

Apocalypse Then: Philip Roth's *Indignation*

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For America's leading social realist Philip Roth to write the Korean War novel *Indignation* at the present moment is to challenge readers to consider the ubiquitous historical amnesia of what is routinely labeled the "forgotten war" or the "unknown war." After all, with no treaty in place, the sixty-year-old conflict has not yet concluded. Korea to us still reverberates with familiar cold war anxieties about atomic weapons under the control of "satanic," unstable leaders and the on-going fears of yet another armed struggle erupting on the rim of American empire. The reviews and early criticism of the novel rarely suggest that it has a social dimension.¹ Indeed, Bruce Cumings, one of the leading American historians of the Korean War and who prefers to append a third label "the never known war," sees the novel as yet another recent example of the "slippages of memory" which helps to encourage the war's historical invisibility where it appears "less a presence than an absence." However, given the revisionist historical analyses of the Korean War, to which Cumings has been a major contributor, the novel is open perhaps to a more nuanced analysis and judgment, one in which "absences" resonate with a broader social and political critique of cold war America. In my reading, Roth's focus is on a personal tragedy but also posits a critique of the chauvinistic assumptions of American cold war politics.(Korean War 62-63)²

¹ For an insightful overview of early reviews of *Indignation* and contextualizing of its narrative strategies, see Derek Parker Royal, "What to Make of Roth's *Indignation*; Or, Serious in the Fifties," *Philip Roth Studies* 5.1 (2009): 125-33. *Indignation* is the first of Roth's novels to focus exclusively on Korea, though *I Married A Communist*, in part, includes the war years and its politics. For a similar consideration of Korea as crucible for cold war ideology, see my essay, "Philip Roth's *I Married a Communist*: Re-thinking the Cold War," *Cultural Logic* 7 (2004).

² It is not possible to address the history of the Korean War without careful consideration of Cumings's scholarship, especially his two volume *The Origins of the Korean War* (1981 and 1990). His reading of the historical record presents an unpleasant and disillusioning story. Beyond the terrible trench warfare of the 1951-53 period, reminiscent of World War I, he claims "Least known to Americans is how appallingly dirty this war was with a sordid history of civilian slaughters amid which our ostensibly democratic ally was the worst offender, contrary to the American image of the North Koreans as fiendish terrorists" (*Korean War* xviii).

The war featured a carpet and napalm bombing campaign by the US Air Force that essentially leveled every major city in the north, a campaign of unremitting violence against civilian populations. These air attacks continued the deliberate strategy of urban bombings that marked the end of WW II in Japan and Germany (both nuclear and conventional) and provided a disturbing prelude to the saturation bombing campaigns of the Vietnam War. According to Cumings, best estimates say that there were 4

In Cumings's very brief discussion of *Indignation*, he sees the novel as a recent example of misperception and limited insight. He argues that Roth, unfortunately, has accepted the "tropes and stereotypes of the time" which requires images of swarms and hordes of screaming Chinese soldiers and offers up the Korean War as a "mystery." To Cumings the novel presents the war as an instrument of Marcus Messner's death and little more. As Marcus lies dying, he seems thoroughly trapped in the memory of *his* life. Cumings is disturbed by this solipsistic emphasis: "He is right: memory is synonymous with oneself. His memory is immortal; the war is not – it recedes into oblivion" (*Korean War* 69). In this reading of Roth, Cumings presents the novel as one more instance of both forgetting and disinterest which stands in for knowledge as America intervenes, selflessly and with great cost, to halt Communist aggression. "In this manner," he explains, "a wrongly conceived and never-known civil conflict disappears before our very eyes, as an American construction that only an American would believe, but American amour proper remains firmly intact" (*Korean War* 65). For Cumings, Roth's Marcus exemplifies the lacuna that is the history of the Korean War.

Marcus's horrible death (literally sliced up to bleed to death like the koshering of his father's chickens) is indeed strictly a personal matter – an inability to "accommodate himself to the institutional authority" as Roth has said (Roth intv). Marcus dies with no larger understanding or even anger as to why he is sacrificed to the war. He narrates his own "life's" story from a morphine-induced haze in the foyer of death on the last day of March 1952 on a numbered hilltop in central Korea a few months short of his twentieth birthday. He recounts how his indiscretions, not to mention his indignations,

million casualties for the countries involved in the three years of fighting with 36,940 Americans killed, 92,134 wounded in action, more than 8,000 missing in action. South Korea sustained 1.3 million casualties including 415,000 dead. North Korean casualties are estimated at 2 million with 1 million civilian and 500,000 military, and 900,000 Chinese soldiers killed – more civilians on a percentage than in World War II or Vietnam (*Korean War* 27). In short, the Korean War became a site where the United States asserted its global reach. What Cumings previously called the "aleatory pursuit of global hegemony" (*Origin* Vol II xviii):

Eventually the Korean War will be understood as one of the most destructive and one of the most important wars of the twentieth century. . . . Finally, it was this war and not World War II which established a far-flung American base structure abroad and a national security state at home, as defense spending nearly quadrupled in the last six months of 1950, and turned the United States into the policeman of the world. (*Korean War* 243)

For a compendium of the air war and its strategies, see Conrad C. Crane, *American Airpower Strategy in Korea, 1950-1953* (Lawrence, KS: UP Kansas, 2000), but for a critique of the air war, see Cumings, 149-161 (*Korean War*).

led both ironically and inexorably to his death having learned “. . . what his uneducated father had been trying to teach him all along: of the terrible, the incomprehensible way one’s most banal, incidental, even comical choices achieve the most disproportionate result” (231). Set in the moment of the Korean War, the novel may, in my view, be taken to represent a parable of the Cold War, a work at once awash in blood, shivering with anxiety, and haunted by apocalypse. Such a reading of the novel is sustained by several narrative elements: an epigraph from a famous anti-war poem, the irony of “indignation” rooted in the Chinese national anthem, the reactionary politics of the college administrators, and the profound anxiety that disorients and debilitates Marcus’s father.

