УДК 327.54
DOI: 10.28995/2073-6339-2021-2-22-36

The depiction of the Great Patriotic War on American television during the Second Red Scare

Michael A. LoSasso
University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida, United States of America, losassom@usf.edu

Abstract. This article analyzes the portrayal of the Eastern Front of World War II on early American television, specifically the documentary anthology series *The Twentieth Century*. It explores how most early portrayals of World War II on television excised or minimized the Eastern Front in response to the Second Red Scare. Although *The Twentieth Century* was one of the first to display the Eastern Front in detail, its portrayal paralleled Cold War propaganda of the Soviet Union and its people. This work analyzes three episodes of the series devoted to the Soviet Union's role in the war and notes how each utilized certain traits of U.S. anti-communist propaganda. Other matters considered are the mediators in the crafting the display of the war and the way the history was presented to satisfy the interests of the sponsor and the network. It concludes that the presentation of the Soviet people responded to Cold War imperatives with episodes produced in times when tensions were high having sharper criticism, whilst periods of eased relations leading to less propagandistic depictions.

Keywords: Cold War, World War II, television history, media history, propaganda, documentary

For citation: LoSasso, M.A. (2021), "The depiction of the Great Patriotic War on American television during the Second Red Scare", *RSUH/RGGU Bulletin. "Political Science. History. International Relations" Series,* no. 2, pp. 22–36, DOI: 10.28995/2073-6339-2021-2-22-36

Изображение Великой Отечественной войны на американском телевидении в период второй «красной паники»

Майкл А. Лосассо
Университет Южной Флориды, Тампа, Флорида, США,
losassom@usf.edu

Аннотация. В статье анализируется изображение Восточного фронта Второй мировой войны на раннем американском телевидении, в частности в документальном сериале-антологии «Двадцатый век». Автор исследует, как в результате второй «красной паники» самые первые изображения Второй мировой войны на телевидении сокращали или сводили к минимуму роль Восточного фронта. Хотя «Двадцатый век» стал одной из первых работ, в которых Восточный фронт был подробно показан, его изображение соответствовало американской пропаганде в отношении Советского Союза и его народа времен холодной войны. В статье анализируются три эпизода сериала, посвященные роли Советского Союза в войне, и отмечается, как в каждом из них использовались определенные элементы антикоммунистической пропаганды США. Среди других рассматриваемых вопросов – то, какие средства применялись для изображения войны и как была представлена история для удовлетворения интересов спонсора и телеканала. Делается вывод о том, что представление о советских людях отвечало императивам холодной войны: в сериях, создававшихся во времена повышенной напряженности, содержится более резкая критика, в то время как в периоды улучшения отношений изображение событий становится не столь пропагандистским.

Ключевые слова: холодная война, Вторая мировая война, история телевидения, история СМИ, пропаганда, документальный фильм

Для цитирования: LoSasso M.A. The depiction of the Great Patriotic War on American television during the Second Red Scare // Вестник РГГУ. Серия «Политология. История. Международные отношения». 2021. № 2. С. 22–36. DOI: 10.28995/2073-6339-2021-2-22-36

Introduction

At 6:30P.M. April 19th, 1959 anyone turning their television dials to CBS would have been greeted by German dictator Adolf Hitler delivering a speech. In seconds, the Fuhrer's voice fades as an off-screen narrator explains, "To him it is the city of Stalin, its very name an affront, infuriating, and he vows that no human being shall push us away from

that spot". The screen dissolves from Hitler to Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin also delivering a speech. The narrator continues, "To him it is his city controlling the Volga and 'Mother Russia'; and he orders Stalingrad must be held at any price". Dissolve again to the two men, now side by side in split-screen, as if facing one another as the narrator remarks "two dictators, Russia's Joseph Stalin and Germany's Adolf Hitler, make this battle of half a million men their personal death struggle here in this city". The image fades out to reveal narrator, CBS News anchor Walter Cronkite who announces, "This our story 'Stalingrad' – As the Prudential Insurance Company of America presents *The Twentieth Century*"[1].

