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# Rulers, Rhetoric, and Ray-Guns: A Post Colonial Look at 90's Alien Invasion Media

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RULERS, RHETORIC, AND RAY-GUNS:  
A POST COLONIAL LOOK AT 90'S ALIEN INVASION MEDIA

A Thesis  
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Logan Matthew Hudspeth

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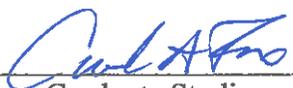
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RULERS, RHETORIC, AND RAY-GUNS:  
A POST COLONIAL LOOK AT 90'S ALIEN INVASION MEDIA

Logan Hudspeth

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70 Pages

Directed by: Jeffrey Rice, Ted Hovet, David LeNoir

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This thesis opens discussion on American alien invasion films of the 90s as a self-critique, a reaction to being an imperial power at the end of the Cold War. The alien menace in these films is not the "other" but rather the U.S. itself being the colonizer or conqueror looking to expand its sphere of influence. Furthermore, it discusses how Presidential rhetoric in the films play a role in this postcolonial reading. Specific works studied are: *Independence Day* (1996), *Mars Attacks!* (1996), *Babylon 5: In the Beginning* (1998), and *The Puppet Masters* (1994).

## Chapter 1:

### Introduction

*"The Western American way doesn't allow the past to be mourned or apologies to be made. Instead we make alien invasion movies." -Julie Clawson in "Neocolonialism and Cowboys and Aliens"*

Alien invasion films are, at their heart, about some advanced power invading a country (or world) that has a lower standard of technology. This invaded subject then has to either fight an uphill battle to wrest control of their land from the invaders or find some weak point in the alien menace, as if in a video game. The key in this definition is hostile intent on the part of the aliens, which makes this definition exclude films like *E.T.*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, or *Batteries Not Included*, as the aliens encountered in these films are non-aggressive. Aggressive cinematic aliens tend to use two main methods of invasion: infiltration or planetary assault.

Infiltration can be seen in films like *The Thing*, *The Puppet Masters*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and *Dreamcatcher*. The power of the invaders is often bio-tech or simply their biology, and this sinister method of invasion lends itself well to academic criticism of "fear of the other." In this scenario, the threat comes from within; we cannot tell who are the aliens and who are humans, and our humanity is put on trial as we try to root out subversive elements without destroying loyal humans.

Planetary assault is the preferred method for films like *Mars Attacks!*, *War of the Worlds*, or *Independence Day*. Here we have aliens using their superior technology to wipe away resistance. This is a much more familiar scenario, these aliens use more conventional warfare tactics adapted to their own war machine, as any force of humans

would given the same level of technology. In these films, we see flying saucers instead of APCs, we see city-destroying death rays instead of atom bombs, we see alien metal or biological armor instead of flak jackets.

But, why would a technologically/militarily superior race invade Earth? According to Charlie Anders, pop culture writer for iO9, resources as we perceive them are in abundance elsewhere (asteroids can be mined for minerals or water), so it seems unlikely that a space-faring species would bother with a military takeover of another planet for those alone. Invasion to acquire slaves is possible, though we can assume that if the aliens have technology for interstellar travel then they probably also have technology to create robots, so why do they need humans as slaves? Xenophobia is also possible, but if that is the case, why would they risk exposure in close quarters when they could lob asteroids at the planet to wipe us out .

If we follow this line of reasoning, then the aliens must represent something else, something more conventional that would use these tactics. . . like humans.

### **Aliens as symbols:**

The grotesque alien monsters that are the threat to the humans are symbols for humans. As Jenna Busch, geek culture writer for the *Huffington Post*, observes "It's very dangerous to focus your anger on a group of fellow humans, but it's okay to direct it at aliens. They're like bank robbers wearing masks, or storm troopers in *Star Wars*. You can't see their faces, so it's okay to hate them" (qtd. in Butler). Aliens can be a safe metaphor for whatever human threat the filmmakers or society decide them to be.

We can further see this human connection in how aliens are portrayed on the movie screen. They are driven most often by human-like impulses; for instance, the

Martians of *Mars Attacks!* are imbued with stereotypically male impulses, as Karen Schneider observes in her critique, "They [are] . . . highly conventional men . . . despite a lack of discernible sex markers, for they drool over *Playboy* centerfolds and fog their bubbles as they voyeuristically observe humans having sex" ("Unexpected" 10). While not all aliens are as sexualized as the little green men of *Mars Attacks!*, most invading aliens have some motivation that seems human-like.

If they are a rhetorical symbol for humanity, both they and the real threat they represent must be worthy of our enmity. That enmity must also arise from the dominant paradigm of the film's country of origin, either to get it through the studio system or to make it successful at the box office. Robert W. Butler observes of the cold-war era Alien invasion films that "Their popularity was born in the fears of communism and atomic annihilation." Post-U.S.S.R.-dissolution films, however, pose a problem.

The 1990's seemed to have no specific menace for a reasonable alien metaphor. Michael Schau, executive editor of *Entertainment Marketing Letter*, observed, "We've run out of enemies again for us to fight. . . . We've beaten the communists. . . . The only bad guys left that are safe to pick on are the ultimate 'them'--aliens" (qtd. in Jensen). If that is the case, it seems odd that the 1990's would spawn such a wide variety of alien invasion media, including big-budget films, if there was not a compelling, clear danger. Who were we so afraid of, to hide them behind grotesque alien faces?

### **I, Alien:**

We were afraid of ourselves. With no imminent threat of nuclear annihilation, and no *Red Dawn* (1984)-esque Soviet invasion, the people of America were forced to turn their attention inward, and those dark, inhuman faces were what we saw. Elazar Barkan

also notes this self-reflection in the 1990's: "moral issues came to dominate public attention and political issues, and displayed the willingness of nations to embrace their own guilt. This national self-reflexivity is the new guilt of nations" (2). I would posit that the goal of winning the cold war and extending our sphere of influence through our neo-colonial endeavors was so pressing that we had lost sight of our humanity, thus fostering guilt in the American consciousness.

Another trend in film at the same time was a notable surge in the portrayal of high-office figures; the 1990s had the greatest number of Hollywood films that included a presidential character (Uscinski 694). I would argue that this is because of the loss of our major conflict in the public eye. Without the cold war to focus on, filmmakers looked at the institution of the presidency, and the numbers seem to bear this out, as "rather than showing a 'rally around the flag' effect, filmmakers appear less likely to address the institution of the presidency during Cold War years" (Uscinski 698).

Putting aside the "orthodox version" of the cold war where, as Noam Chomsky summarizes, "there are two forces in the world, at opposite poles. In one corner we have absolute evil [the U.S.S.R.]; in the other, sublimity [the United States]. . . . The diabolical force . . . must seek total domination of the world" (*Deterring Democracy* 10), the U.S.'s motives are much more suspect during the Cold War period. Chomsky goes on to explain, "it is commonly conceded well after the fact . . . that the threat of Soviet aggression was exaggerated, the problems were misconstrued, and the idealism that guided the actions was misplaced" (*Deterring Democracy* 23).

The ugly truth, as Chomsky puts it, is "the interests of the 'concentrations of private power' in the United States that largely dominated the world capitalist system

have been advanced by . . . pursuit of the 'national interest'" ("Foreign Policy and the Intelligentsia" 166). Chomsky frames this in a broader context among U.S. history, but the Cold War era is no different. U.S. interests were primarily economic, rather than ideological, as, in the dominant Western paradigm after WWII, the third world was "to fulfill its major function as a source of raw materials and a market' for the Western industrial societies" (*Deterring Democracy* 143).

American neo-colonialism is a combination of military might and economic power. As the free market expands into third-world nations, U.S.-based business goes with it, exploits the new market for its own profit, and makes the economic situation for that nation worse. The colonized nation must then look to the United States for political and/or military aid when it cannot fulfill its obligations to its people or its neighbors, further indebting them to the United States. With this debt, the influence of the U.S. in that foreign state grows.

### **Liminal America:**

If the U.S. is cast in the role as the alien invaders, they are also the invaded. As a creation of the Hollywood system, the film's protagonists have to be American or American-analogues as well. Moreover, these analogues should be idealized metonyms for the United States as a whole. In these films, it is as though Hollywood had become America's subconscious, where the noble, illusory U.S. (the U.S. of the orthodox Cold War story) fought the diabolic, harsh U.S. This battle is played out, not within the souls of the policy makers, but in mass consumable media, films and television.

America, however, cannot survive as both diabolic grotesque and Hollywood ideal. One must be shed to allow the other to survive in the hearts and minds of the

populace, hence the conflict. Invariably, as these are products of Hollywood, the "good guys" (read: humans) must win. The analogue being, most often, the better nature of America wins out; that romantic, independent spirit that drove off the British in the War of Independence is still strong. This is how we could absolve ourselves of the guilt of neo-colonial expansion: using these films to paint ourselves as the good guys once again. Arguably, chief among the good guys is the President of the United States or whatever head-of-state analogue is appropriate for the narrative.

### **Role of the President:**

Uscinski asserts "the inclusion of a president in film indicates not only that the film is at least remotely political, but that it speaks to what the public perceives as the embodiment of U.S. government" (700). This implies the role of the President in a film carries with it some baggage, precisely what the baggage is, though I do not completely agree that it is political in all cases, as what is the President but a symbol of America. Still, filmmakers must be aware of this when they add a presidential character. They want the American audience to examine him with increased scrutiny.

That scrutiny in the 1990s is noted by Antonio Sanchez-Escalonilla, who asserts "Hollywood had . . . diverted its attention at that time to villainous proceedings within the state apparatus itself" (14). So in the case of alien invasion films, the audience's eyes are forced to turn to the President as a symbol for the hapless everyman. If we are engaging in political naivety, or the way things should work in a (to borrow Chomsky's definition in the orthodox view of the Cold War) sublime system, then the President is chosen by the people to be their representative. This makes the President an "everyman," someone

who represents everyone collectively. So their response to alien threats is not so much as a leader, but as a noble American.

### **The Product:**

What these films said to us at the time in regards to American colonialism seems to have gone unremarked. As I mentioned previously, these films are rhetoric to the American Populace, selling them on a post-colonial/post-imperial vision of America--a vision that may have been missed by those in power.

## Chapter 2:

### Literature Review

*"Would you like to know more?"- Fed Net Announcer in Starship Troopers.*

#### Colonialism vs. Postcolonialism

The field of postcolonial/colonial sci-fi scholarship is rather sparse. As Jessica Langer rightly points out, the field of Postcolonial criticism of science fiction is like an "elephant shaped hole" (1). While scholars may have been slow to put science-fiction under the colonial/postcolonial lense for examination, it is now growing.

*Postcolonialism and Science Fiction* by Jessica Langer and *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* by John Rieder are both great foundational texts to frame future scholarship.