First , the epigraph of the novel is an excerpt from E. E. Cummings’s famous anti-war poem “i sing of Olaf glad and big” which Roth employs with shrewd irony to contrast high principles with political naiveté selecting three lines from near the end of the poem: “Olaf (upon what were once knees)/does almost ceaselessly repeat/’there is some shit I will not eat.” Olaf is not just standing up for his own principles but consciously challenging the authority of the state during wartime. As Gary Lane suggests in his perceptive reading of the poem, “Olaf embraces an integrity of private rather than public convictions.” His poem sings not of “arms and the man” and not of Achilles’s strength valorized in war. Indeed, Olaf is a big, blonde Swede (probably second generation America) who has the appearance of a Teutonic warrior but whose nature is gentle and “whose warmest heart recoiled at war.” It is worth presenting the entire poem:

“i sing of Olaf glad and big”

I sing of Olaf glad and big
whose warmest heart recoiled at war:
a conscientious object-or

his wellbelovéd colonel(trig
westpointer most succinctly bred)
took erring Olaf soon in hand;
but--though an host of overjoyed
noncoms(first knocking on the head
him)do through icy waters roll
that helplessness which others stroke

with brushes recently employed
 anent this muddy toiletbowl,
 while kindred intellects evoke
 allegiance per blunt instruments--
 Olaf(being to all intents
 a corpse and wanting any rag
 upon what God unto him gave)
 responds,without getting annoyed
 "I will not kiss your fucking flag"

straightway the silver bird looked grave
 (departing hurriedly to shave)

but--though all kinds of officers
 (a yearning nation's blueeyed pride)
 their passive prey did kick and curse
 until for wear their clarion
 voices and boots were much the worse,
 and egged the firstclassprivates on
 his rectum wickedly to tease
 by means of skilfully applied
 bayonets roasted hot with heat--
 Olaf(upon what were once knees)
 does almost ceaselessly repeat
 "there is some shit I will not eat"

our president,being of which
 assertions duly notified
 threw the yellowsonofabitch
 into a dungeon,where he died

Christ(of His mercy infinite)
 i pray to see;and Olaf,too

preponderatingly because
 unless statistics lie he was
 more brave than me:more blond than you (Lane 38-39)

Lane writes: "Olaf's strength is moral. Scarcely annoyed as his self-righteous and sadistic torturers attempt to strip him of human dignity, he achieves epic stature by *refusing* to kill" (40 Lane). In Lane's interpretation, Olaf's pacifism and resistance is a reversal of classic, epic heroism, not reflective of submission to prevailing social values but rather a re-definition grounded in individual strength:

As the irony gathers, Cummings unmask the modern bankruptcy of collective values. In a society so perverted that torture has become socially correct – it is administered by the “wellbelovéd colonel(trig/westpointer most succinctly bred)” – sometimes profanity can express the sacred heart. Refusing to “kiss your fucking flag.” . . . His taut Anglo-Saxon, direct as his behavior, is comment enough on his suave persecutors. (40-41)

Olaf is beaten, branded, tortured, jailed and killed by democracy’s servants who are threatened by his message and his courage. The poem’s narrator concludes by noting that in a democracy, statistics don’t lie and Olaf is “more brave than me:more blond than you.” As Lane remarks, “He can do so lightly, however, defying both the military force of his nation and its massively conformed opinions, because he answers to an individual rather than a collective truth, personal vision rather than social regard” (40). Olaf holds both to his moral and political purpose with a resolute individual will. He refuses to kill and is brutalized for that refusal, but he does not surrender either his personal or political beliefs. He willingly and heroically surrenders individual liberty to oppose the war. Olaf knows that his pacifism in wartime is tantamount to treason.

However, Roth’s Marcus is no Olaf. Marcus while equally driven by moral purpose is fundamentally narcissistic in defense of “his” truths, egotistically concerned with his own survival. Roth adopts Cummings’s blunt language to establish Marcus’s disdain for the hypocrisy of authority, but does not challenge the basis of that authority. Further Roth doubles on the irony inherent in the poem and heightens the tragedy by revealing Marcus’s death early in the novel as his morally driven choices lead him blindly and innocently to his end.³ Despite what he considers a reasonable, rational plan to avoid combat, he fails to preserve his life. Marcus’s refusal is an assertion of personal moral right without the larger belief in just cause. Both the poem and the novel are grounded in the cruelty of power, blindness toward systematic violence, and obeisance to

³ Alan Cooper judges Marcus as a young man of principle “who does everything moral and nothing right” (255). Cooper also sees something of a larger social dimension in the novel: “It is also an oblique examination and evaluation – that is a criticism – of American values in 2008” (255). But he does not expand on this view.

the state. Marcus's refusals are strictly personal but reverberate in world historical events. He is a political innocent. Of course, the "why" of Korea remains unknown to him as it did to most Americans in 1950 and sadly still to most Americans in 2010. In the case of our intervention in what was a Korean civil war and revolutionary struggle, Bruce Cumings wants to set aside this mythology:

Korea is the place where the Cold War arrived first, where it never ended and never left, and where we can still see it on cable television. In Cold War bipolarity we are in the right, our motives pure, we do good and never harm. They are a hateful mob, criminal when not just Communist, invisible . . . , grotesque, insane, capable of anything. We are human and dignified and open; they are inhuman, a mysterious, secluded Other with no rights worthy of our respect. . . . After seven decades of confrontation American images of North Korea still bear the birthmarks of Orientalist bigotry. (*Korean War* 100)

Like Olaf, there is "shit" that Marcus will not eat. When forced to attend chapel and to listen to the droning sermons (hogwash" as Marcus calls it), what he "ceaselessly" repeats is the Chinese national anthem in which the novel's title is embedded.

MARCH OF THE VOLUNTEERS
 Arise, ye who refuse to be bondslaves!
 With our very flesh and blood
 We will build a new Great Wall!
 China's masses have met the day of danger.
 Indignation fills the hearts of all of our
 Countrymen,
 Arise! Arise! Arise!
 Every heart with one mind,
 Brave the enemy's gunfire,
 March on!
 Brave the enemy's gunfire,
 March on! March on! March on! (82)

Though a secular school Winesburg College requires attending a minimum of 40 chapel sessions as a graduation requirement. The religious content is watered down but Marcus “objected strongly to everything about attending chapel, beginning with the venue . . . and listen . . . to Dr. Donehower or anyone else preach to me against my will . . . I objected not because I was an observant Jew but because I was an ardent atheist” (80). Marcus finds out that Winesburg may be secular but remains parochial. He was surprised to learn “. . . of the beliefs with which youngsters were indoctrinated as a matter of course deep in the heart of America” (81). I see the tension between Marcus’s indignation and his indoctrination into American values as also an element of Roth’s consideration of the era of the Korean War. Marcus will be killed in hand to hand combat with a Chinese soldier wielding a razor sharp bayonet while bugles blare “March of the Volunteers” – the popular song of resistance to the Japanese invasion in the 1930’s which was then adopted as the national anthem of People’s Republic. While Marcus is keenly aware of the war – reading about it “obsessively,” he says – and very much opposed to General Douglas MacArthur’s calls to widen and intensify the struggle, his opposition was strictly self-serving: how to avoid combat. And yet, his every action and decision insures his expulsion, loss of his student deferment, and deployment to Korea. Singing “March of the Volunteers” in Winesburg’s chapel is echoed murderously a year later.