This was the beginning of the last episode of CBS's popular documentary anthology series *The Twentieth Century*'s second season. Enrapturing audiences with its stark footage of the Battle of Stalingrad, this would be the first program to detail the battle on American television. Its chronicle was some of the first images Americans saw of the Eastern Front since the war, but presented through the filter of Cold War axioms which skewed the portrayal.

This article examines how the Soviet Union and the Eastern Front of World War II were portrayed on early American television through an analysis of three episodes of the CBS documentary series *The Twentieth Century*. *The Twentieth Century* produced the first American television programs on the Eastern Front for a national audience. This side of the war was largely excised from the American media due to the strictures of the Red Scare even as media of World War II flourished in mid-century America. Although the series broke a taboo in its display of the Eastern Front, its presentation aligned with prevalent anti-Communist propaganda, particularly the relation of communism to Nazism and the distinction between the Soviet leadership and the larger populace. These portrayals promoted the Anti-Communist ideological precepts that permeated through the United States in the 1950s through the early-1960s. However, as relations between the two superpowers began to shift by the mid-1960s, so too did their portrayals in the war as evidenced in the later episode "Leningrad" which presented a less propagandistic portrayal of the Soviet Union and its people.

The examinations offered here on the Cold War ideology propagated in television depictions of World War II fills a significant gap in the scholarship on Cold War culture and television history. While Tom Engelhardt and Peter C. Rollins have written about how war-documentaries promoted an image of a strong, noble America in relation to Cold War directives, neither detail the depiction of the Soviet Union in the early television documentaries. This work sheds light upon the

[1] Stalingrad. New York: CBS, Apr. 19, 1959.

skewed presentation seen on early American television in line with types of anti-communist propaganda examined in Cydney Hendershot's *Anti-Communism and Popular Culture in Mid-Century America* (2003). While there has been little analysis on the presentation of the Soviets in the war on American television, *The Twentieth Century* offered the most comprehensive look at the war on the Eastern Front since World War II's conclusion through presentations which reverberate Cold War themes. It supports the thesis of Ronald Smelser and Edward J. Davis' *The Myth on the Eastern Front* (2017) of how the history of the Eastern Front played into Cold War animosities by villainizing the Soviets and humanizing the Germans. Furthermore, it argues the importance of *The Twentieth Century* in television history and as an influencer of public opinion. The series' reach has been largely absent from scholarly works on the history of television outside of Jack C. Ellis and Betsy A. McLaine's *New History of Documentary Film*, despite being the longest running documentary series of its kind, while its popularity and critical acclaim made it an important propagator of the war narrative.

The Twentieth Century

The Twentieth Century was one of the most successful documentary-based series ever made. Lasting nine seasons from the fall of 1957 until its cancellation in 1966, the show aired twenty-six original programs each season along with twenty-six re-runs viewed by roughly thirty million people a week. Hosted by news anchor Walter Cronkite, the series was commanded by producers Burton Benjamin and Isaac Kleinerman who oversaw the production of 205 of its 219 programs[2]. Its concept as a documentary account of the twentieth century gave it a flexibility to cover a variety of topics both contemporary and historical, so long as there was enough available film to fill its 30-minute run-time. Film theorist William Bluem notes that the series pushed the format further, being one of the first continuing series to incorporate on and off camera interviews into their historical documentaries which gave them a "you-are-there" aspect [Bluem 1965, p. 169]. The series was considered a bright spot in public affairs programming with its broad appeal and concise, yet exciting presentation as evidenced in its two Primetime Emmy Awards, a Peabody Award, and other prizes received throughout its run[3].

[2] The Twentieth Century (Nine Year Report: 1957–1966). CBS News, n.d. – Sec. 1, p. 1. Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. F. (Burton Benjamin Papers, 1957–1988). D. U.S. Mss74AF Ed. 14. No. 6.

[3] Ibid.

