American sailors.[67] In the hotel, the Japanese bellboys wore western uniforms and served American soldiers and Japanese

[66] Robson, *The Bridges,* 24:00.
[67] Robson, *The Bridges,* 39:00.

businessmen alike.[68] The characters make an effort to pronounce Japanese names correctly and treat the waitstaff with respect. Most tellingly is the bathing scene where the main character, his wife, and daughters are bathing nude in the hotel's private pool and are shocked when a Japanese family comes to bath in an adjacent pool. Despite initial protests after thinking the door was locked, the daughters of both families immediately interact and bring the families together, where the mothers and fathers of the two corresponding families realize their similarity.[69] Here is a literal mirroring of the American protagonist's family with a correspondingly pleasant Japanese one, showing the audience that because of American intervention the Japanese have become just as wholesome or prosperous as America. While the portrayal of Japanese in this movie does nearly nothing to show American audiences what Japanese culture is like, it does serve to show the benefits of American intervention, and what democracy can do for a recently antagonistic nation.

A similarly loaded depiction of Chinese characters can be seen in *Pork Chop Hill*, where racial lines divide the movie simply between heroic Americans and villainous Chinese. The film recounts the actions of the first Battle for Pork Chop Hill where American soldiers retook and then defended the hill from a Chinese counterattack.[70] The actions of the American soldiers are underscored throughout the entire film by a Chinese broadcaster who speaks through a loudspeaker from a cave hideout, imploring the American soldiers to retreat or surrender. The Chinese broadcaster shows empathy for the American soldiers while threatening them with his troops' viciousness. The Broadcaster plays "taps" over the loudspeaker, promising the soldiers

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[68] Robson, *The Bridges,* 26:00
[69] Robson, *The Bridges,* 49:00
[70] Bill McWilliams, *On Hallowed Ground: The Last Battle for Pork Chop Hill* (Berkley, CA: Berkley Caliber Books, 2004) 2.

death unless they retreat, and then continues to play loud swing and jazz over channel throughout the night.[71] Much like how *The Bridge's at Toko-Ri*'s Japanese characters fit into the pro-American ideological mold, *Pork Chop Hill's* Chinese characters fit into the model that looks to villainize communism. The Broadcaster and his few comrades hide in a cave tormenting the American heroes psychologically while their troops in the field wear mismatched uniforms made from furs. Where *Bridge's* Japanese prospered from American capitalism *Pork Chop's* Chinese suffered conversely from Chinese communism. This does not mean that *Pork Chop Hill* ignores the Korean people entirely, in its last breath it praises American intervention when Gregory Peck says in the film's final line "millions live in freedom because of what we did that day."[72] The film's only reference to the South Korean people is an enforcement of American paternalism.

That paternalism is equally on display in *This is Korea!* (1951), a documentary produced by the U.S. Navy to be shown in theaters. The film alternates between showing Korean people living their lives either in villages or in ruins, and what can be described as war-porn, where the full power of U.S. arms are proudly released. By volume this film absolutely has the largest Korean presence, which is not to say that that presence is in anyway meaningful. Many of these scenes are aerial shots of miles-long refugee caravans escaping the fighting, or refugees picking through rubble.[73] Similarly the film begins with a shot of a hut-village where Korean peasants are making crafts, which could be a fascinating look into Korean life if not underscored by the narrator saying "the kids were starving until we got there," and then a cut to those village kids

[71] Milestone, *Pork*, 23:30
[72] Milestone, *Pork,* 97:00
[73] Ford, *This is,* 19:30.

crying. This narration immediately implies that before American intervention this way of life was starving children and that Korea would be better off if Americans could give them some of the same democracy given to the Japanese after WWII. This scene is followed but numerous scenes of American soldiers handing candy children with the narrator describing how the G.I.s had to teach the children to it. Assuming that these children were unable to eat a chocolate bar on their own. American soldiers further help Korean children by handing them off to a christian orphanage run by Korean nuns, naming an orphan "Little Babe Ruth Joe DiMaggio."[74] The implication here being that western Christianity was the thing saving children, who were happier with western names. *This is Korea!* has more scenes showing the generosity of American soldiers, and how badly the Korean people seemingly need it, than would be appropriate to keep describing. Suffice it to say that this officially produced film totally reinforces the message that American intervention in Korea was something that the Korean people needed desperately.

Perhaps most interesting about these films, is their public reception. A movie's message without understanding its reception should only describe the views of its writer and director, but those views can be extrapolated by comparing how they sold. *This is Korea!* was released to critical acclaim with the New York Times stating the film was "well worth the price of admission," going onto praise nearly every other aspect of the film's depiction of American soldiers.[75] This could be expected as, despite the film's gritty take on war and its sacrifice, it absolutely praises individual American soldiers, something that outside of Vietnam, the public has always been receptive to. Most surprising is that *Pork Chop Hill* lost nearly one million