Early in the novel when Marcus is narrating from his morphine-induced stupor, he explains his plan for evading combat. He plans to do well in the mandatory one-semester ROTC course to qualify for acceptance into advanced ROTC and matriculation into the Army as a second lieutenant in the Transportation Corps. Once in Transportation (where he still might be sent to a combat zone), he will apply to transfer into Army Intelligence. Otherwise when he graduates he would be subject to the draft and after basic training could end up “in a freezing Korean foxhole awaiting the bugle’s blare” (33). Eight cousins had been in combat in WW II and two had died, Abe, Uncle Muzzy’s son, at Anzio in 1943 and Dave, Uncle Shecky’s son, in the Battle of the Bulge in 1944 and “the Messners who lived on were steeped in *their* blood.” Marcus thinks it prudent not to be drafted into the infantry:

. . . the war looked as though it could go on for years, with tens of thousands more Americans killed, wounded, and captured. American troops had never fought in any war more frightening than this one, facing as they did wave after wave of Chinese soldiers seemingly impervious to our firepower, often fighting them in the foxholes with bayonets and their bare hands. . . . Chinese Communist soldiers, attacking sometimes by the thousands, communicated not by radio and walkie-talkie . . . but by bugle call, and it was said that nothing was more terrifying than those bugles sounding in the pitch dark and swarms of the enemy, having stealthily infiltrated American lines, cascading with weapons ablaze down on our weary men. . . . (31-32)⁴

Marcus's anxiety is minutely focused on Korea and the possibility of dying in a war that appeared particularly vicious and frightening. However, his antagonism to authority and indiscriminate power does not extend to the war itself or to what it represents. Unlike, for example, Dalton Trumbo's Joe Bonham in the thoroughly anti-war novel, *Johnny Got His Gun*, Marcus does not see that he has been misled. Joe Bonham with no hands, legs, eyes, ears, mouth but whose brain is intact, communicates, also often from a drug induced miasma, by tapping out Morse code with the back and forth movement of his head. He wants to be released from the prison of the VA hospital to travel around the country earning his way as a "freak show" to the "real" cost of war – a hunk of meat with a brain! He will be a crusade against war. But the Government will not release him. Joe understands that he will be imprisoned until his death, isolated from the world because he is too dangerous. Joe might convince young men to turn the guns

⁴ For an analysis of Chinese strategy and tactics in Korea, see Guang Zhang's *Mao's Military Romanticism*. He suggests that the intimate fighting was a planned strategy by Chinese forces to defeat a technologically superior army. According to Peng Dehuai, commander of the Northwest Military District and the First Field Army of the Chinese Peoples Volunteers, the tactics employed "must dare to organize close combat with satchel charges, bayonets, and grenades which the enemy troops fear the most." (Zhang 92). In drawing US forces deep into the north, the strategy was to destroy one regiment or battalion at a time. While there were no instances of such a complete success, the Chinese leadership viewed the truce at the 38th parallel a great victory in which Mao argued that for the first time China stood up against a Western power. In halting US aggression, the Chinese leadership believed it undermined the view of US invincibility and encouraged anti-colonial resistance – e.g. in Vietnam. For the US leadership the war in Korea demonstrated the need to accelerate the expansion of the military. (Zhang 247-61)

around.⁵ But Marcus, even in the moments of reflection before his death, offers up no larger “indignation.”

Of course, Marcus knows all about razor sharp knives and blood and the smell of freshly butchered meat, but he wants no part of the slaughterhouse in Newark or Korea. Roth sets up Marcus’s tragedy by contrasting the sanguinary rituals of kosher butchering with the cruelty and indifference of authority in service to an emerging empire. The ruling elite was willing to place thousands in the maw of an ideological battle turned hot and murderous. At the end of the novel when the narrator steps in to finish off Marcus’s story to describe his death from the bayonet wounds which “had all but severed one leg from his torso and hacked his intestines and genitals to bits” (226), the reader learns that Marcus’s company had occupied one of those numbered ridges in central Korea (like the famous battle on Heartbreak Ridge, September 13 to October 15, 1951). Their position is overrun *en masse* by Chinese soldiers who have adopted a strategy of night raids and hand to hand combat as way to terrify American/UN troops, and to offset and defeat superior firepower and a modern army. In Marcus’s company only 12 of 200 survived “Massacre Mountain.” The Communist attacked with a 1,000 soldiers and lost almost 900:

He had not been encircled by so much blood since his days as a boy at the slaughterhouse, watching the ritual killing of animals in accordance with Jewish law. . . . They’d just kept coming and dying, advancing with bugles blaring “Arise, ye who refuse to be bondslaves!” and retreating through a landscape of bodies and blasted trees, machine-gunning their wounded and all they could locate of ours. The machine guns were Russian made. (226-27)

Despite Roth’s lapse into the cliché of Asian barbarity, he suggests that Marcus’s death was in service to no legitimate threat to the United States: “both sides sustained casualties so massive as to render the battle a fanatical calamity, much like the war itself”

⁵ In the prefatory material to the recent edition of *Johnny Got His Gun*, one finds a damning foreword by anti-war activist Cindy Sheean whose son Casey died in 2004 about the Iraq War and the power of the 70 year old novel to both anger and inspire resistance, along with Ron Kovic’s introduction about the novel’s relevance to Vietnam. Trumbo wrote an introduction (1959 and a 1970 addendum) to explain the novel’s publishing history just at the start of WW II and to note the terrible carnage of Vietnam both the dead and the mutilated. Christopher Hitchens was the only reviewer to link the two novels; see his “Nasty, Brutish, and Short,” *Atlantic* Oct. 2008: 111+.

(226). Marcus is trapped in an equation in which his trivial and banal personal decisions have been raised exponentially to deadly consequence in the newly inaugurated chapter of cold war economic and military turmoil.

The Korean War's military history is readily divided into three phases: the battle in the South after the June 1950 invasion, the battle for the North in the fall and winter of 1950 (after the September invasion at Inchon) with the involvement of Chinese forces, and then the two years of trench warfare reminiscent of WW I along what is now called the DMZ (demilitarized zone), essentially along the 38th parallel. For Marcus, once the war entered into the third phase (after MacArthur's dismissal in April 1951), he is very much alarmed by the prospect of a drawn out struggle. However, what he reads is tainted by heavily censored news reporting beginning in 1951 and by an unprecedented propaganda campaign.⁶

Once the shooting started, the mass media was portraying the Communist enemy in particularly racist language demonizing Asians as barbarians. It is no wonder that Marcus and his father are terrified about the war. Early on, war reporting was dominated by dispatches about the brutality of the North Koreans and especially by articles about their atrocities. For example, the first article about the war in *Life* (July 17, 1950) included a description of a wounded US soldier with hands up to surrender being machined gun by advancing North Koreans. And in the next week's issue (July 24) a photo of a dead US soldier with this caption: "Face down on a Korean roadside lies the body of an American soldier who was captured by Communists, trussed up and then murdered."⁷

For example, the hawkish military editor for *The New York Times*, Hanson Baldwin, articulates this view of Asian savagery with shockingly mater-of-fact directness. As to the Koreans, he writes, "We are facing an army of barbarians . . . they are barbarians . . . as reckless of life . . . as the hordes of Genghis Khan. . . . The invaders are well armed and their manpower is virtually inexhaustible. . . . We face in Korea and

⁶ For an analysis of wartime propaganda, see Steven Casey, *Selling The Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953*. (2008). By the beginning of 1951, war reporting came tightly under the control of Army censors.