Throughout its nine-year run, the show regularly turned to World War II for topics. Of the series' 112 historical episodes, 58 dealt with the war. "Besides their dramatic potential and the availability of footage", notes series chronicler Richard C. Bartone "World War II compilations dominate the series because of their national and international importance" [Bartone 1985, p. 90]. Indeed, the World War II episodes garnered high ratings. The series also benefited from its anthology format which allowed it to examine diverse aspects of the war, as opposed to just one branch of service or campaign as preceding documentary series like *Victory at Sea* had. It aired biographies of prominent figures like General George Marshal and lesser-known ones like General Andrey Vlasov as well as accounts of battles and miscellaneous topics like the internment of the Japanese Issei. It would devote six-episodes to the Eastern Front of World War II and be the first American television series to detail the Nazi-Soviet conflict.

World War II on television

On television the war was largely seen in the form of documentaries. While action or comedy-oriented series set during the war like *Combat*! (1962–1967) and *Hogan's Heroes* (1965–1970) dominated television by the mid-1960s, the war documentary was the primary form of presenting the war on television from the late 1940s through the early 1960s [Doherty 1993, p. 211]. NBC's series *Victory at Sea* (1952–1953) which detailed the triumphs of the Allied naval campaign, is the exemplum of how the war was presented to Americans, whether reliving the war or seeing it for the first time in their living rooms. Each episode was edited to make the campaign resemble a cinematic thriller, with plenty of gun fire and troop movements accompanied by Richard Rodgers rousing score as Leonard Graves' narration guided viewers through the campaign.

These documentary renditions of World War II were more than historical accounts of the war, they were laudatory epics of American strength that acted as surrogates of Cold War ideology. The presentation of the United States' as an innocent power that liberates the world from the forces of despotism and totalitarianism through its military might, the savvy of its commanders, and the fortitude of its people reinforced Cold War notions of vigilance and strength against communist inversion. Film historian Thomas Doherty notes in his work *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* how the war's appeal "wasn't merely the attraction of adventure, romance, or high melodrama, but the consolation of closure and serenity of moral certainty"

[Doherty 1993, p. 271]. In one episode of *Victory at Sea*, the narrator described the purpose of the Pacific campaign as such: "From island to island, continent to continent, the children of free peoples move the forces of tyranny are no more" [Rollins 2003, p. 103–122, 107].

Television depictions of the war mirrored Hollywood in minimizing mention of the Eastern Front and the Soviet Union as allies due to the Cold War. Historians Ronald Smelser and Edward J. Davies note how when relations with the Soviet Union changed after the war, "it was important to erase at least some aspects of the recent war from public memory and revise the terms of discussion of other aspects, particularly with regard to our new enemy – the former ally – the Soviet Union" [Smesler, Davies 2008, p. 2]. The resulting Red Scare led both networks and advertisers to reject any subject it considered pro-Communist. Films like *Mission to Moscow* (1943), *The Song of Russia* (1944) and even *Ninotchka* (1939) were aired with caution by the networks and local stations while the Pro-Soviet World War II film *The North Star* (1943) was re-titled and re-edited to lessen its praise of the Russians. In *Victory at Sea*, the Soviet Union is only shown in three of the series' twenty-six episodes and only one battle mentioned by name [MacDonald 1985, p. 124].

The availability of footage was another factor in the exclusion of the Eastern Front in documentaries. No American cameramen were present at key battles and Cold War relations prevented the acquisition of film from most of Eastern Europe. Researchers had to make do with German-shot or captured Soviet footage, largely in West German and British archives or consult private collectors. When *The Twentieth Century's* Mel Stuart inquired Soviet authorities about footage from a Soviet documentary on the Battle of Stalingrad he had seen during the war, he was informed those films were "obsolete" and rebuffed[4].

A wide network of connections to film archives and private collections around the world provided the coveted footage of the Eastern Front. For "Stalingrad" Mel Stuart spent six months scouring repositories in Germany and Washington D.C. for appropriate footage of the German side and acquired the Soviet documentary he remembered from two private film collections. The ability of the series' production crew in locating footage reinforcing Kleinerman's belief that if there is a "body of film" to make a program practical pursue it[5].