Langer takes definitions of postcolonialism and shows how they need to be expanded to accommodate science fiction from postcolonial societies. She cites scholars such as Robert Young and Ato Quayson who attempt to define postcolonialism in terms of chronology, particularly citing Young for defining the postcolonial as "what happens after colonization *begins* rather than after it *ends*" (Langer 4).

She then looks at Ato Quayson's criticism that the study of postcolonialism is shifted too far into the discourse side of things, rather than looking at the very real economic and social conditions that create that discourse; Langer suggests this "materialist approach risks denying the real power of narrative and other discourse as catharsis and the real necessity of psychological as well as physical decolonization" (6).

Langer focuses on five areas of interest: historical contexts, diaspora, race, hybridity, and indigenous knowledge. While many of these could have been applied to

the United States, Langer instead chooses to focus primarily on other areas. Also, many of these themes seem to play out more overtly rather than covertly in the texts that Langer examines.

First, there are the histories of nations that have at one time been colonized, and at others been the colonizer. Here the foci are Japan, including its opening to the west and imperial expansion, and Canada, citing its status as a "breakaway settler colony" (12) and its historical marginalization of First Nation Indians. These voices are not often given consideration because much of the field of postcolonialism is focused mostly on European powers during the heyday of imperialism.

Langer focuses her next chapter on diaspora, the displaced people, and location identities. Whenever groups come into conflict there are often people who must move, and build new identities around locations they move from or move to. It is in this chapter that Langer looks at settler colonies and breakaway settler colonies, who have shifted from diaspora to a location identity. Again, while she chooses to focus more on Canada, and shows the link between whiteness and identity, this could work just as easily for America--a breakaway settler colony that has historically othered non-whites, or even groups that do not fall into the upper and middle classes. For instance, Langer cites the hyphenated Canadians that become more white as time goes on and thus more accepted by the national narrative, and distinguishes a difference between internal and external diaspora. While colonies originate from external diaspora, it is internal diaspora we will see more of in Chapter 3, where an indigenous people become displaced from their location by the acts of a colonizer--a similar tragic example out of American history would be the re-settling of Native Americans to reservations in the Midwest.

In a break from non-American works, Langer chooses to make the focal point of her chapter on race the wildly popular MMORPG *World of Warcraft*. She chooses here to focus on the distinctions between the various races/species of the game and how their cultures are portrayed in regards to real-life analogues. While each culture in the game world (or perhaps by extension any work of sci-fi) is a caricature, the danger comes when one mistakes the representation for the real thing; or perhaps mistaking participancy for subjectiveness of the other due to the interactive nature of this particular piece of media. She terms this as "identity tourism."

Identity tourism works equally well in film, as the audience is drawn in to sympathize with the protagonists. Since the texts being examined in later chapters overtly cast the United States in the role of the colonized, and the American audiences are drawn in to feel sympathy for the American characters, one could argue these films also force us into identity tourism. As a colonizer and a breakaway colony who has historically marginalized voices of diasporic elements in our populace, we are wholly unprepared to have a reasonable subjectivity for the colonized, yet, as discussed later, we try anyway!

In chapter four, Langer looks at hybridity, nativism, and transgression. This chapter focuses on the figure of the hybrid, the hopeful or sometimes threatening portrayal of a person who is not completely human. Langer highlights some sci-fi where the hybridity is embraced, or others where the act of hybridity is a transgression, a radical step and statement away from perceived societal norms. Though much more importantly, we see the possibility of a knee-jerk reaction to this hybridity in nativism, which will be discussed more in Chapter 6; this nativism is a desire, often destructive, to return to a pre-colonial state as though the colonizers had never arrived.

In the final chapter Langer shows how postcolonial sci-fi deals with the dichotomy between western science and indigenous knowledge. She posits that "a post-colonial view of science fiction foregrounds the concept that indigenous and other colonized systems of knowledge are not only valid but at times more scientifically sound than is Western scientific thought" (Langer 131), which will be discussed later. She also discusses the culture clash between western "progress"-oriented culture and what they would view as the barbaric cultures of the people they colonized. These clashes come in the form of those who, on the part of the colonists, want to either leave the indigenous people "pure" and the indigenous people who want the advanced technology of the colonizer, or, as we will see more of in later chapters, the colonized who want to return to an imagined "golden age" of their pre-colonized days against the cultural changes wrought by the colonizer.

We also need to discuss the mirror of this postcolonial, the colonial history of science fiction; John Rieder's *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* is lauded as the most comprehensive look at how colonialism and western science-fiction literature are intertwined. In early science fiction, "having no place on Earth left for the radical exoticism of unexplored territory, the writers invent places elsewhere" (*Colonialism* ch.1). Of course the opposite view is true, as "a satirical reversal of hierarchies generates the comparison of extraterrestrials to colonialists in an episode from Washington Irving's *A History of New York by Diedrich Knickerbocker*" (Rieder ch.1); thus we have one of the earliest alien invasion stories being directly linked to colonialism, as the extraterrestrials view the human culture of New York with the same

disdain or curiosity as early western anthropologists viewed the "barbaric" cultures of their nation's colonial holdings.

Rieder shows this trend continuing, further explaining the view of aliens to humans when speaking about 19th century sci-fi (like *War of the Worlds*):

The confrontation of humans and Martians is thus a kind of anachronism, an incongruous co-habitation of the same moment by people and artifacts from different times. But this anachronism is the mark of an anthropological difference, that is, the way late-nineteenth-century anthropology conceptualized the play of identity and difference between the scientific observer and the anthropological subject--both human, but inhabiting different moments in the history of civilization. (*Colonialism* ch.1)

We assume, even in alien-invasion works today, that the aliens are more or less like humans. The threat comes from advanced technology that we deem as "futuristic," which connotes that we humans can advance to that level of technology, we just are not there yet. Therefore, any alien invasion narrative could be an analogue for any advanced imperial power of humans colonizing another, less advanced group.

When linking imperialism to science fiction, Rieder states, "For the historian of science fiction, the point has less to do with the sharing of real wealth than with the reading public's vicarious enjoyment of colonial spoils" (*Colonialism* ch.1). To illustrate, Eric Hobsbawm's criticism of *The Time Machine* is about the Eloi and Morlocks representing "the 'parasitism at the centre' of imperialism and fears of 'the eventual triumph of the barbarians'" (qtd in *Colonialism* ch.1). While the people consuming the media may not necessarily be the colonizers, they will sympathize with the Eloi, as they

too are benefiting from their nation's imperialist actions. The Morlocks are othered, barbarians who remain a threat to the Eloi despite not having been directly involved with the colonization.

Rieder then identifies ideological fantasies in use in colonial science fiction, the most basic being "We know very well that there are people living in this land, but we act as if it were empty before our arrival" (*Colonialism* ch.1). This is the sort of thinking that has become ingrained in the history of the United States as we hail the pilgrims and frontiersmen as those who helped forge America, rather than the Native Americans who were already here.

The next fantasy is the missionary fantasy: "Although we know that our arrival disrupts and destroys the traditional way of life here, we believe that it fulfills the deep needs and desires of all right-thinking natives" (*Colonialism* ch.1). The most obvious example of this is Christianizing the natives of colonies, which we have seen played out in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* or Herzog's *Aguirre: The Wrath of God*. In regards to science fiction and invasion stories, we find some analogues here with *The Puppet Masters*, which I will discuss later.

The third fantasy Rieder identifies is the anthropologist's fantasy: "Although we know that these people exist here and now, we also consider them to exist in the past--in fact, to be our own past" (*Colonialism* ch.1). This is exemplified in "new technology [and] the new technology's scarcity" (*Colonialism* ch.1). An example of this fantasy in play in pop culture is in *Star Trek: Enterprise*, Vulcans withheld warp drive technology from Humans, partly because Humans reminded them of their own tumultuous past.

Rieder also points out the genre of lost-race fiction. This is a fantasy where the colonizers and the colonized are linked via some distant strand of history where the two peoples broke away from each other. Rieder describes lost-race plots to be "summarized on the whole as fantasies of appropriation in (and sometimes of) the 'virgin territory' of previously inaccessible foreign lands" (*Colonialism* ch. 2). As this trope plays out, the work of the colonizer is deemed acceptable because these people they are colonizing were once a part of their own culture anyway, and it is simply seen as welcoming them back into the fold. Rieder explains:

Lost-race fiction. . . derives its fundamental 'mythic' power from the way it negotiates the basic problem of ownership by simultaneously reveling in the discovery of uncharted territory and representing the journey as a *return* to a lost legacy, a place where the travelers find a fragment of their own history lodged in the midst of a native population that usually has forgotten the connection. (*Colonialism* ch. 2, emphasis Rieder)

This plot device is used less in the 90's than earlier works, save for *Stargate*, where the people on the other side of the gate were transplanted humans, but it also does come into play in *Babylon 5: In the Beginning* as I will discuss later.

### **Guilt and Rhetoric**

What we have are two very opposing branches of scholarship, yet, I would argue, that science fiction works, like those discussed in later chapters, occupy a liminal space between these two, comprised of both categories. In the following chapters, I will discuss works that show awareness of the colonial side, yet as they were produced when the neo-colonial expansion of the United States was not as necessary with the collapse of

the Soviet Union, they must be doing something more than just re-telling the colonial story. Rieder argues that colonialism "is part of the genre's texture, a persistent, important component of its displaced references to history, *its engagement in ideological production*, and its construction of the possible and the imaginable" (*Colonialism* ch. 1, emphasis mine). So the question becomes what ideological purpose do these invasion stories serve? Following this line of thought, Rieder claims in an earlier work that:

The invasion story is the form of science fiction disaster that, whatever its psychological basis, is most heavily and consistently overdetermined by its reference to colonialism. The plot of invasion and subjugation by a technologically superior alien race is also one that can be traced in both its continuities and its *moral and political fluctuations* from the Victorian era to the present. ("Science Fiction, Colonialism" 378, emphasis mine)

This begs the question, what moral and political fluctuations were in place in the 1990's to spawn big alien invasion films like *Independence Day*, *Mars Attacks!*, or *The Puppet Masters*? Prior to these films, the 1990's saw the end of the cold war. The United States was the arguable winner as the U.S.S.R. collapsed. Thus we have a political fluctuation. The United States was left with all of its imperial holdings, as discussed in chapter 1.

For moral fluctuations, we have to take into account Langer's suggestion of a breakaway settler colony. America is a nation that prides itself on the fact that it was a colony, but broke away from imperial rule to form its own nation. American history vilifies Great Britain as being a distant imperial overlord with no real connection to the American colonies or its people. So when the United States has neo-colonial holdings, and sees itself cast in the same light as the imperial power it broke away from over two

centuries ago there arises a feeling of guilt. This guilt is the liberal guilt that has trickled from English literature into film.