⁷ See pages 36 and 21, respectively. [Full text copies of every issue of *Life* are available on Googlebooks.com.] And once the Chinese entered the fighting the atrocity reports were routine in the media.

elsewhere – not only the armed horde, but the armored horde.” With Chinese, Mongolians, and possible Soviet Asiatics joining North Koreans, US forces require better training “. . . to meet the barbarian discipline of the armored hordes . . .” (July 14, 1950). And five days later Baldwin reports on the “bloody” fighting, especially the heavy North Korean casualties. “But unfortunately to him it makes but little difference. To him life is cheap. Behind him stand the hordes of Asia. Ahead lies the hope of loot. And what else – what is the goal that brings him shrieking on, into the muzzles of our guns?” (July 19)

Baldwin, in a December 1950 *NYT Magazine* article (after the intervention of Chinese forces in Korea and heavy losses as US troops have been trapped in the north after they drove to the Yalu River), sees Red China “. . . the sullen enigma – the brooding, ominous, giant” as a threatening dark shadow over the Pacific Rim – Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Formosa, and Indo-China. It will shape “the destiny of the Orient.” He repeats the trope of the Asiatic hordes – “fecund teeming millions of the Orient”: “. . . wherever one goes there is febrile life, often scabrous, dirty, diseased but thronging and persistent. Like animals, many of the masses of Asia live, breed, and dies; like animals they persist, fatalistic, determined, undeterred – driven by the great primitive instincts to eat, to breed, to acquire.” (Dec. 24 1950). And then in the spring as a new enemy offensive begins, Baldwin reminds readers:

. . . the oriental disregard for life, must be interpreted against the whole history of the Far East. We tend to play up to an undue extent the large casualties of the enemy; yet we forget that life is cheap and death a commonplace in the Orient. . . . To Westerners the appalling disregard for the casualties shown by the enemy displays either a shocking indifference or a terrible discipline. . . . An army built around such tactics “keeps coming”; heavy casualties are no deterrent to its drive. . . . But men, we should always remember, are the cheapest commodity of the Orient. (May 23, 1951).⁸

⁸ For discussion of the trope of Asian barbarism, see Cumings *KW passim*. Several examples suffice: a) The *NYT* editorial on October 7, 1950 says that reports of Communist atrocities in Korea should not “cause surprise.” Communists everywhere “put the most miserably low value upon human life and has put no value whatever upon human dignity or human decency.” In this regard they are like the Nazis and their misdeeds “in the light of more civilized standards of behavior, has been utterly atrocious.” The editorial concludes by saying that “A part of the necessary restoration in Korea . . . must be the re-establishment of moral values that will make it impossible for human beings to turn away from their humanity in the service

There is another aspect to the public campaign to argue for the apocalyptic nature of the conflict with Communism. In April 1950, the National Security Council under the leadership of Dean Acheson, Secretary of State, promulgated a new strategic plan for American foreign policy which addressed the issues of increased Soviet aggressiveness, Soviet atomic weapons, and Communist expansion. In September 1950, after the start of the Korean War, The President signed off on NSC 68, the single most important document of the cold War era, which argued for the need to be committed to a long-term struggle with the Soviet Union that will require a substantially larger commitment of our resources to military expansion. The premise was to strive for peace but be prepared for war. Of course, this was a top secret document but mainstream media such as the *NYT* and *Life* would become, through their wired-in military correspondents and editors, public conduits for the new policy of aggressive anti-communism.⁹

The language of NSC 68 is blunt and clear about the fact that “The whole success of the proposed program hangs ultimately on recognition by this Government, the American people, and all free peoples, that the cold war is in fact a real war in which the survival of the free world is at stake.” The Soviet Union is run by an evil dictatorship that is committed to the destruction of capitalism and to the control of the world; it is worth quoting at length:

... the Soviet Union, unlike previous aspirants to hegemony, is animated by a new fanatic faith, anti-thetical to our own, and seeks to impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world. Conflict has, therefore, become endemic and is waged, on the part of the Soviet Union, by violent or non-violent methods in accordance with the dictates of expediency. With the development of increasingly terrifying weapons of mass destruction, every individual faces the

of an essentially in humane cause.” b) The *NYT* reported Army Chief of Staff, General J. Lawton Collins as likening Korean fighting to “a reversion to old-style fighting – more comparable to that of our own Indian frontier days than to modern war.” (Dec. 27, 1950). c) Walter Karig depicts Korean Communists as “cunning” fighters who are “insouciantly contemptuous of every rule of civilized warfare” hiding behind women and children and parking tanks inside of schools (“Korea Tougher Than Okinawa,” *Collier*, Sept. 29, 1950, 24+).

⁹ For specific focus on NSC 68 publicity campaign, see Steve Casey, “Selling NSC 68: The Truman Administration, Public Opinion and the Politics of Mobilization, 1950-51,” *Diplomatic History* 29 (2005): 655-90 and his *Selling the Korean War*, *passim*. For an analysis of the historical significance of NSC 68 in Korea and the cold war, see Cumings, *KW* and *Origins*, *passim*.

ever-present possibility of annihilation should the conflict enter the phase of total war.

On the one hand, the people of the world yearn for relief from the anxiety arising from the risk of atomic war. On the other hand, any substantial further extension of the area under the domination of the Kremlin would raise the possibility that no coalition adequate to confront the Kremlin with greater strength could be assembled. It is in this context that this Republic and its citizens in the ascendancy of their strength stand in their deepest peril. (NSC 68)

The fight in Korea is necessary because it is yet another example to American leaders of the Soviet drive to domination and now, "in the context of the present polarization of power a defeat of free institutions anywhere is a defeat everywhere." Containment is no longer sufficient. There must be a coherent and rapid development of military strength "to check and to roll back the Kremlin's drive for world domination." In a few years, the Soviet Union will have the capacity to attack the US directly with atomic weapons. NSC 68 called for battle on all fronts (economic, political ideological and military):