---

[4] Twentieth Century Scours U.S. and Germany for Stalingrad Films the Russians Call Obsolete. CBS Television Network Press Release, April 6, 1959. Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. F. (Burton Benjamin Papers, 1957–1988). D. U.S.Mss74AF Ed. 2. N. 12.

[5] Film Bloodhounds Find Intriguing, Forgotten Shots // Victoria Advocate. 1959. March 1. P. 76.

Cold War "mediators"

Despite Kleinerman's adage, there was more to the selection of programs than if there was enough footage available. *The Twentieth Century*, despite being a critical and commercial hit for the network and sponsor, was subject to certain Cold War strictures pervasive in the American television industry from the early 1950s to the mid-1960s. The series' sponsor the Prudential Insurance Company of America and the CBS vice-president of Public Affairs programming held the right of approval over the topics presented on the series and as such held considerable sway in the show's content. Each year Burton Benjamin and Isaac Kleinerman would submit a "formal list" of 36 possible subjects for programs for consideration to the CBS head of Public Affairs (Irving Gitlin until 1961 then Sig Mickelson), before sending it on to Prudential [Bartone1985, p. 86]. Prudential had the right to deny any idea they deemed ill-suited to their interests as well as the privilege to recommend program ideas of their own. Henry M. Kennedy, Prudential's Vice-President of public relations and advertising, described this arrangement as such to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC):

> They will present us with a lot of ideas. We will usually go through them and we will say: "This looks pretty good; we have our doubts about this", or once in a while we will say, "We do not think this is a good show". Perhaps they can convince us that it is[6].

While CBS maintained "ultimate responsibility" for the "programming fare", their executives conceded that advertisers did "influence both entire programs and elements within programs"[7].

However, Benjamin and Kleinerman managed to overcome these mediators thanks to its sterling reputation and ability to avoid controversy through a prescribed narrative structure which sought to "mirror" the established historical narrative instead of challenging it [Bartone 1985, p. 119]. Such was accomplished through a strict practice of crafting each episode around a theme or point of view which prescribed the rendition of history decided upon at the beginning of production by the Benjamin and Kleinerman. The resulting programs were thus crafted to reinforce popular perception and the official line espoused

[6] Federal Communications Committee. Second Interim Report by the Office of Network Studies: Television Network Program Procurement Part II. Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1965. P. 388.

[7] Ibid. P. 233.

by the U.S. government instead of directly challenging it which made the series largely non-controversial in its presentation of history as well as hot-button contemporary issues. This led the network and its sponsor (Prudential Insurance) to give Benjamin and Kleinerman a largely freehand.

Furthermore, a depiction of one of the most infamous battles of the Eastern Front was a timely subject of interest in 1959. Although Cold War tensions were high with the launch of Sputnik in 1957, the subsequent positioning of nuclear missiles in Western Europe, and crises in Lebanon and Taiwan in 1958; there was an increasing cultural dialogue between the superpowers. The signing of the Exchange in the Cultural, Technical, and Educational Fields Agreement – better known as the Lacy-Zarubin Agreement – facilitated the exchange of cultural products like films, music, and scholarly works. At the same time high-profile visits to the Soviet Union were made by such figures as Eleanor Roosevelt, Adlai Stevenson, and Senator Hubert Humphrey whilst Soviet vice premier Anastas Mikoyan and Frol Kozlov made tours of the United States. Furthermore, a rising amount of works on life in the Soviet Union, most notably former NBC Moscow correspondent Irving R. Levine's *Main Street USSR,* inspired a new interest in the people of the Soviet Union and their history. As cultural historian Jennifer M. Hudson concludes, the rise in cultural exchanges helped stoke "reciprocal curiosity at the grassroots level" as the "Rhetoric of coexistence overshadowed talks of hegemony – an indication that cultural detente could exist alongside political tensions" [Hudson 2019, p. 151]. This cultural reciprocity would reach a zenith in 1959 with the Soviet Exhibition in New York City in June [two months after the premiere of "Stalingrad"], the American Exhibition in Moscow in July and Nikita Khrushchev's visit to the United States in September. These exchanges birthed a renewed hope for peace, dubbed "the spirit of Camp David", after Khrushchev's sojourn with Eisenhower at the Presidential getaway, at the end of 1950s [Rosenberg 2005, p. 223]. A documentary on one of the defining battles of the Soviet Union in World War II was bound to garner attention, as is evidenced by CBS's publicizing the program with four different press releases and various write-ups.