In *The Birth of Liberal Guilt in the English Novel*, Daniel Born states that guilt has become "not in any way descriptive of actual behavior but instead persists as a symptom of what is now commonly labelled 'low self-esteem'" (15). Further, when talking of Edwardians, Born cites Jefferson Hunter:

A sense of vague disquiet. . . was typical. In a few cases this disquiet, whatever its source, produced something one can only call a bad conscience about imperialism, and the bad conscience in turn produced imaginative reactions--fictions in which altered or symbolic form admit guilt, reveal atrocities, express doubts. (16)

We can see this guilt in the criticisms of imperialism such as Wells' *War of the Worlds*. This sense of disquiet and bad conscience about imperialism is a repeatable phenomenon and not limited to England, as the moral self-reflection that Barkan observed suggests. A similar disquiet happened after the Cold War in America, this disquiet manifested itself in politicized fictional works, such as films like *Bulworth* (1998), wherein an American senator tries to have himself assassinated and ends up honestly talking about the ills of society to his voters, *Wag the Dog* (1997), where a fake war is televised to distract the people from a Presidential sex scandal, and the alien invasion films I will be discussing in later pages of this thesis.

Jessica Langer stumbles onto an interesting point that I would like to explore more; in citing Gregory Benford, she says "there is a 'deep, unconscious need' in formerly (and in the case of America, arguably currently) colonial societies to return to the site of

conflict, trauma, and destruction" (84). Langer even calls Benford out on what she describes as "the necessity to give an appalled cry at the suggestion that 'retreading', or rather working through and remembering, of our own colonial history is a problem rather than a necessity" (84). The question raised, though, is why is it a "necessity" and what is the cause of this "deep, unconscious need" to retell these stories? We retread these old problems in an attempt to absolve ourselves from a sense of nagging guilt.

The rhetoric of this absolution is what concerns this thesis. In continually recasting ourselves as the victims of invasion, what rhetoric is at play to convince the American audience of these politicized alien invasion fictions? What are we really trying to convince ourselves of and how are we doing it?

### **Areas of Focus**

In the following chapters, I will examine four alien invasion films from the 1990s. Chapter 3 will examine *Independence Day*, themes of diaspora among the colonized, the rhetorical image of America the film conveys, and particularly the figure of President Whitmore as a political figure rebelling against the colonial alien forces. Chapter 4 will focus on *Mars Attacks!*, and the figure of President James Dale as a figure positioning himself as a collaborator to the colonial power. Chapter 5 will focus on *Babylon 5: In the Beginning*, the interplay between Humans and Minbari as colonizer and colonized, and the President of The Earth Alliance and her rhetoric of survival. Chapter 6 will examine *The Puppet Masters*, the President as a cultural symbol, and Nativism.

### Chapter 3:

#### *Independence Day*

"Welcome to Earth." --Captain Steven Hiller after punching an Alien.

"*Independence Day* had the rare distinction for a 1990's movie of being approved by both the incumbent, Bill Clinton, and the Republican challenger, Senator Bob Dole, during the 1996 presidential election campaign," explains Jude Davies, most likely because of "its ambivalence with respect to American exceptionalism" (402). Davies attributes this ambivalence to an intersection of ideologies in the 90's:

Read one way, it looks back to the Second World War/Cold War ideologies of the United States as the saviour of democracy; read another way, it looks forward to American global leadership predicated on its own successful integration of 'diversity.' (402)

This ambivalence, I feel, is indicative of a missed mark. While each ideology can be extrapolated from *Independence Day*, neither are truly satisfying. The film itself does not place democratic ideals in its rhetoric as opposed to monarchies or totalitarian regimes, nor does the film put the United States in a position of global leadership as I will discuss later.

In contrast, in an essay on using science fiction cinema as a pedagogical tool, Kenneth Madsen observes "As with many alien invasion movies, [*Independence Day*] can be interpreted as an imperial movement to control resources with little regard for the world's current (i.e., indigenous) population" (54). Here is an interpretation that satisfies,

a critique of colonialism and the harvesting of economic resources it brings, disguised as a sci-fi action film--a disguise that worked a bit too well.

Even if the critique is covert, it joins a tradition of alien invasion works that critique the colonial drives of capitalist nations. The unnamed aliens of *Independence Day* echo the Martians of *War of the Worlds*, of which Rieder observes: "Wells's Martians bear a sustained resemblance to Marx's description of capital itself: emotionless, calculating, unsleeping, and vampiric. . . Wells fashions his Martians to resemble industrial capitalists as well as colonialists" ("Science Fiction, Colonialism" 383). I would add physically awkward to the list of descriptors, so much so that without their machines, the Martians are too awkward to move on Earth at any great clip. The aliens of *Independence Day* are similarly nuanced. The awkward top-heavy aliens with spindly limbs and backward-facing toes in their bio-mechanical suits seem totally counter-intuitive to movement on earth, so the main threat comes from the technology of their fighters and destroyers. Their faces are, apart from eyebrow-ridge movements, unemotive; their precise, chess-like movements in sweeping away the indigenous population speaks to their calculatory nature, and their vampiric nature can be seen not only in their planned consumption of Earth's resources, but also in the way the captured alien pilot uses the lifeless body of Dr. Okun (Brent Spiner) to communicate.

### **Colonial Forces**

While monstrous, just like the Martians of Wells's novel, the aliens of *Independence Day* are representative of colonial humans. The film makes it clear to the audience, as Dr. Okun explains, "Really they're not all that dissimilar from us. Breathes

oxygen, comparable tolerances to heat, cold. . . Their bodies are just as frail as ours" in an overt effort to biologically equate the aliens to humans.

What visible differences there are make them caricatures of colonials. They have enlarged craniums and no vocal chords, so these aliens have more mental capacity than the humans, and communicate in ways the humans cannot understand. This seems oddly reminiscent of a "civilized, intelligent" western power meeting the "barbaric" populations of lands to be colonized, communicating with them only through interpreters and not bothering or feeling it necessary to learn the language of the indigenous population. Had they done so, there likely would have been an ultimatum sent, some method of communication that issued demands. Humans could just have as easily been enslaved *a la Battlefield Earth* (2000), or *Robot Holocaust* (1986). This lack of communication makes it seem as though the humans, to the colonizers, are little more than vermin, and would fit in with one of Rieder's ideological fantasies.

As discussed in chapter 1, the third world was a treasure trove of resources and new markets for the Western, industrialized nations. This scenario for the aliens and humans could, at best, be considered one of Rieder's "Anthropologist's Fantasy" where the West could sell its technological advancements into developing markets, or, at worst, be the basic "New Land" ideological fantasy where the resources are there for the advanced peoples, while the primitives already inhabiting the land are beneath notice.

It seems obvious that the monstrous colonial aliens of *Independence Day* have the harsher paradigm when it comes to the "third world" in our solar system, evinced by Whitmore's description of the alien's thoughts: "They're like locusts. They're moving from planet to planet, their whole civilization. After they've consumed every natural

resource, they move on. And we're next." Or further shown by the callous way in which the alien destroyers wipe away human cities from the landscape.

Even when the indigenous peoples make an overture of peace, the colonials do not heed them. President Whitmore asks the alien if they "can negotiate a truce" ultimately asking "Can there be peace between us?" The Alien responding through the human he has made into a ventriloquist dummy: "Peace? No peace" and then giving the humans their only demand "Die." This overture of peace is not casting Whitmore in the role of a collaborator, unlike President James Dale of *Mars Attacks!*, whom I will describe in Chapter 4; rather than expressing the self-interest of a collaborator figure, Whitmore has, throughout the film, shown a deep sense of duty when it comes to doing what he feels is best for the American people. Whitmore is not blind to the threat these aliens represent, the olive branch of peace is offered cautiously and from behind the relative safety of a glass wall and inside a heavily fortified military base. In this situation, Whitmore has all of the leverage to force a colonial alien to negotiate with the indigenous humans, but the alien chooses to attack rather than give an inch to the indigenous population.

While it would be anticlimactic for an invasion film for the aliens and humans to negotiate their way out of conflict, it echoes the paradigm of the United States in its dealings with the third world, particularly after the threat of U.S.S.R. retaliation was negated. As Chomsky explains:

Diplomacy is a particularly unwelcome option. The U.S. has very little popular support for its goals in the Third World. This isn't surprising, since it's trying to impose structure of domination and exploitation. A diplomatic settlement is

bound to respond to the interests of the other participants, and that's a problem when your positions aren't popular. Negotiations are something the U.S. commonly tries to avoid. That has been true in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Central America. (*What Uncle Sam Really Wants* 74-5)

Rather than negotiate a truce, the aliens simply decide to carry on by applying force, their strength, against an enemy that is totally outmatched in order to dominate and exploit Earth.

Should the aliens attempt to negotiate, it would force them to accede to some demands by the humans, which in this case would require them to leave the humans alive and share their resources. Instead, their current campaign of destruction will ultimately give them all of the resources they desire from Earth and the native inhabitants cannot hope to compete technologically.

### **Diaspora**

With the strife inherent with the colonial assault there are the displaced, exemplified best in the scenes of the massive convoy of vehicles passing through the desert, and the people like Russel Casse (Randy Quaid). This diaspora consists of those who were able to leave the cities: the transient, the lower classes, all finding their way to Area 51, the groups that perhaps could be the most affected by the loss of a nation, the lower classes, particularly, as they do not have the economic means to define themselves in any other significant way than by patriotism. These displaced people are then oppressed/marginalized by the occupants of the land they find, the military base Area 51.

First, despite their need, this indigent group is refused access until they reveal a commodity to the gatekeepers of the area--the unconscious alien pilot. The group of

refugees are also explicitly not allowed inside the base's laboratories or other shelters (until later). Further, they are called upon to fill out the ranks of fighter pilots as the new offensive is being planned, though ultimately forgotten by the locals (the military establishment) when the alien ship hovers overhead until reminded by an accepted outsider, the President's Press Secretary. Only after the reminder are these displaced people allowed inside the shelter of the base, and only at the last minute as alien fighter-craft begin to assault Area 51.

With these displaced people we have the classic diaspora story that plays out with any imperial power. Migrants are stripped of their commodities and are themselves commoditized to the dominant force, whether that force be military or economic. That dominant force "vampirically" uses the minority until they are used up, and all the while the diasporic elements seek to be accepted by the dominant force. However, what is different here is that the group is let into the restricted area. They are seen mingling cross-class and cross-race--with Dylan (the son of an african-american stripper) and Patricia Whitmore (the white president's daughter) both admitting their fear to each other--and cross-faith--as the former secretary of defense admits he is not Jewish when he joins in a Jewish prayer circle led by Julius Levinson, the witty response being "nobody's perfect." That response speaks to the nature of this group of Americans that are not the colonials. These are people who accept people regardless of their background, and forgive mistakes.