1. Thus we must make ourselves strong, both in the way in which we affirm our values in the conduct of our national life, and in the development of our military and economic strength.
2. We must lead in building a successfully functioning political and economic system in the free world. It is only by practical affirmation, abroad as well as at home, of our essential values, that we can preserve our own integrity, in which lies the real frustration of the Kremlin design.
3. But beyond thus affirming our values our policy and actions must be such as to foster a fundamental change in the nature of the Soviet system, a change toward which the frustration of the design is the first and perhaps the most important step. Clearly it will not only be less costly but more effective if this change occurs to a maximum extent as a result of internal forces in Soviet society (NSC 68)

For example, the propagandizing for the new policy can be seen clearly in

Baldwin's reporting, and in articles and editorials in both the *NYT* and *Life*. Part of NSC strategy was to build public support – the American public must be educated to that threat and to support measures required to resist it. Writing on August 21, 1950, with the war still not turning to US advantage, Baldwin explains in a more philosophical piece that the Korean struggle is also an ideological struggle, not to be won only by force of arms. Mirroring language in NSC 68, Baldwin notes that there is a world-wide struggle which requires both expanded military and political effort to demonstrate “. . . the political ideal of democracy, the moral ideal of Western civilization, the economic ideal of equal opportunity.” Baldwin warns that the bombing campaigns with high civilian deaths (one of the very few instances where such deaths were acknowledged) without the necessary campaign to win over the support of Koreans (“hearts and minds”) will not be successful. “. . . unless these simple, primitive, and sometimes barbaric peoples are convinced that we – not the Communists – are their friends and offer the hope of a better life.” To gain mass support against the North and the guerrillas in the South requires a pacification program to balance the visible devastation, Baldwin declares.

After the intervention of the Chinese in support of the North Koreans, Baldwin wrote on December 1, 1950, about the dangers posed by Communism: “The United States faces today the greatest danger in our history. Military, economic or political destruction of Western civilization and of our American way of life are definite possibilities. . . .” We are now at war with Red China in a land battle in Asia against “the hordes of Asia.” Baldwin writes that we have to be worried because while Europe is still the strategically most important in the struggle against Communism to surrender in Korea is to invite undermining our power in the Western Pacific and “much of Asia will fall like a house of cards to Communism . . . we can lose the world in Asia if we are not wise and strong.”¹⁰

In the 1950's perhaps there was no better measure in the general discourse about the war than *Life* magazine under the control of its right wing publisher Henry Luce. While we know that Marcus is preoccupied with war news, there is no evidence that he

¹⁰ Earlier, on August 27, Baldwin published a long analysis of the US military status arguing for the need to build up armed forces to fight the limited wars like Korea, the Nazi-like blitzkrieg invasion by the North which almost overwhelmed allied forces. And he gave prominence to the potential of new radiological and biological weapons the US should develop in support of military expansion. The defensive posture of the immediate post-WW II period must be set aside, he argued.

read *Life* but it is not a huge leap in supposition to suggest he did – after June 1950, the war and the Soviet threat were a rather constant topic in the mass media (newspaper, radio, magazines, and movies). Even prior to the outbreak of fighting, Marcus would have read a steady stream of articles about the possible fall of China into the hands of Stalin and the Communists, the loss of A-bomb monopoly, the prospects for global war, the need to build up the American armed forces, and the unrest throughout all of Asia. With the success of the Communists in the civil war in China and the explosion of a nuclear bomb by the Soviets, the October 3, 1949 *Life* editorial makes clear that the leadership of the Soviet Union are power hungry totalitarians who seem to be on “a timetable for war.”

In the January 1, 1950 issue, the *Life* editorial marking the beginning of the second half of the “American Century” is unambiguous: “The mid-century American is called upon first of all to resist the Communist threat to his world. Which is to say, to rally his world to battle for the life and freedom of all men. And this is to say, to make his world a place and his century a time of freedom everywhere” (28). This is followed at the end of February with an issue devoted to an assessment of US military power: “War Can Come; Will We Be Ready?” The editorial argues that the Soviets are “determined to destroy the free world.” This is a real threat the editorial warns because its ideology calling for world domination is backed by an expanding military and nuclear arms. And echoing NSC 68, the editorial suggests that the US population is not worried enough about Communist threats. And by the end of 1950, with the Chinese offensive decimating US forces in the north, *Life* sees WW III ever closer and that while our true enemy is the Soviet Union the Chinese Communists are linked to Russia and together they want to conquer Europe and Asia. No peace can be bought according to *Life* and the US must lead the anti-Communist alliance. *Life* is not urging unlimited war with atomic weapons but wants continued and escalated resistance to Communists in Asia. The magazine supports mobilizing for war and a reading of these cold war issues, especially after June 1950, certainly are congruent with all of the aims of NSC 68, not to mention helping to raise the anxiety of a possible nuclear attack.¹¹

¹¹ In 1941, Henry Luce expressed his notion of American leadership in the well known essay “The American Century” claiming the U.S. is “...inheritor of all the great principles of Western civilization –

In my view, Marcus's solipsistic naiveté is a metaphor for the extent to which the Korean War was masked. Through Marcus and even more through his father, Roth reflects the anxieties of the cold war where valorous death in service to America is once again possible though little understood. The war's horrific violence was justified in the name of democracy and presented publicly as a stand against communist perfidy. The central issues of the cold war as defined by NSC 68 were linked to the fighting in Korea – escalating defense spending, nuclear weapons, national security, fear and vilification of communism, and control of insurgent nationalisms in the Third World. In my view, anti-communism was the smokescreen behind which the American ruling elite worked to consolidate its influence. Marcus, however, dwells in the realm of memory while under the miasma of morphine. His innocence remains:

. . . Though perhaps this perpetual remembering is merely the anteroom to oblivion. As a nonbeliever, I assumed the afterlife was without a clock, a body, a brain, a soul, a god – without anything of any shape, form, or substance, decomposition absolute. I did not know that it was *not* only not without remembering but that remembering would *be* everything. . . . But inasmuch as I have no idea where I am, what I am, how long I am to remain in this state, uncertainty appears to be enduring. . . . You can't go forward here, that's for sure. There are no doors. There are no days. The direction (for now?) is only back. And the judgment is endless though not because some deity judges you, because your actions are naggingly being judged for all time by yourself. (56-7)

above all Justice, the love of Truth, the ideal of Charity.” As the country prepared for war he called on the U.S. to take on “the role of world leadership” (*Life*, February 17, 1941, 64-65). [The editorial in January 1950 is an opportunity to assess the prospects for the second half of America's century.]

And by 1947, Luce is again asking for the country to take on the role of the protector of democracy and capitalism and to see that the Soviets are out to destroy capitalism. Luce is especially concerned about the Far East and the possibility of a Communist victory in the Chinese civil war. Unsurprisingly, Luce is a strong supporter of Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang. See especially the June 1947 issue of his *Fortune* magazine which includes a long editorial on the importance of U.S. leadership in rebuilding industrial capitalism and military strength to combat Communist expansion (81+). See also a quite long, unsigned article about Korea as a venue for such development under American leadership. (“Korea: the U.S. gets to Work,” 99+). Needless to say, Luce was no ally of either Truman or Acheson. Rather, he is aligned with General Douglas MacArthur on the need for “rollback” of Communist expansion.