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[74] Ford, *This is*, 21:33.
[75] "This is Korea!" Turner Classic Movies, http://www.tcm.com/this-month/article/309494%7C0/This-is-Korea.html

dollars, its budget three million and its box office take only two.[76] Whether this was because Americans had lost interest the Korean war by 1959, had lost interest in the reality of the Cold War, or any other number of confounding circumstances is another argument to be made, but it can be said that the film was comparatively unpopular. *Pork Chop Hill*'s unpopularity is especially noticeable when paired against *The Steel Helmet* which was praised as realistic,[77] and made twenty times its budget at the box office.[78] For comparison against the two million made by *The Steel Helmet,* the best selling film that same year made approximately $30 million at the box office.[79] What looking at box office returns ultimately shows is that Korean War films, regardless of their depiction of the Korean people, were just not that popular. The best selling films following 1951 were *The Greatest Show on Earth* (1952),[80] *Peter Pan* (1953),[81] and *White Christmas* (1954),[82] which all made between $30 and $40 million, unadjusted.[83] These are all predictably light and entertaining films, which a war-weary public could be easily expected to flock too, additionally considering parents and children as a demographic who are unlikely to see a war-picture.

**Conclusion**

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[76] "1959: Probable Domestic Take", *Variety*, 6 January 1960 p 34
[77] Bosley Crowther "The Screen In Review," *New York Times* (New York) January 25, 1951.
[78] Ezra Goodman, "Low-Budget Movies With POW!: Most fans never heard of director Sam Fuller, but to some film buffs he has real class," *New York Times,* (New York) February 28 1965.
[79] *Quo Vadis,* directed by Mervyn Leroy (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1951).
[80] *The Greatest Show on Earth,* directed by Cecil B. Demille (Paramount Pictures, 1952).
[81] *Peter Pan,* directed by Clyde Geronimi (Walt Disney Pictures, 1953).
[82] *White Christmas,* directed by Michael Curtiz (Paramount Pictures, 1954).
[83] Tanza Loudenback and Jason Guerrasio, "The biggest box-office hit the year you were born," *Business Insider,* February 2, 2018, https://www.businessinsider.com/highest-grossing-movie-the-year-you-were-born-2016-4

Despite the relative unpopularity of these films in the broader context of American pop-culture, they play an important role in analyzing the depiction of Korean people in the 1950's. Both *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* and *Pork Chop Hill* play perfectly into well established depictions of Asian characters alongside Koreans' absence from the films. *Pork Chop Hill*'s Chinese characters could have easily been a part of Herbert Block's political cartoons. These were characters who existed to reinforce fear and disgust of communism in the American conscience. The idea that a Chinese soldier could be tormenting troops psychologically over a loudspeaker could have been a segment in *Battle Report -- Washington* or *The Facts We Face* where the real enemy is always communism, rather than specifically North Korean soldiers. The Truman administration, often behind those T.V. shows, dreamed of a successful movie with exactly that message, and although *Pork Chop* came out under Eisenhower, it very much on the Truman-era message that the American people should worry about communism, not the war at hand. Correspondingly the Japanese characters in *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* play perfectly into the Truman administration's about why American intervention in Korea is necessary. *Toko-Ri* idealizes intervention, allowing Americans to revel in their own given prosperity and to hope that Korea might someday see the same.

*This is Korea!*'s overwhelming paternalistic imagery fits in line with the earliest Korean War rhetoric, as well as with what Americans could read in the news about Korean citizens. Repeatedly the film shows, in color, the miles of refugees that were supposedly jamming trains, blocking roadways, and how it might be possible for a Korean to abandon their baby on the side of the road. The film similarly praises American soldiers in the same ways as print media regularly did, and demonstrated in a longer form the actions reported on in the NBC and CBS

programs. *This is Korea!* shows the highest number of Korean people out of any other researched media, but none of them matter. No shown Koreans have any sort of impact or importance, they are at best background props to show behind troops, or at worst starving without the help of American soldiers.

This leaves *The Steel Helmet* which truly seems unique. No where else, before or after, treated a Korean character with such depth and agency. Short Round actively refuses to accept racism and makes an attempt for cultural exchange, he wants to understand Zach just as much as he wants Zach to understand him. The soldiers exhibit a great respect for the buddhist temple where they rest, so much that Zach writes a buddhist prayer out for his charge. This film presents a depiction totally at odds with what else has been found everywhere else in American popular media. The Korean character is totally relevant to the Korean War, his death near the end is devastating to the entire group of American soldiers, where in other films countless other Koreans die to essentially no emotional repercussion. Short Round matters to his media in a way no other Korean finds themselves during the Korean War.

This is, however, one film amidst a wide body of other media. That depiction is groundbreaking and important, but is still the absolute minority. The greater Cold War marginalized the Korean people in their own war. Fear of communism forced worry about Korean suffering into the back of American minds, which was only reinforced by America's president, newsprint media, and audiovisual media. Joseph Stalin and Mao Tse Tung hid Kim Il Sung and Syngman Rhee in their shadows, much like nascent T.V. news preferred to cover the Soviet Union or China. America may have been actively at war in Korea but the American media perpetuated that the thought that the real war was with communism, and that Korea was a

relatively minor facet of that. Whether that was a concerted effort of President Truman to keep American minds off of the real fighting and dying so soon after WWII, or whether Americans truly preferred to think about the enemy they knew than the foreign and rural peninsula they did not, is hard to say. Though it almost certainly both, looking at media shows that when Americans did think of that small peninsula they did so paternalistically. American popular media on the whole shows, however, that for the most part, Americans simply didn't think of Korea.

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