

CHAPTER 3

REACTIONS TO THE FILM IN 1964

The Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (1963) marked the beginning of a period in the American past that historian Paul Boyer called the “Big Sleep,” during which public concerns about the bomb diminished.¹ Despite the public’s lack of concern, some cultural commentators, pacifists, and scientists warned that the possibility of nuclear war still existed. *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) warned audiences that US nuclear diplomacy had not eliminated the possibility of nuclear war. Many reviews of the film evaluated the merit of Stanley Kubrick’s political message rather than the film’s artistic value. Some audience members felt compelled to contribute to this discussion and wrote letters to newspapers and magazines. Although film critics and the general public did not unanimously accept Kubrick’s warning, *Dr. Strangelove* did inspire some discussion about the soundness of US cold war policies. When the issue of nuclear war emerged during the 1964 presidential campaign, the film became associated with individuals who appeared eager to wage nuclear war to end the cold war.

Boyer argued that after 1963 the bomb tended to diminish in American culture and thought. He provided five possible explanations for this disappearance. First, the Test Ban Treaty gave the appearance that world leaders were working to eliminate the threat of nuclear war. Second, newspapers and television programs gave little attention to the bomb. The nuclear bomb became an abstraction in the minds of many Americans. The issue of nuclear warfare seemed more theoretical and distant than it had been in October

¹ Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb’s Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 356.

1962. Third, the possibilities for peaceful and beneficial uses for nuclear energy displaced public fears about the destructive power of the atom. Fourth, deterrence theory seemed to be an effective method for preventing nuclear war. Finally, the Vietnam conflict diverted the attention of those Americans who had expressed concerns about the threat of nuclear war.² Despite dwindling concerns about the bomb, some Americans, including Kubrick, still discussed the threat of nuclear war in hopes of combating public apathy.³

Although the production of *Dr. Strangelove* began before the Test Ban Treaty was signed, the film's warnings were still applicable after 1963. The treaty may have eased many Americans' fears about the possibility of nuclear war, but the treaty did not alter US nuclear policies. Kennedy appeased opponents of the treaty in Congress, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the scientific community by promising to continue nuclear testing underground. The United States also continued to develop and stockpile strategic nuclear weapons and rely on this arsenal to deter a first strike.⁴ The Test Ban Treaty did not lead to a more comprehensive treaty as many supporters had hoped. Indeed, talks of disarmament had been complicated by the proliferation of nuclear weapons to France and communist China. The threat of nuclear war still hung over the heads of audiences that saw *Dr. Strangelove*, but not all reviewers were willing to accept Kubrick's warning

² Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, 356-358.

³ Stanley Kubrick, "How I learned to stop worrying and Love the Cinema" *Films and Filming* 9 (June 1963): 12-13; Gene D. Phillips, ed., *Stanley Kubrick: Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001): 28.

⁴ "Stockpiling still increasing," *Science News Letter* 85 (18 January 1964): 38; Michael Mandelbaum, *The Nuclear Question: The United States and Nuclear Weapons, 1946-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 181; Robert Norris and William Arkin, "Estimated US and Soviet/Russian Nuclear Stockpiles, 1945-1994," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 40 (November/December 1994): 59.

about the dangers of US nuclear strategies and the possibility of an accidental nuclear war.

Reviews of *Dr. Strangelove* assessed the film's treatment of nuclear war and the realism of Kubrick's scenario in order to refute or support Kubrick's claims. Historian Robert Brent Toplin has recognized that films possess messages about social and political issues, either subtly or forcefully displayed. Toplin noted that critics and audience members have often discussed the messages of films.⁵ Reviews and subsequent public responses to *Dr. Strangelove* represented a limited discourse about the film that focused more on Kubrick's political message and the reasonability of U.S. nuclear policies.

Critics had widely varied views of Kubrick's treatment of nuclear war. Some who wrote scathing reviews believed that Kubrick's picture was pure fiction. Henry Hart of *Films in Review* called *Dr. Strangelove* a farce constructed for the benefit of liberals and pacifists. He said that the film was "twirpish twiddle" that "kids around with the nonkiddable proposition" of an accidental nuclear war. Hart dismissed any similarities between Kubrick's characters and their real counterparts.⁶ Philip K. Scheuer called *Dr. Strangelove* "an evil thing about an evil thing." He suggested that Kubrick's sexual references were childish and claimed that the film's villains were disturbing rather than funny. Scheuer contended that the armed forces should be treated with more respect.⁷ Also critical was Midge Decter, who, writing for the Jewish journal *Commentary*, wrote that many of the jokes in the "spoof" were "banal." Decter lambasted Kubrick for

⁵ Robert Brent Toplin, *History by Hollywood: The Use and Abuse of the American Past* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 1-2.