Politically, aside from his previously noted disdain for MacArthur's warmongering, Marcus is both rather oblivious and accepting of the mythology of American benevolence, even as he becomes a victim of cold war *realpolitik*. In a certain sense, he is just as indoctrinated to convention as the other conventional students at Winesburg. The prevailing pieties of cold war American patriotic ideology and bourgeois morality are offered up by the Winesburg administration in the sanctimonious lectures of Dean Hawes Caudwell and President Albin Lentz. Dean Caudwell sees his job, *in loco parentis*, to provide spiritual, ethical, and social guidance to Winesburg's undergraduates, as Marcus finds out in his earlier, contentious, and indignation producing interview with the Dean. The Dean is concerned that Marcus is not adapting well to Winesburg – having changed rooms twice in less than a semester.

Marcus's anger is provoked as he seems to hear that his choice of roommates, his relations with his parents, his religious preferences, and his social life seem askew to the Dean. His anxiety and indignation are inflamed. "I am going to be thrown out of school, I thought. For moving too many times I am going to be asked to leave Winesburg. That's how this is going to wind up. Thrown out, drafted, sent to Korea, and killed" (87-88). But his resentment and humiliation are not enough to stop Marcus from confronting the Dean (standing, pointing a finger, pounding the desk) and in the contretemps that follows when Marcus invokes Bertrand Russell's "Why I Am Not a Christian" to support his atheism, the Dean's conservative premises are apparent:

. . . I don't necessarily admire whom and what you choose to read and the gullibility with which you take at face value rationalist blasphemies spouted by an immoralist of the ilk of Bertrand Russell, four times married a blatant adulterer, an advocate of free love, a self-confessed socialist dismissed from his university position for his antiwar campaigning during the first War and imprisoned for that by the British authorities. . . . what is worrying me today, is not your having memorized word for word as a high school debater the contrarianism of a Bertrand Russell that is designed to nurture malcontents and rebels. . . . What worries me is your isolation. (106-07)

Marcus is clear in his response. He is absolutely not a “malcontent or rebel.” He wants to do what is right: to do well in his classes, and to be free to choose roommates, friends, and beliefs. But even the fear of expulsion, the draft and Korea is not enough for him to back down.

His second meeting with the Dean ends in an even sharper confrontation when Marcus tries to find out what has happened to Olivia. The Dean accuses Marcus of impregnating her and contributing to her breakdown. The hospital, where Marcus was recovering from his emergency appendectomy, had reported the nurse’s observation of Olivia’s masturbating Marcus. But Marcus is still a virgin and simply tells the Dean that it is “impossible” that he impregnated Olivia, but then can’t control his indignation:

“Given all we now know,” the dean said, “that’s also hard to believe.”

“Oh, fuck you it is!” Yes, belligerently, angrily, impulsively, and for the second time at Winesburg. But I *would* not be condemned on no evidence. I was sick of that from everyone.” (192)

As Marcus worries again about expulsion, he ponders the “vapidity” of the College and “the constricting rectitude tyrannizing” his life. For Marcus it is all personal, except for the very frightening possibility of death in Korea. With Roth’s usual comic irony, Marcus’s fondest wish to have sexual intercourse before he dies will not be fulfilled.

The connection to Korea and the larger world, in cold-war terms, is made convincingly by President Lentz when he addresses the male students in the aftermath of the panty raid. With that speech, Roth elaborates his understanding of the politics of the cold war and the necessity of Korea. Lentz is a career politician who had been a two-term Republican “strikebreaking” governor in West Virginia, and an unsuccessful senatorial candidate in 1948. He has taken on Winesburg as a steppingstone to a run for Ohio governor and perhaps to position himself for a presidential run in 1956. In an impressive oratorical display Lentz makes clear how juvenile and insipid are the panty raiders. On the day of the raid, he reminds them, a tentative truce line was established in Korea: “it means that fighting as barbaric as any we have known in Korea – as barbaric as any American forces have known in any war at any time in our history can flare up any

hour . . . and take thousands more young American lives” (218). He reminds the boys “how fortunate, how privileged, how lucky” they are that while watching football in mid-October his old WW I division is engaged in bloody warfare with more than 4,000 casualties. “When measured against the sacrifices being made by young Americans your age in this brutal war against the aggression of the North Korean and Chinese Communist forces . . . do you have any idea how juvenile and stupid and idiotic your behavior looks. . . .” Where were those who should have had the courage to stop the boorish behavior, he asked. “How’s it going to serve you when a thousand screaming Chinese soldiers come swarming down on your foxhole, should negotiations in Korea break down? As they will, I can guarantee you, with bugles blaring and bearing their bayonets!” (219-20)

Lentz continues by linking the Korean War and their childish behavior to the larger struggle with the “godless” Soviet Union. He reminds the boys that the Soviets now have the atomic bomb and atomic war is a real possibility. The threat to America is clear:

. . . Beyond your dormitories, a world is on fire and you are kindled by underwear. Beyond your fraternities, history unfolds daily – warfare, bombings wholesale slaughter and you are oblivious of it all. Well, you won’t be oblivious for long! . . . history will catch you in the end. Because history is not the background – history is the stage! (22)

Lentz was emphatic “decency” and “dignity” will prevail at Winesburg and the administration will be vigilant in preserving the “ideals” and “values” of the college: “Human conduct *can* be regulated, and it *will* be regulated! The insurrection is over. The rebellion is quelled” (223). Marcus hears the message, authority will prevail at least for now:

President Lentz had pronounced the words “thoughtless fun” as scornfully as if they were a synonym for “premeditated murder.” And so conspicuous was his abhorrence of “rebellious insolence” that he might have been enunciating the

name of a menace resolved to undermine not just Winesburg, Ohio, but the great republic itself. (224)

In Lentz's formulation, the world is at war again, and young men will be called to service and Marcus will sacrifice his life to a cause that he never quite understood. It seems that Marcus had been anaesthetized much earlier to accept the justness of America's new role as the world's defender of "democracy." As suggested by the novel's epilogue, it will take the Korean and Vietnam wars to stimulate widespread resistance in the late 1960's to blind acceptance of the "Winesburgian" and American values. In the aftermath of the panty raid, Marcus is expelled not for his participation in the riot but for faking his attendance at chapel and for refusing to apologize and accept punishment of an additional 40 chapel lectures before graduation.