Anti-communism in television

Although a bold move to present the war in the East, the series' portrayal of the Soviet Union was couched in anti-communist precepts that had permeated popular culture since the late 1940s. Media scholar Cydney Hendershot notes how during this period, "Suspicion of and

hatred for Communism, and especially Soviet Communism, formed the backdrop of Cold War politics" while popular culture aided in interpreting the threat [Hendershot 2003, p. 144]. Being particularly vulnerable to government regulation, the medium was quick to fall in line with popular attitudes and official lines of thinking. American television, in the words of J. Fred MacDonald, "flooded the culture with politicized rhetoric that, rather than reason with viewers, bombarded them with anti-Communist platitudes" [MacDonald 1985, p. 105].

One way it did this was by relating Soviet communism to Nazi fascism as "Red Fascism." On television, this link was illustrated largely in documentaries. These included overt anti-communist programs on the rise of the Soviet Union like NBC's "Nightmare in Red" (1954) to later specials in its *White Paper* series "The Death of Stalin" (1962) and "The Rise of Khrushchev" (1962) which depict the country's leaders relying on ideology, repression, and personality to jockey for control like the Axis leaders of World War II. Even an UpJohn, sponsor of the program "Who Goes There? A Primer on Communism", commercial draws parallels between the Axis powers and the Soviet Union. It displays a series of extreme closeups of Hitler, Tojo, and Stalin in tangent while a narrator describes America as a healthy and prosperous nation "thanks in part to the men who weren't shouting or marching, but just working quietly at Upjohn, hoping in their way to change things" [Curtin 1995, p. 48].

"Stalingrad"

The relation of communism and fascism through its leaders is apparent in the opening of "Stalingrad" which presents Hitler and Stalin side by side. The positioning of the two leaders – totalitarians, embodiments of their respective governments who led thousands to death for their megalomania – implies the two men are one in the same. Such imagery likens the leadership of Stalin to that of the Axis leaders, inviting the viewer to compare the Communist world to the legacy of fascism, America's past foe with its present.

Most of the program that follows, proceeds as a compact history of the battle and its brutal conditions with the two sides portrayed even-handedly. It is in the final minutes on the aftermath of the battle that the Cold War remerges. After the German surrender of February 2, 1942, Cronkite dubs the victory the turning point in the war on the Eastern Front, "decisive as Marne, Verdun, and the Battle of Britain", but reminds viewers, "From this point on the Russian Army will move constantly westward to the Danube, the Odor, and the Elbe. With it will march Soviet communism and the torments of a divided postwar world", as a

shot of a Soviet tank rolls westward through the snow. The program cuts to the arrival of one man, a man Cronkite calls "an important functionary in the Ukraine and virtually unknown outside of Russia", this man "will later direct communism's destinies – Nikita Khrushchev"[8].

Here the program connects the viewer of the present to the war. The viewers' mind would likely turn to domination of Eastern Europe and the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian Uprising a year previously. The appearance of Khrushchev further reinforces this. As Michael Heller and Steven Barson point out in their history of anti-communist propaganda and popular culture, by the late 1950s, "Khrushchev had taken on the aspect of King Kong, a fearsome monster who 'brought half the world to its knees!'" [Barson, Heller, p. 116]. The scene thus informs the viewer the ills of the contemporary Cold War are rooted in the Soviet victory.