### **Voices of Resistance**

We even have the dominant force of the U.S. military under the commander-in-chief Whitmore quickly becoming a more sympathetic group. To reassure and inspire the

fighter pilots gearing up for the fight against the implacable war-machine of the aliens, President Whitmore delivers this impromptu speech:

Good morning. In less than an hour aircraft from here will be joining others from around the world, and you will be launching the largest aerial battle in the history of mankind... Mankind. That word should have new meaning for all of us today. We can't be consumed by our petty differences anymore. We will be united in our common interests. Perhaps it's fate that today is the fourth of July and you will once again be fighting for our freedom... not from tyranny, oppression, or persecution, but from annihilation. We are fighting for our right to live. To exist. And should we win the day... the Fourth of July will no longer be known as an American holiday, but as the day the world declared in one voice: We will not go quietly into the night! We're going to live on! We're going to survive! Today we celebrate our Independence Day!

Here the soundtrack swells in the audience's collective ear and anyone with a shred of patriotic feeling for America will be shedding tears into a tissue, or will they?

Davies decries this speech, saying it "not only echoes the right-wing attack on multiculturalism as the politicization of identity responsible for fragmenting the nation, but also triumphantly--and many would argue prematurely--announces the completion of the American national project" (400). While this might seem to be the case, I feel that Davies is a bit harder on this speech than is necessary. The scene itself does not necessarily reflect the stereotypical black/white/jewish-trifecta that Davies accuses the rest of the film to portray; the *mise-en-scène* surrounding the speech shows other strata of society, social and racial, as the camera cuts between the crowd and the President. Davies

also claims "the integration of difference. . . becomes visual and narrative evidence for a belief in the exceptional nature of the American nation, and its fitness for global leadership" (401). Albeit, Davies states, the integration was in a structured, conservative paradigm, but more to the point is what Davies is suggesting about the film and American exceptionalism.

What is interesting in the last part of the speech is that "the Fourth of July will *no longer* be known as an American holiday" (emphasis mine). Whitmore does not say "no longer just" but rather negates this old holiday, as though giving up something intrinsic to American identity, setting aside the celebration of individuality in order to join the world community.

Whitmore's rhetoric paints a picture of America as we want to see it, not fighting in wars to control resources, nor with any moral ambiguity, but legitimately fighting "to exist" against a foreign power that is bent on nothing short of "annihilation." Also it shows an America that is not after a global hegemony, but joining its voice with the rest of the world to create the "one voice." It is that worldwide aspect that is being commented on when Whitmore admonishes that "we can't be consumed by our petty differences anymore;" the previous scenes of the Morse-code messages moving worldwide, and in the very next scene, like an Eisensteinian montage, the President of the United States is discussing not *leading* the rest of the world, but *joining* with them; further he ends the speech with the inclusive "our," which references not just the US, but the whole world's populace.

This rhetoric is punctuated by an uncharacteristic move for a president to lead from the front. Immediately after delivering this rousing speech Whitmore is escorted to

fighter, given gear, and explains to his chief of staff "I'm a combat pilot . . . I belong in the air." By defining himself not as president, but a combat pilot, the dynamic of the president changes. He defines himself as no better or worse than those people under his command; more significantly, he is joining few military personnel in jets, as the impression given is that many of those pilots were the civilians they recruited--anyone with flying experience. Since the president here is acting as a metonym for the United States, then the United States is symbolically leaving its "exceptional" position to join the rest of the world as equals.

Of course, being an example of Classical Hollywood Cinema (CHC), *Independence Day* must have a happy ending. The humans triumph worldwide, and it can be assumed that the destruction of the alien mother-ship is what caused the destruction of the rest of the alien technology. One could read that triumphant moment going to the American team who infiltrated the alien mother-ship as smacking of American exceptionalism, but considering America in this film is represented by both the colonial aliens and indigenous humans, we have to assume that this exceptionalism shown is meant as a signal to the audience that our cooperative ideals are clearly better than our neo-colonial ways.

### **Conclusions**

With the rhetoric both verbal and visual around *Independence Day*, the struggle and eventual victory of the America we want to be over the grotesque reality of what we were cannot be ignored. The film ushers us to the conclusion that a cooperative, rather than imperial America is what must win, rather than simply continuing neo-colonial expansion for resources. Unfortunately this message seems to have been lost, as much of

the film was simply interpreted as fitting with ideologies between the Republican and Democratic parties of the time. It remains to be seen if the forthcoming sequel to *Independence Day* will bear this theme out, or if it will be once again a cry against colonialism.

## Chapter 4:

### *Mars Attacks!*

*Ack ack ack, ack ack!--Martian Ambassador*

*Mars Attacks!* has been ignored by scholars on the whole. The issue is, perhaps, that it is so campy that few can take it seriously, only receiving a comment here or there on a minor character's depiction or how the film figures into the oeuvre of Tim Burton. However, just like *Independence Day*, we have an alien invasion film with a prominent presidential character, which puts this film in opposition to Susan Sontag's view of Camp being "disengaged, depoliticized -- or at least apolitical."

The Aliens in this film are very much like the Martians of Wells' *War of the Worlds*, weak and vulnerable-looking without their technology to aid them. Where they differ is their sexuality. Karen Schneider observes that "despite a lack of discernible sex markers, . . . they drool over *Playboy* centerfolds and fog their bubbles as they voyeuristically observe humans having sex" ("Unexpected Resistance" 10). While the Martians are grotesque, these sexualized behaviors humanize them; they have the same basic urges as stereotypical males in at least lust. This representation of alien lust for human women is a trope of alien invasion films, but it represents something deeper about a colonizer. This lust brings in the threat of hybridity, where the separation between colonizer and colonized is transgressed. The biological conclusion of this lust is a hybrid child, and as Langer states, "the hybrid is terrifying because it is uncannily both us and not-us" (107). While some narratives would have the prospect of a hybrid as a hopeful development, there is no hope here; the Martians seem intent to use and enjoy the indigenous population and infrastructure, the humans and their works with callous

disregard for any indigenous-assigned value of these resources. So, while caricatures, they represent humans of a colonizing force.

What needs to be examined here is the way in which the political system reacts to the Martians. Urged on by Press Secretary Jerry Ross (Martin Short), President James Dale (Jack Nicholson) welcomes these new and strange people as a political windfall to swing public opinion in his favor. The issue is that when the administration finds out that the Martians are more a threat than a boon, the administration is crippled with conflicting agendas. In the midst of all of the confusion, President Dale labors to keep his power and ensure that American life goes on uninterrupted; curiously, he employs strategies similar to another famous historical politician.

### **The Rhetoric of the Collaborator**

On April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1940, Vidkun Quisling took control of the Norwegian government as German forces expanded the Reich. He broadcasts a speech to the Norwegian people to calmly and rationally explain why the Wehrmacht has entered Norwegian territory, and how the Norwegian people should react to their new ally and government.

Fast-forward to 1996, the Martian invasion of Earth has begun with the United States of America. President James Dale, acting on the advice of his top scientific advisors, has given the Martians two opportunities to enter into a peaceful relationship with the United States of America—both have ended disastrously for the Americans. The Martians, who choose to speak only in their own monosyllabic language but seem to understand English, have finally entered the pentagon and President Dale delivers speech after speech to welcome the Martians into a peaceful relationship with Earth.

The common thread between these two different situations is the future both politicians are facing. Any further position of power they may have is dependent on a regime set up by the aggressors, which seems an appropriate character for a mid-nineties sci-fi film, even one as satirical as *Mars Attacks!*. According to Antonio Sanchez-Escalonilla, "Hollywood had . . . diverted its attention at that time to villainous proceedings within the state apparatus itself" (14). There could be no greater villain within the state than a politician whose self-interest or public persona is more important than the people they supposedly serve, and the rhetoric and characteristics of both of these politicians coincide with this notion of the villain within the state.

Vidkun Quisling served the people of Norway throughout his career, first during his service in the Norwegian army, then with Nobel laureate Fridtjof Nansen. He joined the Norwegian national-socialist party, eventually becoming the party's Fuhrer. While the party achieved moderate success despite its move from religious based rhetoric to more pro-Germany and anti-Semitic rhetoric, it was not until the German invasion that the party came to true political power. The Nasjonal Samling party was the first to announce a coup and took over the Norwegian government, with Vidkun Quisling as its head. ("Vidkun Quisling") The imperialist move by Germany into Norway gave Quisling the opportunity to grab power, and the rhetoric he employs at the moment he takes advantage of the imperial force is echoed by James Dale.

James Dale is a president, as Karen Schneider rightly observes, "who customizes his decisions for maximum public approval, [and] is at once a comically and tragically ineffectual commander-in-chief. . . [His rhetoric] evinces a self-deluding indifference to history for the purpose of personal gain" ("Unexpected Resistance" 5-8). While Schneider

chooses to focus on Tim Burton's use of the characters of *Mars Attacks!* as a postmodern satiric pastiche, I want to focus more on President Dale's rhetoric in the face of colonial invasion through comparisons of his rhetorical moves with Quisling's. Both politicians choose their rhetoric to ensure their own safety and continuation of power. They become the collaborator, traitors to their own people. Each politician situates themselves, through their oratory, in a position to survive the coming invasion and colonization--by convincing themselves and others to do nothing.

We first see this irenic rhetoric in both politician's introductions to the issue at hand. While Dale's rhetorical introduction is the ubiquitous "My fellow Americans"—the simple rhetorical move to put the President as one of the people, rather than as a ruler. Quisling's rhetoric does not, yet both establish their speaker's Ethos. The "Proclamation to the people of Norway!" establishes Quisling as a leader, not just to the Norwegians—the stated audience—but also to the Fascist government of Germany—arguably, the real audience—that commands the Wehrmacht moving to occupy Norway when this speech is given.

In a government that supposedly represents the whole nation this line automatically puts the President in the crowd of Americans. This exordium, this commonplace of American political speeches to the masses puts "the audience into a receptive and attentive frame of mind" (Leith 84). This plays on not only the thought that the President is first and foremost an American, but also plays on the American Dream that any American could, through hard work, one day rise to become President. Because of this success ethic ingrained in the American Dream, we tend to pay attention to the politician who utters these three words because of this one ethos-granting move. The

issue with Dale's rhetoric, though, is no one other than a politician of high office is going to utter those words; it is an automatic key-phrase for the American mind to sit up and pay attention to whatever this leading politician is saying. This automatically gives them the ethos of a leader.

Furthermore, Dale says “I apologize for interrupting your regular programs, but I have a very important announcement to make” (*Mars Attacks!*), further adding to his credibility. One might see that he not only wants to be considered the common “American” despite his high office, but also he asks his compatriots forgiveness for interrupting their routines—their all-important normalcy! The explanation of the announcement interrupting the normalcy, however, sets him apart; this announcement makes his voice more important than the status quo. Again this covertly sets him as more important than the Americans he is talking to, this rhetoric sets him in the role of a parent wanting the family's attention, each member of the family has their own thing to do, but everyone must stop and listen to what is about to be said. Dale reinforces this image by recounting important events in his own history, two of them being "The day that Marsha said she would be my wife and the birth of our daughter Taffy."