The stately, silver haired Dean of Men, former Winesburg star athlete, WWI veteran admonishes the boys to cease their riotous behavior or face expulsion and the boys retreat knowing full well that with expulsion they risk the draft and war. However, the following day the Dean expelled 22 ringleaders and vows that those who denied participation but are found to be lying will also be expelled: "You can't deceive me . . . and won't deceive me" (214). Personal decorum, respect for rules, and acceptance of authority are the Dean's demands of the rioters and of Marcus. There is no doubt that Dean Caudwell will notify Marcus's Newark draft board of his expulsion. He will lose his student deferment, and be called up promptly for basic training in December of 1951, and deployed to Korea in March 1952. He dies in the trench warfare of the War's third phase.

It is interesting to consider that Roth's irony extends to the selective service system as well. It is worth recalling how the draft was shaped to the needs of the cold war era. For the first time, the draft was invoked without a declaration of war to jump start the man-power needs of the Korean War itself and as a complement to the demands of establishing a world-wide military presence for the US under NSC 68. The Korean War draft is rooted in an approach to strategic thinking about "intellectual" resources and to a view that the battle with Communism will extend for years and perhaps decades, not just focused on a specific crisis like Korea. At first, the student deferments were

primarily intended to support research in science and engineering. However, in planning for a new selective service system student deferments were offered broadly but not universally, as M. H. Trytten explains in his history of the origins of the cold war selective service system, *Student Deferment in Selective Service* (1952). He offers this analysis about the importance of intellectual resources in long-term national security:

Thus the current student deferment program does not deprive the military service of able young men. But what in the long run is more important, that the program ensures a steady flow of able and educated people who will manage the nation's industry, direct its educational system, preserve its health, make its laws, direct its military service, write its books, make its scientific discoveries, develop its new products, and in general, lead its cultural, political, economic, religious, and social development of the future. (60)

The philosophy of the new regulations was developed in the spring of 1950 by various technical committees established to provide policy recommendations to General Lewis B. Hershey, director of the selective Service system. It was very much tied to the belief that national security required a large pool of college and post-graduate educated young men in support of the long-term geo-political struggle with Communism. Such an approach avoided the problem of trying to pre-determine what expertise the country would need, but rather to see that “Men of high ability constitute a national resource that's in short supply” (45). The merging of military needs with civilian requirements is premised on the belief that college is not a “privilege for the individual but a national necessity” (106). Long-term security needs had to be considered in an era of atomic weapons where the U.S. was no longer insulated from direct attack. In short, a ruling elite of highly trained “men” were needed to maintain both “the national defense as well as the national welfare” (88).¹² Marcus with his straight A's and focused work ethic was

¹² As Trytten notes, the issue of student deferment was the beginning of government involvement in the course of higher education. The expansion of college and university attendance was directly related to a long-term strategic plan: NSC 68. It also marked the moment of the beginning escalating influence of the College Board and the Educational Testing Service in national testing for college admissions. ETS was hired to produce the first national selective service test, the Selective Service College Qualification Test (scaled to the Army's own Army General Classification Test). Not surprisingly the ETS selective service

exactly the kind of student who would benefit, but whose indignation, perhaps, made him unfit for such leadership. However, his contribution to national security became a foxhole in Korea.

Lastly, how to read the father's fears and anxieties? The depth of the father's bafflement and overwhelming generalized anxiety invites, in addition to a psychological reading, a political interpretation in which the father's psychosis symbolizes the great terror of the Red Scare. In my reading, the father's breakdown represents the angst of this crucible moment in the cold war conflict. The geopolitics of anti-communism would dominate the remainder of the twentieth century and stamp, as well, the conduct of the "war on terror" in the twenty first. As noted above, Steven Casey makes clear in *Selling The Korean War* frightening the public was an important part of the publicity campaign to convince the public of the "real" and present dangers. The ruling elite wanted support for NSC 68 though not so much hysteria that it would initiate a mania for "preventive" (pre-emptive) war. Within a month of the start of the Korean War, the NYT reported that health professionals were seeing a sharp increase in fear and anxiety in part because of the sense that the Korean War may very well be the start of a global conflict with the possibility of peace less likely. As *The Times* reported the psychologists say clients voice a belief that ". . . they are in graver danger today than at any time in the last war. Some explain that this occurred because, for the first time in any war fought by Americans, civilians as well as fighting men face the potential danger of death." (Aug. 20, 1950)

On the level of narrative action Marcus indeed fulfills his father's premonition. Small acts, some principled and some indiscreet, produce the disproportionate result which moves him from indignant college student in the fall of 1951 to death in a Korean foxhole four months later. The novel opens under the shadow of the beginning of the Korean War with Marcus recalling the startling change in his father's behavior as he starts college as a commuter student to downtown Newark in September 1950. To Marcus, seemingly overnight, the solid, grounded father is wracked with anxiety and insecurity manifested most directly in the fear that Marcus will get in to trouble and be killed. What has been, up to this time, a loving and respectful relationship with his father

test looked remarkably similar to the soon-to-be the ubiquitous Scholastic Aptitude Test. Lastly, the sexist language of college and military training was the usual landscape in the 1950's.

becomes distorted and broken by the father's constant inquisition about what Marcus was doing, with whom, and where he had been. Of course, objectively, the shooting war in Korea was a tangible danger, especially for the father of an 18-year-old son, and an only child. The memory of WW II is still sharply etched for the father whose two nephews died in combat (as did many other young men from the Weequahic neighborhood). The father's fear of war is palpable and the belief that Korea might well last many years is believable as is the possibility of it triggering a third world war. But as long as Marcus remains in school and does well, he will retain his student deferment under the rules of the newly re-instituted draft.

Marcus, the epitome of rationality, as he begins college, confronts a father's "ignorance and irrationality." His father came to be fixated, not just on the war, (or the supermarket taking his customers or about the exodus of Jews to the suburbs) but in all of life's dangers ". . . where the tiniest misstep can have tragic consequences" (12). After a year, Marcus can't abide his father's "craziness" and heads off to Winesburg to isolate himself from the harangues. As noted above, Marcus has absorbed similar anxieties about the war and the consequences of losing his student deferment, but his father's fears are more perverse and pervasive.

For example, when his mother arrives to check on his recovery the emergency appendectomy, Marcus learns that his father is "losing his mind," fearful all of the time. He accuses the mother of trying to poison him and waits for the mother to take a first bite. She doesn't know this husband and wonders what has happened to him: "Fear, Marcus, fear leaking out at every pore, anger leaking out at every pore, and I don't know how to stop either" (151). She is ready to divorce him, an action almost criminal in their Jewish world. But she simply can't abide his lunacy any longer:

That my father could have gotten my mother to go on her own to see a lawyer about a divorce was a measure not of her weakness but of the crushing power of his inexplicable transformation, of his all at once having been turned inside out by unrelenting intimations of disaster. (162)

The father is undone by a reality he no longer understands – from the upheaval in his neighborhood to the possibility of total war and atomic annihilation, and to a bloody conflict in Asia that may consume his son. The “world” has become inexplicably unstable, and he is overwhelmed.