⁶ Henry Hart, Review of *Dr. Strangelove*, *Films in Review* (February 1964): 113.

⁷ Philip K. Scheuer, "Strangelove Drops Controversial Bomb," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 February 1964, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences Library, *Dr. Strangelove* file.

constructing each character as a radical conservative and failing to criticize any liberals. She stated, “Everyone, after all, is against psychotic generals and Nazis.”⁸ *New York Times* film critic Bosley Crowther called the film “the most shattering sick joke I’ve ever come across.”⁹ Although he found some value in the film’s artistic achievements, Crowther believed that the film’s negative portrayals of government leaders and the “defense establishment” served no constructive purpose.¹⁰ These critics saw nothing humorous about Kubrick’s satirical treatment of the president and the armed forces.

Others who were favorably impressed with *Dr. Strangelove* praised the film for the brilliance of its satire and for the importance of its political message. Marjorie Adams called *Dr. Strangelove* “a rather bitter, wickedly clever, tremendously amusing spoof of conditions which worry most of us in the dim reaches of the night.”¹¹ Robert Hatch claimed that the film “holds a cold blade of scorn against the spectator’s throat.”¹² According to Hatch, Kubrick challenged the basic assumptions of the US cold war posture and exposed the erroneous political philosophy that reinforced those assumptions.¹³ Brian Forbes commented that Kubrick constructed a serious joke to display the dangers of the bomb to audiences. He contended that Kubrick had used the bomb “as a banana skin, with a nuclear prat fall as the ultimate pay-off gag.”¹⁴ Stanley

⁸ Midge Decter, “The Strangely Polite *Dr. Strangelove*,” *Commentary* 37 (May 1964): 75, 77.

⁹ Bosley Crowther, “Screen: *Dr. Strangelove*,” 24.

¹⁰ Crowther, “Screen: *Dr. Strangelove*, a Shattering Sick Joke,” *New York Times*, 30 January 1964, 24.

¹¹ Marjorie Adams, “*Dr. Strangelove*: Grim Satire, Bright Film Shocking Plot at Astor” *Boston Globe*, 30 March 1964, 9.

¹² Robert Hatch, Review of *Dr. Strangelove*, *Nation*, 3 February 1964.

¹³ Hatch, *Dr. Strangelove*, *Nation*.

¹⁴ Brian Forbes, Review of *Dr. Strangelove*, *Films and Filming* 10 (1964): 26.

Kaufman did not believe that the film was a satire because it offered no alternative paths for the nation to follow, but he praised its comic assault on the military and US nuclear strategies.¹⁵ The *Denver Post* noted that the performances were “large than life, but in keeping with the spirit of the film.”¹⁶ These critics believed that the film’s comedic treatment of the subject of nuclear warfare was provocative because audiences were not overwhelmed by the thought of nuclear Armageddon. Instead, audiences laughed at Kubrick’s satirical treatment of U.S. cold war strategies, and, at the same time, they worried about the dangers he exposed within those strategies. By praising *Dr. Strangelove*, these reviewers helped to call attention to lingering dangers of nuclear war and encouraged readers to see the film.

Reviewers formed different opinions about the realism of Kubrick’s scenario. Alastair Buchan, the Institute of Strategic Studies official who originally recommended Kubrick read Peter George’s *Red Alert* (1958), criticized the director after the film’s release. Buchan said that he had warned Kubrick that the film could not accurately depict the possibility of an accidental nuclear war because he could not describe the precautions the US and other nuclear powers had taken to prevent an accidental nuclear war. Reviewers such as Gerald Kaufman and James Price cited Buchan’s claims when they dismissed the possibility of an accidental nuclear war.¹⁷ By denying that this possibility existed, critics refuted Kubrick’s cynicism about US nuclear strategies. No threat existed and therefore nuclear strategies were not flawed, but necessary to protect national

¹⁵ Stanley Kaufman, “Dean Swift in the Twentieth Century,” *New Republic*, 1 February 1964, 26.

¹⁶ “Movie Stops Worrying, Loves H-Bomb,” *Denver Post*, 5 March 1964, 24.