"Stalingrad" furthers the notion of Soviet oppression with its ending depicting lines of cold, bandaged, poorly clothed German prisoners marching through the snow as Cronkite informs the viewer, "123,000 Germans, less than half of fortress Stalingrad, lived to be captured. Of these, 50,000 die on the road to Siberia or typhus ridden Russian prison camps. Since the war fewer than 5,000 have been returned to Germany. It is unlikely that any more will return"[9]. An ending which reinforces the perception of the Soviets as brutal conquerors. TV Keys, a team of critics used by several newspapers, said as much in their review noting it was, "hard in retrospect to remember how America's heart went out at the time to 'our brave allies"[10].

"Partisan: The Nazi-Soviet War"

The next portrayal of the Eastern Front by *The Twentieth Century* came on February 11, 1962 with the episode "Partisan: The Nazi-Soviet War". Unlike "Stalingrad", this episode takes a more expansive view, beginning with the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939 and ending with the German retreat of late 1941 with a focus on the rise of the partisan guerrilla fighters whilst highlighting the atrocities of the Stalin regime.

By 1962, animosities between the United States and Soviet Union were flaring from multiple events that ended the "Thaw" period of the

[8] Stalingrad. New York: CBS, Apr. 19, 1959.

[9] Ibid.

[10] TV Keys. The Twentieth Century: "Stalingrad" // Herald and Review. 1959. Apr. 19. P. 48.

Cold War. The downing of a U-2 spy-plane's flight over Russia in May 1960 proved American spying efforts, despite Eisenhower's initial denial. His subsequent refusal to apologize sabotaged the goodwill fostered from Khrushchev's visit to the United States. These tensions were soon heightened by the alignment of Cuba to the Soviet Union under Fidel Castro and the Berlin Crisis of 1961, where American and Soviet tanks faced each other over the occupational status and partition of Germany. Only a weeks after the Berlin Wall was erected, Khrushchev broke a three-year Soviet-American moratorium on nuclear bomb testing which climaxed with the detonation in November of a 58-megaton bomb, 3,000 times more powerful than the one dropped on Hiroshima [LaFeber 2002, p. 220–224]. Tensions between the two-superpowers were flaring up.

Such animosity permeated American popular culture, especially on television. The Kennedy Administration made it known to networks and syndicators their desire for more programming to promote their foreign policy initiatives culminating Federal Communications Commissioner Newton Minow's infamous "vast wasteland speech" of May 9, 1961. Broadcasters responded with a record number of documentaries that aimed to enlighten Americans on issues within the nation and world, many tinged with anti-communist prerogatives. The 1961–1962 television season, in which "Partisan" premiered, witnessed the airing of an unprecedented 46 documentaries on the big three networks, most with an anti-communist slant. These included examinations of issues like the ongoing Berlin Crisis in "Khrushchev and the Wall" (NBC) and illustrations of the dangers of communist influence like "Red Heresy" (ABC) and "The Hot and Cold War's of Allan Dulles" (CBS) [Curtin 1995, p. 263–264]. Such programming stressed the duplicity of the Soviet government and their totalitarian ambitions, while highlighting the tragic toll of these ambitions [MacDonald 1985, p. 188–190]. *The Twentieth Century* added to this stream of thought with its telling of the prelude and aftermath of the German invasion of the Soviet Union.

The program describes the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact as "an uneasy bargain with Hitler" made by Stalin who now, "makes plans for war". The program cuts to images of battle as Stalin begins the Winter War of 1940 while fueling the Nazi war machine with Soviet goods. The viewer watches sacks of grain and train cars of oil sent to Germany as Cronkite explains, "The Soviet breadbasket is plundered by Stalin to pay off the political debt" to "fuel Hitler's panzers already poised to attack the West" whilst "every part of Russia is deprived of food". It cuts to November 1940 where Stalin has sent his Minister of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov, "a hearty Bolshevik", to "insist that Hitler acknowledge Russia's dominance in Eastern Europe as the 'Reds' have

already annexed Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. This again highlights Fascist-Communist equivalency with Molotov's words used to show the two as equals while by detailing the Soviet complicity in the sufferings of World War II. Stalin and other "hearty Bolsheviks" helped start the war, supply the Nazis, and annex free countries as the Nazis had in Western Europe[11].