In contrast, Quisling goes on with the proclamation, stating “it is the duty and the right of the National Unification movement to assume Government power in order to protect the Norwegian people's interests, and Norway's security and independence” (Nesbø). He does not overtly set himself up as a member of the people, but he likens his movement to a watchful guardian, a protector of the people. This proclamation specifically leans on "duty and the right" suggesting that the National Unification (NU) party has been called to do its duty as though it knows what is best for the country and

her people; and because he says “movement” rather than party, he imbues the NU political party with energy, suggesting that his party has the people’s support. Both of these moves add up to convey a sense of legitimacy to the new government.

Dale's announcement is that the Hubble Space Telescope has found "A large fleet of vehicles which can best be described as flying saucers." While this seems shocking to the people watching Dale's announcement in the film, we are not shocked as an audience as we have seen the flying saucers rise from Mars in the credits sequence. However, something in the script that did not make the final cut of the film, right after Dale mentions the Hubble, he states that it was "a much-criticized program, which, I might add, has been solidly supported by this administration" (Gems 13). This, similar to Quisling's rhetoric, is imbuing legitimacy to Dale's administration. If he had not supported the Hubble, this information would not have come to light and he could not have announced it to the people.

Of course, both leaders must set their current position in regards to their recent history to win the people to their paradigm. President Dale sets the discovery of Martians in amongst a victorious U.S. history, stating:

I feel this is the perfect summation to the twentieth century... a time that has seen the dropping of borders and the extending of friendship in all directions. . .

Communism has fallen, and now there is no East or West—just us. We have

become one planet. And soon we will become one solar system. (*Mars Attacks!*)

What Schneider might call an "indifference to history" here is Dale's attempt to paint a picture of a victorious USA. Communism itself has not fallen, only the U.S.S.R. There is not "just us" as he puts it, as we can see the Martians "negotiating" with France later, but

it keeps the americentric view that the only nation in the world that matters, in fact the one that speaks for the entire world is the United States, aggrandizing the audience's nation.

What does the jingoistic rhetoric accomplish though; is this just a convention of cheesy sci-fi films to be mocked? No, it is a deliberate invoking of pathos. It stirs up not only patriotic feelings in the audience, but also selects to invoke warm, fuzzy feelings with the association of "friendship" and deflects the idea that we may still be harboring enmity for our former enemy, the Russians--similarly to how Quisling suggests that their friends, the Germans, can help them. This prefaces what he wants to come next, that we should welcome these new strange people into our lives with as little trouble as possible. Here an absence is as telling as a presence, he neglects to mention the diplomatic hurdles, plans for the future, or adjustments that the American people must make. Rather, pro-American rhetoric aside, he has fundamentally said "Hey, there's aliens coming to Earth, just thought you might wanna know." Dale brushes any potential change or challenge aside, as not worth mentioning, in the belief that everything will still be status quo--that the discovery of aliens will simply be an item on a timeline of American history.

What easier way to deal with the oncoming invasion than to simply do nothing other than to mark it as a quirk of history? Quisling, too, establishes the history of the crisis Norway is facing by explaining:

After England violated Norwegian neutrality by laying minefields in Norwegian territorial waters without meeting any opposition [than] the usual half-hearted protests from the Nygaardsvold Government, the German government offered the Norwegian government their peaceful help accompanied by a sincere reassurance

that they would respect national independence and Norwegian life and property.  
(Nesbø)

Immediately Quisling sets Norway's current situation against an enemy: England, like Dale did with the Communists. But instead of aggrandizing the state for pathetic appeal, Quisling suggests that Norway has been slighted! Norway has been *violated*! All Norway wanted was to be neutral—kept out of the war, and the former government is to blame for allowing this violation. Quisling specifically points out the peaceful intentions of Germany, deflecting the conflicts that country has already been involved with as they have expanded their power and borders. Here is a friend who is willing to help out their neighbor, rather than an imperial power who wants more resources and more land.

The Germans, however, are a much more tangible force at this point, and communication was possible with them--unlike the Martians--so rather than sweeping any culture clashes under the rug like President Dale, Quisling parades it in front of his audience. He claims that Germany will respect the Norwegian people and their rights as a sovereign nation. Thusly, in the face of invasion, the best thing to do is nothing that would upset order as it is now because the Germans are not going to go against the status quo (despite a coup). So similar to President Dale's "indifference to history" in showing the conflicts with the Russians to be nothing more than a spat between freinds, Quisling is deliberately casting the Germans in a positive light, as a friend that can be counted on.

Next on Quisling's talking points is like a reverse-infomercial tagline--if you do not act now, here is what you get! He further outlines the benefits of the current situation, German force invading and the new Nasjonal Samling government:

As an answer to this offer to help solve this for our [country's] totally unbearable situation, the Nygaardsvold Government called for regular mobilization, and [gave] the Norwegian armed forces the unreasonable order to oppose the German help by means of armed force. The government itself has fled after, without second-thoughts, having put the future of the country and its inhabitants at risk. Under these circumstances, it is the duty and the right of the National Unification movement to assume Government power in order to protect the Norwegian people's interests, and Norway's security and independence. We are the only ones that can do this because of the situation and our [movement's] national goals and [thereby] save the country [from] the desperate situation the party politicians have put our people in. The Nygaardsvold Government has stepped back. The National Government has [seized] government power, with Vidkun Quisling as Chief of Government and Minister of foreign affairs. (Nesbø)

Quisling has to logically justify the coup in a way that will not make the Norwegian people angry. So, continuing with the aggrieved Norway theme, he tells the people that we were in an unbearable situation. Like the "My fellow Americans" inherent in presidential speeches of the United States, Quisling is counting himself among the people as he shifts to the inclusive "our country." Then he goes on to claim that the old government that obviously did not care about the Norwegian people, because they left! Therefore, logically, it was time for that uncaring government to step aside and a new, better government to take over.

This brings us to the benefits that Norway could reap; now they have a new government who will look out for them. Moreover, because the Nasjonal Samling's views

are so closely aligned with Germany's, Quisling is implying that the Germans will respect this new government as a strong ally, rather than an extension of Germany itself.

The idea of being an ally to Martians is something that President James Dale keeps trying to sell to the conquering aliens. After the first disaster in the desert, where the armed forces acting as guards attempted to drive off Martian aggression, President Dale sends a message to the Martians in the hopes that there was a cultural misunderstanding, saying “There is no doubt that we two peoples have a great deal to offer one another” (*Mars Attacks!*). Dale is expecting a benefit, as any alliance with a technologically superior power might have for a less-advanced people. Perhaps it is symptomatic of Dale's self-delusion, but like Quisling, he is willing to allow an alliance with a foreign (or extra-terrestrial in this case) power after a military conflict has already occurred, as long as the benefits are there.

Later, when his back is against the wall in the war room he continues with his irenic rhetoric:

Why are you doing this? Why? Isn't the universe big enough for the both of us? What is wrong with you people? . . . We could work together. Why be enemies? Just because we're different? Is that why? We could work together! Think how much we could do! Think how strong we could be! Earth and Mars together! There's nothing we couldn't accomplish! Think about it! Why destroy when you can create? We can have it all—or we can smash it all—which is better? Which is better? Why can't we settle our differences? Why can't we work things out? Why can't we just get along? (*Mars Attacks!*).

While this rhetoric is particularly moving in terms of pathos, and coaxes a single tear from the Martian Ambassador, it does not actually save Dale or Earth. Immediately after shaking the Martian's hand in friendship Dale is stabbed through the heart, left as a monument in the war room, impaled by the Martian flag.

While the coup in Norway made the German conquest less significant in terms of body-count as the Martian invasion in *Mars Attacks!* it is not inconceivable that this oratory is filling the same function as Quisling's. First, if the universe is big enough for both, then the Martians can "respect [Earthling] life and property." Then the simple move to trivialize the outer differences of the two species is a similar move to Quisling's mentioning that the Nasjonal Samling's goals are closely aligned with Germany's. Each can work together. Finally, as Quisling attempted to legitimize his role in a government allied with the Germans, so too does Dale. Quisling announces that he is the head of the new Norwegian government, but Dale, in another display of americentrism, uses "we" or "us" interchangeably for "Earth." Either this is another ignorant American self-delusion, or Dale is suggesting cunningly that he is the spokesperson for the entire world and would be the person in charge who cooperates with the Martians. In which case, if he is successful, life can go on as per normal for everyday Americans.

This was a last-ditch effort to appease the aggressors for Dale, a tactic he employed earlier more directly by broadcasting to the Martian fleet: "You have nothing to fear from us. Our customs may be strange to you but we mean you no harm" (*Mars Attacks!*) after what they believed was a cultural misunderstanding led to the slaughter of media personalities, civilians, and the armed forces. Obviously in the film, it did not

work, as the un-pacified Martian forces zapped and smashed their way through any resistance they met.

Quisling also made a move to pacify the aggressive force and discourage possible resistance to the German forces by stating to the Norwegian people, “every ongoing resistance is not only futile, but also equal with criminal destruction of life and property” (Nesbø). While this might not do anything to ease the fears of the people of Norway, it does ease the apprehensions of the German forces or leaders who might be listening in. If there are resistance fighters, then they will be treated as criminals to the state, which means the Norwegian government is going to support the Wehrmacht as it stays in Norway. Quisling here is working very hard to make sure that nothing happens in the face of a change in power, that no resistance will spring up, that the Norwegian people take no action whatsoever to do something about this change.

Furthermore, Quisling adds “Every official and other serviceman in state and municipality, and especially all officers of the country in army, navy, coastal artillery and air force are obligated to obey orders exclusively from the new national government” (Nesbø). For the Germans, this, again, shows the commitment to complicity the new Norwegian government has in their invasion, that no official or armed serviceman will rise against the Germans. This carries a double meaning though, for the real audience of the Norwegian people, this does hint that regular state services will go on, despite the change in government; normal life would go on, even with the Wehrmacht in the country.

President Dale, too, nearing the end of his role in the film, and after a similar government shake-up--the destruction of the entire legislative branch by the Martians--wanted to go on-air to reassure the people. He said:

We've got to let the people know they still have two out of three branches of government working for them. That ain't bad! I want people to know the schools are still open. . . I want people to know the garbage still gets picked up! I want a cop on every corner! (*Mars Attacks!*)

If the people needed to be reassured of the legitimacy of the government, that was the time. The Martian invasion was happening, and yet, the government continued its sit on its hands and calm the people down posture. Dale wanted American life to go on as though no apocalypse was taking place.

Both of these politicians are using the same rhetorical moves to carefully position themselves into a spot where they can placate both the people they represent and the colonial forces. Of course it does not work out for either politician, as Vidkun Quisling was executed after World War II, his name synonymous with traitor to this day, and Dale was killed in the floor of the War Room by the very Martians he hoped to appease and left as a literal foundation for the Martian flag on Earth.