While on the level of public policy, NSC 68 was predicated on gaining mass support for a new global conflict with a dangerous and “evil” enemy. The daily war reporting along with other media reminders of the war escalated the tensions and uncertainties about the communist threats abroad and at home, especially the ominous references to the use of atomic weapons in Korea after Chinese forces entered combat. For example, President Truman threatened atomic weapons at a news conference at the end of November and it is now clear that the atomic option was part of military discussions throughout the first half of 1951. The dismissal of General MacArthur in April 1951 was closely tied to having a “reliable” commander with respect to possible atomic strikes in Korea.¹³

¹³ See especially Roger Dingman, “Atomic Diplomacy during the Korean War,” *International Security*, 13.3 (Winter, 1988-1989): 50-91 and Bruce Cumings, “Why Did Truman Really Fire MacArthur? . . . The Obscure History of Nuclear Weapons and the Korean War Provides the Answer,” <<http://hnn.us/articles/9245.html>> 26 January 2010. That MacArthur was interested in dropping atomic bombs near the North Korea/China border to create an irradiated zone to prevent troop movement is noted in two 1954 interviews which were first published at the time of MacArthur’s death in 1964: James Lucas interview “Great Betrayal by Fools’ Charged MacArthur,” *New York World-Telegram and The Sun*, April 8, 1964, 1+ and interview with Bob Considine in *New York Journal American*, April 8, 1964, 1+. Both interviews were reported by Robert Trumbull, “MacArthur Blamed British For a ‘Betrayal in Korea,” *NYT*, April 9, 1964. Instead of atomic bombs, MacArthur and General Curtis LeMay conducted a relentless carpet bombing of North Korea – LeMay’s first attempt at bombing an Asian enemy “back to the stone age.”

For example, as early as spring and summer 1948, *Life* ran a series of articles on the prospects for war and questioned U.S. readiness to fight the massive Russian army. In the July 5, 1948 issue, *Life* ran an article by retired Chief of Staff of the US Air Force, Carl Spaatz (commander of air forces that dropped A-bombs on Japan). He called for sharp increase in military spending especially for air power and he warned of the end to American atomic weapon monopoly. And in a long analysis of Soviet military strength in the August 9, 1948 issue, *Life* began with this lead: “Recent events in Europe have made it clear that if Russia’s leaders are not actively seeking war, they are coldly willing to risk it. This being so, war could conceivable begin between the Soviet Union and the West any month or any day” (37). The Russians are re-building their industrial strength in their European centers but also dramatically expanding industrial development in Siberia to guarantee production should the West attack. While late in 1948 and into the new year, *Life* also begins to routinely report on the civil war in China with the Communist forces on the offensive and winning. The “Red Peril” will soon encompass both the Soviet Union and China, not to mention the threats in Eastern Europe and the oil reserves in the mid-East.

Of course by October 1949, China has become the People’s Republic and Russia has exploded an atomic bomb. And by February 27, 1950, *Life* devotes the entire issue to the question of lack of American preparedness for war, especially how to defend against a surprise nuclear strike. The editors note that the US population is not yet worried enough about Communist threat especially given the possibility that cities “from Seattle to Boston might be atomized.” The military authorities believe it might take Russia as little

It is probably safe to say, the single most dramatic and anxiety producing episode that links the communist conspiracy, the Korean War, and atomic weapons was the espionage revelations of Klaus Fuchs and the indictments of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, whose trial, appeals, and execution punctuated and bracketed the Korean War, arrested June 17, 1950 and executed June 19, 1953. And as Judge Irving Kaufman famously declared in his sentencing as reported in the *NYT* on April 6, 1951.

Your crime is worse than murder. . . . I believe your conduct in putting into the hands of the Russians the A-bomb years before our best scientists predicted Russia could perfect the bomb has already caused the Communist aggression in Korea with the resultant casualties exceeding 50,000 Americans and who knows but millions more of innocent people may pay the price of your treason.

However, beyond this often quoted judgment, the rhetoric of Judge Kaufman's explanation of sentencing shows how far the cold war rationales had permeated the public discourse by spring 1951 and the degree to which a new era had begun. Kaufman argued that the "nature of Russian terrorism is now self-evident" and that we are engaged in a "life and death struggle" with a system antithetical to our own which challenges our "very existence." The conspiracy to provide the Soviets with atomic secrets has "undoubtedly altered the course of history to the disadvantage of our country. . . . No one can say that we do not live in a constant state of tension. We have evidence of your treachery all around us every day – for the civilian defense activities throughout the nation are aimed at preparing us for an atom bomb attack." The war against Communism must be engaged everywhere, but especially domestically, since the nuclear peril makes possible an attack on the homeland:

as two years to prepare for an all out war. Also part of this presentation is an article discussing the destruction of a hypothetical US city of 900,000 if it were the target of two A-bombs. Lastly, in this issue was a primer on atomic weaponry, what it is and how it works. As such presentations make their way into public discourse, it was combined with deliberate decisions to crack down on dissidents in the US with such cases as Whitaker Chambers's revelations about Alger Hiss and the Smith Act arrests and trial of the leaders of the CPUSA. The Red Scare, already vibrant, escalates dramatically with smear campaigns against individuals, unions, and leftist political groups, not to mention such legislation as the McCarran Internal Security Act.

In the light of the circumstances, I feel that I must pass such sentence upon the principles in this diabolical conspiracy to destroy a God-fearing nation which will demonstrate with finality that this nation's security must remain inviolate; that traffic in military secrets, whether promoted by slavish devotion to a foreign ideology or by desire for monetary gain must cease.

Given the unprecedented dangers, Kaufman said, leniency was not an option.

For me, it is quite plausible to read the father's unraveling in such broadly social and political terms. After all, living through the most recent incarnation of the fight against "evil" where the fear of Islamic terrorism has perhaps replaced the fear of Communism, the manipulation of anxiety is the foundation of a campaign to gain popular support for continued warfare in the name of democracy. Given this reading of *Indignation*, it should join the more widely applauded postwar trilogy (*American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist*, and *The Human Stain*) as offering up a sharp social criticism of postwar America. This quartet of novels at least opens the question of America's role in the violence and carnage unleashed by the cold war and to measure its consequences. *Indignation* should force readers to reflect on the postwar legacy of America's rise to world power and the willingness of its leaders to routinely invade foreign nations, sanction widespread killing of civilians, and support fascist governments over a sixty year period in order to protect American interests around the world. Reading Roth's Korean War novel in the present moment demands an awareness of a usually veiled history.

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