"Partisan" utilizes another aspect of anti-Soviet propaganda to greater effect: the separating the people of the Soviet Union from the government. While Stalin and his aides are condemned for their actions, the people at large presented as prisoners of the communist system and its leaders' terror. As the German Army moves further inward through Ukraine, Belorussia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the episode notes how hundreds of thousands, "Fanatically hating the Stalin regime, gladly surrender, and are ready to cooperate with the Germans in any way." The narration details how, "Ukrainians, Cossacks, Moslems, and other minorities at last can voice their resentment of Stalin. Millions horrified under communism welcome their conquerors as liberators". Footage of crowds waving and saluting passing German soldiers, throwing flowers and openly embracing Nazi soldiers is accompanied by people destroying monuments to Lenin and Stalin, which Cronkite calls "symbols of tyranny"[12]. This reinforces Michael Curtin's conclusion on the style of anti-communist documentary of the early 1960s:

> the 'effects' of these programs were not limited to what they had to say about particular places or events but included how they positioned these elements in relation to other elements, drawing attention to some things while obscuring others [Curtin 1995, p. 39].

According to the program it is only Hitler's order of mass-enslavement and persecution of the "racially inferior Slavs" what the program dubs, "Hitler's most fatal blunder", that led the people to take up arms, for their "homeland" and their "lives". This creates the partisan forces which sabotaged the Nazi war machine and turned the tide of the war. The episode makes it clear that the Soviet partisan guerrilla fighters are not Communists. Cronkite calls the civilian soldiers "minute men", like those in the American Revolutionary War, with the only semblance of government support stated in the program is the commissars dropping ideology to urge people to fight, "not for communism, but for Mother Russia"[13].

---

[11] Partisan: The Nazi-Soviet War. New York: CBS, Feb. 11, 1962.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

"The Siege of Leningrad"

The Twentieth Century would address the Eastern Front in another four programs between 1962 and 1965, the most notable is "The Siege of Leningrad" which premiered on February 28, 1965. It was the first program made with footage from the Soviet archives [Bartone 1985, p. 163] which offers a grand display of the struggle for survival in the city's 880-day siege[14]. Unlike the previous entries, the program is free of the anti-communist trappings of its predecessors; instead focusing on the plight of Leningrad's citizens, victims of the German war machine, who suffer over a million losses in the siege yet never give up. The viewer sees the damage of the German bombardment, children pulling sleds of dead bodies through the snow, and women receiving their minuscule bread ration, which is made partly from tree bark, cotton seed, or moldy grain salvaged from sunken ships. Here the audience is not reminded of the atrocities of the Stalin regime or the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe, only of the people's indefatigable will to survive[15]. One review echoed such sentiment, noting how the program "is built around the Russians' inexhaustible spirit, in temperatures 50 degrees below zero, to keep their city free"[16].

Such depiction is the result of the easing of U.S.-Soviet relations by the mid-1960s. The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 spurred a reappraisal of the maxims of Mutually Assured Destruction while reinforcing the need for better communication between the two nations. This spawned legislation like the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963 which in turn was complimented by a new look at the Soviet Union in the media. Hendershot notes how the move towards attempting peaceful coexistence by the two governments translated into a "gradual humanizing of American images of Russia" [Hendershot 2003, p. 143]. These emphasized the people and their similarities with Americans, whether students or housing communities, while the government leaders are shown heralding cooperation and co-existence, not nuclear superiority.

American television was also going to the USSR to bring Americans a comprehensive look at life in the Soviet Union. The fall of 1965 NBC broadcast a half-hour news report on the personalities and political at-

[14] Isaac Kleinerman, with the help of CBS's Moscow correspondent Stuart Novins, negotiated the purchase of the 58-minute Soviet documentary *The Bastion of Neve* and available outtakes from the State Committee of Radio and Television, which was re-edited into the episode.