¹⁷ James Feron, “*Dr. Strangelove* Provokes Britons,” *New York Times*, 5 February 1964, 29; Gerald Kaufman, “Blackest Comedy,” *The Listener*, 20 February 1964; James Price, “Stanley Kubrick’s Divided World,” *London Magazine* 4 (May 1964): 67.

security. Henry Hart dismissed the film's premise and argued that Kubrick had not provided audiences a looking glass through which they could view their own world. Instead, he had instead exposed his own "private" world of chaos and insanity.¹⁸

Some critics recognized Kubrick's desire to inspire a discourse about the bomb. Kubrick hoped that *Dr. Strangelove* would foster some discussion about the soundness of US nuclear policies.¹⁹ Several reviewers called upon audience members to discuss the film's meaning and the rationality of US nuclear policies. Stephen Taylor suggested that Americans must talk about the film in order for it to be successful. Taylor did not believe that *Dr. Strangelove* was a good film, but he believed that the picture marked "a beginning to large scale consideration of the folly of American and Soviet nuclear policy."²⁰ Marjorie Adams recommended that friends of different political beliefs should see the film and discuss Kubrick's message. She believed that *Dr. Strangelove* would resonate with anyone who was interested in current events.²¹

Letters that appeared in newspapers and magazines addressed the validity of Kubrick's claims and the reactions of certain critics, further expanding the discourse about *Dr. Strangelove* and the bomb. Midge Decter's harsh review in *Commentary* incited several rebuttals from readers who appreciated the motion picture. Anne M. Stadler of Seattle, Washington argued that the film was not a work of fantasy, but a fantastic realistic scenario. The fantastic elements of the story were matched by the realism Kubrick provided in the scenes in the *Leper Colony* and the "documentary"

¹⁸ Henry Hart, Review of *Dr. Strangelove*, *Films in Review* 15 (February 1964): 113-114.

¹⁹ Kubrick, "How I Learned," 12-13.

²⁰ Stephen Taylor, Review of *Dr. Strangelove*, *Film Comment* 2 (winter 1964): 40, 41.

²¹ Adams, *Boston Globe*, 9.

depicting Americans fighting other Americans. The danger, Kubrick and some audience members believed, lay in the public's belief that the bomb and the threat of nuclear war was a fantasy. Francis Miceli of Notre Dame, Indiana claimed that *Dr. Strangelove* condemned "our society for its rush to destruction...The movie is saying that liberals are impotent and that conservatives are in love with death."²² Miceli's letter captured the essence of the motion picture better than most critics. Men had created a weapon that no one could control once it was unleashed. This criticism of Decker's review suggested that some viewers accepted Kubrick's message and believed that *Dr. Strangelove* needed to be defended against its critics. Without such a defense, the film might have a limited impact on public opinion.

Several letters published in the *New York Times* illustrated audiences' conflicting opinions about the meaning and value of *Dr. Strangelove*. Some letters claimed that *Dr. Strangelove* was a piece of un-American propaganda. Robert Strausz-Hupe, director of the Foreign Policy Research Institute at the University of Pennsylvania and author of several texts on nuclear policy and strategy asked, "Will it raise their [US servicemen's] morale to be told that the men who lead them are imbeciles or neurotics?" Strausz-Hupe claimed the film accomplished the Communist goal of driving "a wedge between the American people and their military leaders."²³ Jeanne McQuade of Queens Village, New York called the film "straight propaganda" that was "unmatched by even our declared enemies."²⁴ Other audience members viewed the motion picture differently, believing that Kubrick had exposed a reality hidden by political rhetoric. Dana Hopkins of New

²² "Letters from Readers," *Commentary* 38 (October 1964): 8, 12, 14.

²³ "Moviegoers' diagnoses of *Dr. Strangelove*," *New York Times*, 16 February 1964, sect. II, p. 7.

York commented that *Dr. Strangelove* offered the truth about man's inability to control nuclear war. Ruth Cain of New York defended Kubrick's picture, arguing that the director ridiculed the human race rather than simply the president or the military.²⁵ Reviews and letters to the editor illustrated the positions of groups debating the nuclear issue.