### **The Innocent Natives**

On the opposite side of the coin, we have Richie. A young man who, as a character, represents young, naive middle-class America. His character is not prone to vices on screen, and seems to be the only one of his family to pay attention to his grandmother. Richie does not have a dark past like the other male protagonist, and his eventual love interest is the President's daughter, echoing and further reinforcing the American myth of class mobility and someone of the lower class being able to romance someone of a higher class without issue.

It is Richie that stumbles onto the ultimate key to victory over the Martians-- American folk music, particularly Slim Whitman's "When I'm Calling You." The idea of folk music, the music of the common culture being the weapon to end aggression is at once absurd and poignant. Symbolically we have the common culture, untouched by the colonizer, being the ultimate tool to decolonize. Merely listening to Slim Whitman makes the oversized craniums of the Martians explode, suggesting that the pre-colonial times are strong enough to overpower and eradicate the colonial influences.

This act leads to his earning a congressional medal of honor. During the award ceremony, Richie even conjures up a speech:

Hi everybody. . . I want to say there's a lot of people in the world who've done a lot more than I have and they're the ones who should be here, getting a medal. I want to thank my Grandma for always being so good to me and helping save the world and everything. So I guess, like, we just have to start over and start rebuilding everything, like our houses. But I was thinking maybe instead of houses, we could live in teepees, because its better in a lot of ways. Okay, that's all I have to say. Thanks.

This awkward moment works, not just as Schneider describes "to collapse conservative and liberal remythologizing and to poke fun at them" (Unexpected Resistance 13), but to highlight that this really was not a *bildungsroman* for Richie. He is the same, gangly, idealistic teenager that he was before the invasion, the same one who misidentified a Martian salute as "the international symbol of the doughnut." His fanciful proposal to rebuild with teepees, and his inability to perceive decorum around rhetorical situations

marks his unchanging character. This is not a return to innocence, this is an innocence untouched by colonization.

Since throughout the film we are meant to identify and sympathize with Richie, this lack of change in paradigm from pre to post-invasion is indicative of a desire to return to innocence. Richie even selected the term "teepees" rather than something like "earth huts" or "log cabins" is telling, he specifically selected a term that is associated with Native Americans. Again, like with the folk music, we have a call back to pre-colonial times in identifying the entire populace now with Native Americans, as all of the people in America despite ethnic background can be seen as "native" with the Martian invader to compare against.

With Richie we have a symbol for a way around what Langer cites as the "impossible mourning" of diaspora or even nativism. He is representative of the hope that there is something innocent and basically good in the national narrative of the United States. I would extend this idea to any sense of loss in identity following a colonial invasion. The invasion of the Martians took away the innocence and naivety of the survivors, save for Richie, who seems to expect human society and infrastructure to be rebuilt "better in a lot of ways"--a modest way to yearn for a new golden age--while standing in the broken ruins of national symbols.

That innocence standing in the ruins of what was once Washington D.C. seems to be the crux of how the film imagines a post-imperial United States. The old establishment is crumbled away and an innocent core is left to thrive--especially as the film has Taffy (Natalie Portman) ask Richie if he had a girlfriend, culminating in a hinted heterosexual

romance between the two--an ultimately creative act--contrasting with the grey, dead concrete and ruins--the scenery of death.

### **Conclusions**

With this film, we are invariably drawn towards the hopeful and virtuous "natives" rather than the subversive and detestable elements within our own government. The fact that the naive and innocent--the pre-colonial ideals--are lauded with medals and rewards and the evil are punished is rhetoric preaching for an ideal United States. The message, whether overt or not, is to return to a pre-colonial innocence, either a recoverable or new golden era. A golden era that, perhaps, is only achievable after a catastrophe of such a destructive invasion.

## Chapter 5:

### *Babylon 5: In the Beginning*

*It is said the future is always born in pain. The history of war is the history of pain. If we are wise, what is born of that pain matures into the promise of a better world because we learn we can no longer afford the mistakes of the past. --G'Kar*

The past is what concerns *Babylon 5: In the Beginning*. This film is distinctly different than the previous two I have discussed, as it was a made-for-TV prequel movie to a successful Sci-fi TV series, and is a reversal of the covert readings of the two previous films. The series is set on "our last best hope for peace," the Babylon 5 space station, a neutral area, that could act as a meeting place for any of the galaxy's powers willing to negotiate their disputes. Of course, the station is threatened on a weekly basis, most often from superpowers in the galaxy or from a totalitarian Earth regime intent on eliminating subversive elements. *In the Beginning* is focused on the war that was the impetus for creating the Babylon stations, the war between the humans and the Minbari-- a war that was made possible by a misunderstanding of cultural norms.

The overt story would indeed be that of a colonial power expanding its borders, as General Lefcourt explains at the start of the narrative, "we've taken advantage of the good will of other worlds to expand our sphere of influence." So immediately the humans are set up as a new power that has its sights on colonial expansion, and are curious about an older power, wondering if they are a threat or a potential ally. As the two races meet accidentally, and the war starts with a mistaken greeting and a(n) (un)lucky shot.

The conflict is resolved by the Minbari surrendering, realizing that Minbari souls are being reincarnated as humans. This is, as Reider would point out, a variant on the "lost-race" narrative, except the aliens are the dominant ones, and apart from one or two losses, are winning the war against the humans. However, the revelation that Minbari and humans are linked at the soul is enough to end the war and cause the Minbari to surrender when their ships are on the doorstep of Earth. This makes *Babylon 5: In the Beginning* a reversal of the colonial lost-race narrative. Rather than putting the humans in a position of condoned expansion, the humans are the ones punished for their aspirations of neo-colonial expansion by those they sought to colonize.

### **One Soul--Two peoples**

As discussed in chapter 2, The lost race narrative hinges on the plot device of finding some link beyond physical resemblances to equate the colonizer and the colonized as a way of reconciling the colonial arrival and the resistance from the native population. In chapter 3, I discuss how the overtly explained biological similarities between the aliens and humans of *Independence Day* speak to the fact that both are analogous to real-world America. *Babylon 5* goes a step further, since the aliens here are obviously human actors with prosthetics and makeup to account for their alien appearance, another overt explanation is given in the series and reiterated in *In the Beginning*. Minbari are the older of the two races, and it is revealed to the Minbari ruling council (and the audience) near the end of the film that Minbari souls are being reincarnated as humans; the ultimate form of this cycle being the soul of the legendary leader and prophet of the Minbari, Valen, being reincarnated into a human, Jeffrey Sinclair (Michael O'Hare). This equivalence is played up in more detail in the series,

where humans and Minbari start to work together more frequently; however, they are just as different as the colonizer and colonized.

The representations of the humans, the Earth Alliance, is roughly analogous to the United States. First, the Earth Alliance is a group of planets and moons colonized by humans formed into a larger governmental body--similar to the colonization of the United States. Furthermore, the crowds of people shown in the film, particularly in *Earthforce*, the military, are limitedly multiracial, or at least multicultural; we see a few Russians (like Susan Ivanova and her brother) in active service alongside American and European officers, we see prominent African-Americans, being Captain Sterns (Jason Ross-Azikiwe), the commander of the *Lexington*, and Dr. Stephen Franklin (Richard Biggs). This speaks to the dream of a cooperative, multi-ethnic and cultural America. Though, rarely do we see any representations of peoples from developing nations--a telling absence. Here we have a fairly realistic representation of mainstream America, while other cultures of humans not prominently represented may exist, they are not shown in favor of the majority--American males.

The Minbari do not have the same ethnic differentiation like humans do; the bony crests on their heads are supposed to differentiate between their clan or caste system--but they all have close to the same skin-tone. These bony crests are only on the back of the head, forming what could almost be considered a headdress similar to the feathered ones worn by Native Americans.

Also, They are a very homogenous race, and, as General Lefcourt suggests, "A full third of their population is devoted to warfare"--meaning the warrior caste. While the U.S. has not been able to boast numbers like that, it is able to boast, even at the time

when this film was made, one of the largest defense budgets in the world, accounting for over one-third of the world's military spending through the 1990s (Walker). They are also the most human looking of the alien invaders I have discussed.

Of the other two castes, the one that gets the most screen time and named characters is the religious caste, whose influence is pervasive in everything the Minbari do. The religious caste are the guardians of culture and philosophy, thinkers, and the ones who officiate the on-screen rituals. They are also the ones the race of "space angels," the Vorlons, reached out to first in secret.

Contrast this to the scientific skepticism of the humans, where religious rituals are lacking in screen time in the film. It is only as a last resort as we will see in the presidential rhetoric that religion is invoked, instead humans fall back on technological leaps or unconventional tactics when the war is going badly for them. Their only victory comes specifically when the "nuke" is invoked, the weapon of choice for the cold war, destroying the Minbari flagship. Ultimately though, the use of the nuke is ineffectual, rather than being a decisive victory to turn the tide of the war; in the very next scene, General Lefcourt explains "We're losing this war. . . If the only way the human race can survive is to surrender, we'll surrender."

The Humans had all but resigned themselves to defeat, and despite the valiant efforts of the Human colonists on other worlds, the Minbari continued to wipe out the defensive capabilities of the colonies until they reach Earth itself, and apart from a few fringe elements of the Minbari administration, they have not allowed negotiations. As cited in Chapter 3, Chomsky points out that the U.S. did not want negotiations, where it would be forced to bargain with its foe, rather it would continue to rely on the field of

might, military force, where it dominated. The Minbari are totally dominant in warfare, as their technology vastly outstrips that of the humans. Again we have a reversal, where the actual colonial power is underprepared in force to deal with those it wished to colonize. The Minbari are portrayed as being, in battle, a mirror image of America's unrelenting, non-negotiating use of force against the to-be-colonized.

The Grey Council, the ruling body of the Minbari, also falls into a trap that the American Government was guilty of during the cold war. Knowledge of, but a lack of planning for, a probable event. Because of conflicting interests between the two dominant castes (Religious and Warrior), the revelation about humans being needed for the next great war against the villainous Shadows was kept from the Warrior caste--knowledge of their existence was limited only to the top echelons of the Religious caste. Thus, when the humans did appear, no plan was implemented for first contact with this new race.

As Timothy McKeown states "Where officials are known to be divided, a decision to plan is a decision to place a conflictual item on the agenda" (1183). McKeown was talking about the lack of planning for the Cuban Missile Crisis, but the same ideas apply. A new threat or ally was on the horizon, and due to a lack of planning and conflict between the highest levels of government, the wrong protocol was implemented and the situation escalated.

Taken together, these similarities suggest that the Minbari, for all their advanced technology, is amalgamation of Native Americans and western science--a spiritual people with important religious rituals and fierce warriors, whose depictions echo the most iconic, if stereotypical depictions of Native Americans--the warrior and the medicine man. Yet in a reversal of colonial history, they are still more technologically advanced

than the science-based western-analogue Earth Alliance, driving the humans to the brink of extinction.