[15] The Siege of Leningrad. New York: CBS, Feb. 28, 1965.

[16] TV Scout. The Siege of Leningrad // The News-Herald. 1965. Feb. 20. P 0.

titudes of the Soviet Union's new leaders Leonid Brezhnev and Aleksei Kosygin. *CBS Reports* news program would air a program on a voyage down the Volga River and life in the Russian heartland for its 7th season premiere in January 1966[17]. *The Twentieth Century* too would go to the Soviet Union, when, after years of requests, the producers received Soviet approval and aid to film a program on student life at Moscow University for their ninth season, free of any hassle by the Soviet censors[18].

Conclusion

The Twentieth Century's presentation of the Eastern Front of World War II is a prime example of how the Cold War affected the presentation of the war. Narrative framing and selective information were used portray to the Soviets in line with anti-Communist propaganda. Thus, what Americans knew about the Soviet side of the war was slanted to arouse contempt for communism and sympathy for those living under such governments. With "The Siege of Leningrad" the presentation became more neutral as relations improved between the two superpowers. Yet, *The Twentieth Century*'s end and the lessening of World War II documentary on television through the late 1960s meant Americans would not get a comprehensive view of the Eastern Front until the 1970s. The eased cultural relations fostered by Détente in the 1970s spurred the production of the 1978 documentary series *The Unknown War*. This 20-episode series in the style of *The World at War* but solely about the Eastern Front, produced by a joint American-Soviet team (including Isaac Kleinerman) and made largely with footage from the Soviet central state film archive (VGIK). Reflecting the state of the Cold War it offered the Soviet perspective on the war for Americans who long knew little of the conflict.

References

Barson, M. and Heller, S. (2001), *Red Scared: The Commie Menace in Propaganda and Popular Culture,* Chronicle Books, San Francisco.

Bartone, R.C. (1985), *The Twentieth Century (CBS, 1957–1966) Television Series: A History and Analysis*, Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, New York, USA.

Bluem, W. (1965), *Documentary in American Television: Form, Function, Method*. Hastings House, New York.

[17] *Doan R.* Life in the USSR // The Evening Review. 1965. May 19. P. 31.

[18] *Byers B.* Meet Ike Kleinerman: Out of the Classrooms And Off to Siberia? // The Kingston Daily Freeman. 1966. Feb. 19. P. 22.

Curtin, M. (1995), *Redeeming the Wasteland: Television Documentary and Cold War Politics*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ, USA.

Doherty, T.P. (1993), *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II*, Columbia University Press, New York, USA.

Hendershot, C. (2003), *Anti-Communism and Popular Culture in Mid-Century America*, MacFarland & Company, Inc., Jefferson, NC.

Hudson, J.M. (2019), *Iron Curtain Twitchers: Russo-American Cold War Relations*, Lexington Books, New York,

LaFeber, W. (2002), *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-2000*, McGraw Hill, New York.

MacDonald, J.F. (1985), *Television and the Red Menace: The Video Road to Vietnam*, Praeger, New York, USA.

Rollins, P.C. (2003), " 'Victory at Sea': Cold War Epic", in Edgerton, G.R. and Rollins, P.C. (eds.), *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age*, University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, KY, pp. 103–122.

Rosenberg, V. (2005), *Soviet-American Relations, 1953-1960: Diplomacy and Cultural Exchange During the Eisenhower Presidency*, McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, Jefferson, NC.

Smelser, R. and Davies, E.J. (2008), *The Myth of the Eastern Front: The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture*, Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge.

Information about the author

Michael LoSasso, M.A. (History, American Studies), Ph. D. Candidate with a focus on Cold War Cultural History, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL, the United States of America; 4202 E Fowler Ave, Tampa, FL 33620, the United States of America; losassom@usf.edu

Информация об авторе

Майкл Лосассо, магистр (история, американские исследования), докторант Университета Южной Флориды, Тампа, Флорида, США; 4202 E Fowler Ave, Tampa, FL 33620, United States of America; losassom@usf.edu