### **The Rhetoric of Survival**

When we finally see the Earth Alliance's President (Tricia O'Neal), we see the Earth as the weaker power that was trying to become a power on the galactic stage, allying itself with other races that warn them to steer clear of the Minbari, on the verge of defeat. The technological powerhouse of the Minbari fleet easily wipes away the Human military at every encounter, and so, as the leader of a people who might soon be extinct, the President broadcasts a speech for those remaining troops in Earthforce.

Anita Gates wrote in a New York Times review of *In the Beginning* that "Tricia O'Neal may not be the star. . . , but she has the movie's most exhilarating moments, as President of the Earth Alliance, sending her planet's soldiers into space battle [*sic*] against a superior alien enemy with some inspiring words." Indeed, the President's parts in the film seem insignificant when you count the nuanced nature of the other characters and the weight of the TV series behind them, but her rhetoric steals the show.

The speech on the eve of what is to be known as The Battle of the Line, offhandedly compared by Gates to the St. Crispin's Day speech at Agincourt from *Henry V*, shows a troubled leader asking for one more sacrifice from the military, the simple stumble of decorum at the beginning of the speech as the President utters "Are we on?" and then the stumbled exordium of "This is... This is the President" speaks to the desperate situation Earth is in.

The President goes on to set kairos of the speech, as she addresses her audience of Earthforce (The Earth Alliance's military) officers and enlisted:

I've just been informed that our midrange military bases. . . have fallen to the Minbari advance. We've lost contact with Io and must conclude that they too have fallen to an advanced force. Our military intelligence believes that the Minbari intend to bypass Mars and hit Earth directly and the attack may come at any time. We have continued to broadcast our surrender and a plea for mercy. And they have not responded. We therefore can only conclude that we stand at the twilight of the human race.

The oncoming night seems a particular theme for this particular situation, where the human race is on the brink of extinction. It recalls Whitmore's speech from Chapter 3, but where Whitmore confidently declares "We will not go quietly into the night," the President here has no confidence for such a declaration.

Instead of instilling in the troops a hope of survival for themselves, or riling them up with jingoism, the President seems willing here to accept the human race in diaspora. She tells the soldiers the only conceivable plan, along with dire predictions for their future:

In order to buy more time for evacuation transports to leave Earth we ask for the support of every ship capable of fighting to take part in the last defense of our homeworld. We will not lie to you. We do not believe that survival is a possibility. We believe that anyone who joins this battle will never come home.

This does not bode well for the military, but it does speak to the heroic self-sacrifice the Humans have been performing throughout the war. The price of their lives must buy something, and she continues:

But for every ten minutes we can delay the military advance several hundred more civilians may have a chance to escape to neutral territory. Though Earth may fall, the Human race must have a chance to continue elsewhere.

Here we have the only hope of the Human race being to move, to leave their homeworld and find some new place to call home. In aspects of terminology, humans are the only race in *Babylon 5* with a species-name not associated with their homeworld (the Centauri being from Centauri Prime, Minbari being from Minbar, etc), this might make diaspora more easily acceptable as racial identity does not necessarily mean "coming from Earth" and species identity is simply a state of having certain features.

Her final lines are: "No greater sacrifice has ever been asked of a people that I ask you now to step forward one last time, one last battle, to hold the line against the night. May God go with you all." Here we finally have the appeal to a divinity, the only vestige of religion the humans display in the film. It is, of course, the Christian God, rather than a concession to whatever higher power those serving in Earthforce worship. This kind of appeal to the Christian God seems indicative, once again, of a western power where Christianity is the dominant religion.

Also, this ending to the speech does not quite fit Gates's earlier *Henry V* comparison, but it cleaves more towards Winston Churchill's *The Few*:

The gratitude of every home in our Island, in our Empire, and indeed throughout the world, except in the abodes of the guilty, goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal danger, are turning the tide of the world war by their prowess and by their devotion. Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.

Both these speeches end with a pathetic appeal to servicemen (and servicewomen in the case of *In the Beginning*), something to stir their nobler emotions towards self-sacrifice for the greater good. "The gratitude of every home" suggests the same thing as the President's "several hundred more civilians have a chance to escape," that no matter the cost to the armed services, the civilians must survive. Both of these speeches were given at a pivotal battle in their respective wars, and communicate to their intended audience that their people must be preserved, no matter the outcome of the battle. Where it differs though, is the real audience of the speech of *In the Beginning*. To the real audience sitting in their living rooms and tuning in to the TNT special of *Babylon 5: In the Beginning*, seeing humanity brought so close to the brink of destruction and then this pathos-laced speech delivered to the beleaguered troops simply reinforces the absurdity for the reasons behind the war. That neo-colonial expansion and the arrogance of the Humans are what drove them nearly to extinction.

However, when the Minbari surrender after the "lost race" plot twist is revealed, the President returns. She ushers us into the series of *Babylon 5* proper, with the decorum befitting someone who just escaped the destruction of their homeworld by a miracle:

Today the Senate has approved funding to begin construction on the Babylon Station located in neutral space between several major governments. Together we stood on the eve of destruction as a result of a terrible, terrible mistake. A mistake which none of us can afford to make again. The Babylon Station will provide a place to work out our problems peacefully. It is, we believe, our last best hope for peace.

Keeping in mind that the "mistake" is not defined in the speech, most would assume it to be the misinterpreting of the Minbari's gesture of friendship--approaching another ship with gun ports open.

Yet one could conclude that the mistake was having neo-colonial aspirations--the reason the humans were in the position to start the war in the first place. The wording here is ambiguous, and "afford" would tend to make us think in terms of economy, but because actual monetary value is only mentioned sparingly in the film, the price of this war was human casualties. Further, the repetition of "terrible" puts the mistake on a moral level, rather than a simple breach of procedure.

As Elazar Barkan notes, in the 1990's:

the international emphasis on morality [had] been characterized in going beyond accusing other countries of human rights abuses, to include self-examination. The very countries and leaders which shaped the policies of a new internationalism -- Clinton, Blair, Chirac and Schroeder -- have all apologized and repented for gross historical crimes in their own countries. (2)

We, similarly, in *In the Beginning*, have a leader who is starting to work with other governments for the Babylon project, and covertly apologizing for the moral breach of neo-colonialism, and offers a solution to it: The Babylon Station--a place where no one political faction should have more influence or power than any other and thus be free of neo-colonial influence in their politics.

### **Conclusions**

The two sides to this conflict are very much humanized, thus making them even better analogues for post-colonial rhetoric. A post-colonial view of this film then, is a sort

of masochistic fantasy. It is as if the filmmakers are saying, if only we had been so decidedly defeated by those we wished to colonize, then perhaps we would have a "last best hope for peace." This hope was for conflicts to be resolved on an equal playing field via negotiations, rather than through force or foreign influence--making the whole premise of *Babylon 5: In the Beginning* a criticism of the colonial expansion of the United States.

## Chapter 6:

### The Puppet Masters

*"Do you miss me, Sam?"--Alien slug on a chimpanzee, typing a message to a former host.*

Many authors have suggested that *The Puppet Masters*, along with the trope of alien invaders occupying/duplicating the bodies of our friends and neighbors, is a piece inherent to the fears of the Cold War. Yet, Elana Gomel points out that "The trope, in fact, came into being before the Cold War and has persisted after the collapse of the U.S.S.R." (181). While Gomel focuses on how the trope explores "a posthuman subjectivity in a human body" (181) one cannot completely distance these texts from their kairos.

When talking about *The Puppet Masters* (1951), Rieder suggests that:

This figure of invasion by assimilation speaks to and about anxieties concerning America's economic and cultural inundation of the postcolonial world, about the invisible but ever more pervasive power of new forms of multinational capitalism, or about the hybridization of the postimperial homelands. (*Colonialism* ch.5)

That is a lot to swallow, and Rieder does not truly delve into Heinlein's novel other than to just make these suppositions. However, struggling to shift to a postimperial/postcolonial paradigm after the cold war influenced the 1994 film adaptation, far after the publication of the novel.

The U.S. had stretched so far into the world via its businesses, political jockeying, and military conflicts other cultures that American culture seemed to be permeating these other cultures. While the commonplace of being able to go everywhere in the world and

get an American-style hamburger seems quaint, it speaks to the level of world-wide permeation of American culture. In *The Puppet Masters* (1994) we play out our own guilt from what Langer would describe as "the desire to keep indigenous cultures 'pure' for the colonizer's own consumption" and the antithetical "desire to 'civilize'. . . colonial subjects" (133). Out of a misguided sense of responsibility we try to impose a *Star Trek*-like "prime directive" on ourselves to limit the cultural "damage" we have caused via our own interactions with these other cultures. The film puts us in the position of having a new, alien culture imposed on us via invasion and infiltration.

This film also proselytizes the myth that there can be a return to, as Langer describes it, "nativism, a desire to drive out the colonizer altogether by (re)capturing some notion of pure indigeneity" (109). We see this in the character of Andrew Nivens (Donald Sutherland), the man who heads the department of scientific intelligence; he is a man who, with a cool detachment, plans how to remove the alien infiltration from earth no matter the cost.

These aliens are once again a colonizer, vampiric, or parasitic in nature as they move from host species to host species, even pointing out "Our previous hosts ceased to be useful. You're stronger." as their reason for coming to Earth. They are similar to *Independence Day*'s aliens in this regard, but the resources they reap from Earth are new host bodies which can explore the periphery of their world, though always returning to the center with the currency of information.

### **Assimilated Culture**

In *The Puppet Masters*, the aliens, referred to as slugs due to their physical appearance, are part of a monolithic hive mind. While others suggest this constitutes the

communist collectivist theme in cold war narratives, the use of this trope of a hive mentality just as easily can represent a cultural paradigm--a possibility that seems more likely from the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. three years prior to the release of the film.

We can also interpret the culture to be a western one. The slugs are supposed to be primarily brain matter; while the correlation between brain-size and intelligence is, in real life, as dubious as phrenology, as a symbol this indicates a higher intelligence. Returning to Langer's description of cultural desires, the western, civilized culture, with all of its focus on science and what it deems as intelligence, desires to impose civilization onto barbaric cultures, which it views as intrinsically ignorant or living in the past. The aliens seek therefore to bring humans into modernity, an addicting sensation to suddenly be plunged into and one any colonizer might believe the barbaric cultures *need*. This view is exactly Rieder's missionary fantasy, the aliens have identified a need in humans and seeks to fill it.

In the film, this need exhibits itself in Jarvis (Richard Belzer) when one of the slugs is removed from his body. He starts going through withdraw symptoms from being separated--ultimately choosing to die rather than live apart from the slug. This paradigm is even understood by Andrew, explaining the reason for withdraw as "one moment you have this huge brain the next moment you don't; just think of it" as though the need for this greater civilization is so seductive that it would be difficult to live without. The slugs are even aware of this fact, asking the newly liberated Sam Nevins (Eric Thal) "Do you miss me?"

The slugs even see themselves (or itself, depending on how you want to count them), as this civilizing force, they are quick to explain how their way of life is superior

to the barbaric human's way, as seen in their repeated criticisms of the loneliness of human existence, Sam's slug even says "you won't be lonely when you're one of us; no one will be" to Andrew, as though offering a better way of life. Of course, this life comes via sacrificing the human's old culture and paradigm, but the slugs refuse to acknowledge the indigenous culture's loss, and when asked what they want, the only reply is "Peace." This peace echoes a refrain we hear even today when the U.S. talks about "stabilizing a region" or "making a region safe for democracy." We do not see that as a particularly negative thing, even if military might is sent, but in so doing we push our western ideals into whatever culture is in that corner of the globe.

This forceful assimilation is something *The Puppet Masters* addresses as well. The teenagers who are first assimilated by the alien invaders physically attack someone with a baseball bat to assimilate a new human. Here they have co-opted part of American culture, by using the tools of "America's pastime" as a weapon to force assimilation onto others. While the method seems overtly hostile, one might be able to read the covert message of the slugs appropriating symbols that are otherwise innocent in American culture and turning them against those resisting the change. Other examples are the overt use of children to carry slugs to new hosts and putting nascent slugs in mailboxes. In the "decent, all-American sort of way" as Andrew Niven puts it, the American paradigm would take the innocence of children and daily mail delivery for granted. Both of these show how symbols that once were welcome are threatened by the alien cultural influence.

### **Rhetoric of the Prize**

There is one American symbol in the film that is sacrosanct, the President. While the President in *The Puppet Masters* does not get a lot of lines, nor is he named, he is

nonetheless important. The aliens make an explicit move to assimilate him and further the co-opting of American cultural symbols. If a colonizer could get cooperation from the highest levels of government (as discussed in Chapter 4 with Vidkun Quisling), it could influence the people into easily falling in line, no matter how effective of a leader the figure might be.

Here we do not have a very effective leader for a United States President; the first lines we hear him speak are "Bruce, you wanna tell me what's happening here, please?" and "Andrew, what in God's name is going on?" neither really confirming his ethos as a leader, more a hapless trophy, an object for morale rather than any strategic value. If the President had known about the possible threats facing him, or had a more active role in the film, we could see him like Whitmore, or even as a potential collaborator like Dale. However, here we have an ineffectual president who is led in his decisions by Andrew, someone who has managed to keep the President safe, despite alien infiltration in the secret service.

We also see the President as a character who is not willing to face the grim reality of the invasion. When informed of the slugs and shown the tape of Sam with the slug on him, the President starts walking towards the camera, shaking his head, as though he does not want to acknowledge the desperate situation the American culture/human race is in. However, he keeps deferring to Andrew in matters of defense, when plans are being suggested, Andrew suggests a plan of action, and we immediately see the President's head centered in frame as he looks up towards Andrew (presumably). His only reaction is to say "Do it." The President continues to defer and rely on Andrew and his interpretations of events, for instance when the General Morgan reports a successful

operation in containing the slugs, Andrew asks the General to take off his shirt. He refuses and when pressed the transmission is lost. Immediately the President asks "Alright what's going on? Andrew?" looking to the sole figure who is willing to take any measure to fight off this alien culture.

### **Nativism, or Else**

In Andrew we see someone who exemplifies the thought behind what Langer describes as "appealing purely to a precolonial nativism as a decolonization strategy" (109). He stops at nothing to wipe away the taint of the colonial presence. Even when the slugs use children to deliver the parasites to other people, Andrew balks at the idea of sparing them: "We cannot think of them any longer as children; they are the enemy." He is even willing to electroshock his own son, Sam, to remove the alien from him.

The nature of this film, though, makes sure that we as an audience sympathize with him, even when he is electro-shocking Sam. Andrew is the leader with the answers, the man who lives for a crisis, and that builds his ethos in the eyes of the audience. This is a very dangerous bit of rhetoric to convey to an audience as it leads them to believe there is even a possibility of resurrecting an innocent, perfect, pre-colonial time of their state or any state. Miyao Miyoshi states "the golden age of a nation-state's memory proved to be neither pure nor just, nor even available, but a utopian dream often turned into a bloody nightmare" (qtd in Langer, 109-10); this way of thinking might have been exemplified in Andrew if we had seen him haunted by the pain he inflicted on his son, or if we could see him have any remorse for suggesting that troops should open fire on children being ridden by the slugs, but we do not. Andrew is unapologetically callous in his efforts to remove alien influence, succeeding in the end of the film.

## The Ending

There is a major and telling difference in the epilogue between Heinlein's novel and the film. In the film, after being released from the control of a slug, as Andrew is being dragged off to the hospital, he says to Sam, "Go on, exercise a fantasy... That was the last one." With absolute finality, and despite Sam's doubts, Andrew assures us that the crisis is over and the heterosexual romance ubiquitous to CHC can continue without threat from alien invaders. While Sam and his love interest, Mary, move deeper into the city of Des Moines away from the remains of the slug hive, we are treated to some witty banter about the nature of men and women in relationships before the credits roll, an ending that could have been pulled from any CHC film.

The book ends differently, of course it is set in a slightly more futuristic time, and interplanetary travel is more feasible. Sam and Mary go off to "clean up Titan" (Heinlein ch.35), the place where the alien slugs stayed before they hit Earth. Here there is no complete finality, Sam tells us that "in spite of the almost complete success of Schedule Mercy there is no way to be sure that the slugs are all gone. No longer ago than last week it was reported that a bear was shot, up Yukon way, wearing a [slug]" (Heinlein ch.35). Here is the concept that there is no going back to a pre-colonial time as Heinlein writes that even the very ecology of Earth had been co-opted by the colonizing aliens. The nature of the end of the book is very retaliatory ending with the words "Puppet masters- the free men are coming to kill you! Death and Destruction!" (Heinlein ch.35), and even has a nod to culmination of the book's own heterosexual romance subplot, where Mary has become a housewife to Sam.

What does this difference say to the audience? One could put it down to the kairos in which each work is presented. Heinlein's novel was published in 1951, when the United States and the audience of western readers would be expecting a full-on war against the soviets to break out at any moment; in contrast, the U.S.S.R. had dissolved by the time the film was released. Since, by the time of the film's release, we had "won" the cold war with our "American-ness" intact, the ending in the book would be wholly inappropriate. Instead, we have the pathetic effect of the "walking off into the sunset" ending and a return to normalcy versus another pathetic effect of a call to arms and an irrevocably changed paradigm of always being on guard.

The change communicates something significant, though. This deliberate choice by the filmmakers in adapting this novel is deflecting that possibility that a post-colonial state might seek some form of justice, whether retaliation or compensation against their former colonizer. There is no sense of bitterness, no thirst for revenge or wanting to continue eradicating the colonizer wherever it may lurk in the wider arena (in this case the solar system), but rather a lighthearted appraisal of the postcolonial state as, in the film, Mary suggests "from a sociological standpoint, it [being a part of the hive mind for a short time] could be a good thing." This, for a state struggling to come to grips with being a colonial power is a comfort, because it suggests that they are immune from retribution; and the de-colonized would be grateful for their experience of being colonized for a time.

### **Conclusions**

The movie itself is simply telling us that everything is back to normal, life can go on just as it was before the invasion as though it never happened. The desire for nativism

won, and colonial cultures can just be erased from indigenous peoples as long as there are still pure symbols of their original culture to cling to and someone in the indigenous culture is willing to do whatever it takes to rid themselves of it, as long as that task is contained solely within their borders. Considering that the United States is representative of a colonial force, this film must be trying to assuage our guilt by putting the impetus on the indigenous population to fully decolonize, and perpetuating the myth that a pure culture is achievable.

## Chapter 7:

### Conclusions

*They'll keep fighting... and they'll win!--Starship Troopers Newsreel*

Each of these films fought the colonial paradigm, and painted a none-too-bright picture of America as colonizer. Further, each have in their own way attempted to resolve the conflicted conscience of a post-imperial America. With *Independence Day* we saw the conflict between an arrogant imperial America-as-grotesque and a hopeful, cooperative internationally-minded America. Similarly, with *Mars Attacks!*, we had the America-as-grotesque and the failure of an arrogant, collaborationist government in the face of a desire for a return to nativism. This nativism as a decolonization strategy against a vampiric colonizer was borne out as well by *The Puppet Masters*. Finally, with *Babylon 5: In the Beginning*, we have a narrative of wishful thinking--as though the filmmakers were saying "if only we had been shown the error of our ways."

This the reactions to this grievous error is played out via the presidential characters. We can, like President Whitmore, rise up against the colonial paradigm and fight. We can collaborate with the colonials to keep things just the way they are and live comfortably normal lives like President James Dale. Like the President from *In the Beginning*, we can escape, we can attempt to learn from the darkness of colonialism and hope for a better future. Or, like the President in *The Puppet Masters*, we can let someone else deal with it.

The ever-pervasive theme of these films also included the assuaging of guilt--whatever the means of becoming a post-imperial nation; by the films' ends, we have the American analogue surviving the colonization attempt, usually at great cost in terms of

human casualties, but otherwise unscathed in terms of identity. This repeated theme, as rhetoric to the American audience, attempts to reassure them that the demons of colonialism can be put or is behind the United States. This means that the U.S. can continue its national narrative as the world-wide "good guys." Supposedly, with little more than an overabundance of pathos, American audiences can be covertly convinced of this.

### **Implications and Further Study**

The existence of this guilt in popular culture during the cold war suggests that the populace was aware and willingly blinding themselves to the United States's colonial activities. The populace of the U.S. cannot claim ignorance, and can be considered just as guilty as those deliberately working towards colonization because of their inaction.

Interestingly, we are still telling these stories. Aliens are still invading in television programs and on film with the remake of the show *V* (2009), and *James Cameron's Avatar* (2009) and its forthcoming sequel. As I mentioned earlier, we may also be seeing a sequel or spin-off of *Independence Day* in the next few years. This indicates that the 90's films may not have been as successful as previously thought in communicating an end to neo-colonialism--or that we as a nation have chosen the path of *The Puppet Masters*, and no one internally has stepped up to the plate to eradicate the colonial aspects of our nation.

That being said, there are opportunities for further study, the question becomes how does this play out in the 00's to today. As there are no shortage of invasion narratives in any decade, what changes in post-colonial rhetoric could be tracked from this decade, and have we lost some of these avenues of decolonization from the ongoing rhetoric or

are each still as viable as they were in the 1990's? Or could we have predicted this postcolonial rhetorical shift in film in popular media prior to the 90's?

Whatever the case, I intend to keep my eyes peeled for the return of *Independence Day* to big screens, and further works like *Babylon 5* from J. Michael Straczynski, for post-colonial themes. There is a lot more of this narrative out there, and I want this thesis to open the door for other avenues of analysis. So, I too leave an imperative, like Ned Scott of *The Thing* (1951), to tell the world, tell this to everybody wherever they are. Keep watching the screens.

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