In a letter to the *New York Times* screen editor, noted intellectual Lewis Mumford responded to Bosley Crowther's review of *Dr. Strangelove*, defending the film as an important message to Americans. Mumford disagreed with Crowther's negative assessment of *Dr. Strangelove*, calling it "the first break in the catatonic cold war trance that has so long held our country in its rigid grip."²⁶ Ten years earlier, in a collection of essays entitled *In the Name of Sanity* (1954), Mumford discussed a "catatonic trance" that would consume Americans driven underground by the fear of nuclear attack. People would withdraw from their lives and their surroundings, consumed by fear but unable to protect themselves. *In the Name of Sanity* had examined four nuclear scenarios, each similar to Kubrick's scenario.²⁷ Mumford believed that Kubrick's satirical treatment of the possibility of nuclear war allowed audiences to view nuclear war from a distance. Kubrick's picture helped Americans to recognize the flaws in U.S. nuclear policies.²⁸

Kubrick's political message about U.S. nuclear policies became relevant during the 1964 presidential election. Reviewers and some audience members discussed the

²⁴ "Strangelove Reactions," *New York Times*, 1 March 1964, sect. II, p. 8.

²⁵ "Moviegoers' diagnoses of *Dr. Strangelove*."

²⁶ "Strangelove Reactions."

²⁷ Lewis Mumford, *In the Name of Sanity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1954), 30, 32.

²⁸ "Strangelove Reactions."

validity of Kubrick's message and the soundness of US nuclear policies, yet the film played a much greater role in the public discourse about nuclear policies. Kubrick's film is one of the few films ever utilized during a political election. Journalists invoked the film during the 1964 presidential election to warn voters about the nuclear war they believed would result from a Republican victory. *Dr. Strangelove* provided the media with images and language that communicated this threat.

During this election, critics associated Republican nominee Barry Goldwater with the mad position represented by Dr. Strangelove, General Turgidson, and Jack D. Ripper. The film ridiculed radical conservatives such as Goldwater, their theories of communist subversion, and their willingness to consider nuclear scenarios to conclude the cold war. As audience members and critics debated the value of *Dr. Strangelove*, Goldwater temporarily disrupted the Big Sleep. He resurrected the nuclear issue during the 1964 presidential election.

Throughout his career, Goldwater advocated a strong nuclear arsenal and an aggressive war on communism, but displayed little understanding about the ramifications of a nuclear war. Goldwater was a staunch cold warrior and Air Force reserves officer who in *The Conscience of a Conservative* (1960) and *Why Not Victory* (1962) expressed his willingness to use nuclear weapons to halt the spread of communism. According to Goldwater, the refusal to consider the use of nuclear weapons provided Communist regimes with the freedom to expand their revolution. In *The Conscience of a Conservative*, he recognized two possible conclusions to the cold war: the defeat of the

United States as a result of a war with the Soviet Union or an American victory in that war.²⁹

Voters were concerned about the course the cold war might take under Goldwater's direction. The senator opposed the ratification of the Test Ban Treaty, claiming that the treaty placed the United States at a disadvantage because the Soviets and the Chinese had superior conventional forces. Goldwater argued that radioactive fallout amounted to "Communist-induced hysteria."³⁰ He publicly criticized Kennedy's management of the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Berlin wall crisis, and the Cuban missile crisis. In each instance, the senator advocated the use of military force to defend American interests.³¹

In October 1963, Goldwater expressed his support for NATO field commanders' authority to use tactical nuclear weapons. The senator suggested that this authority would be necessary to repel a Soviet invasion of Western Europe if communications with the president were severed. The Eisenhower administration had initiated this policy, but government officials denied its existence. Consequently, Goldwater appeared willing to wage a nuclear war with the Soviet Union, while President Lyndon Johnson appeared determined to preserve peace. Goldwater's shoot-from-the-hip style during interviews and public addresses produced comments that worried many Americans. Critics thought

²⁹ Barry Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (Shepardsville, Kentucky: Victor Publishing Company, 1960), 110, 123; Barry Goldwater, *Why Not Victory? A Fresh Look at American Foreign Policy* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1962).

³⁰ Arthur Frommer, ed., *Goldwater from A to Z* (New York: The Frommer/Pasmantier Publishing Corporation, 1964), 21; Robert Alan Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995), 141-142; Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and his times, 1961-1973* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 131.

³¹ Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 152, 155-156, 165.

Goldwater was “trigger happy.” Frightened voters chose Johnson despite the president’s growing nuclear arsenal and his commitment to the Vietnam conflict. The Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), traditionally a nonpartisan organization, actively campaigned against Goldwater, fearing that he would reinvigorate the arms race.³²

During the campaign, Johnson exploited this fear. He presented himself as the peaceful alternative to the warmongering Goldwater, although Johnson continued President Kennedy’s aggressive military spending and expanded the US nuclear arsenal.³³ To counter these facts, the Doyle Dane Bernbach advertising firm produced two commercials for Johnson. The first, which aired 7 September 1964, depicted a little girl plucking a daisy in a field. The little girl counts each of the petals she plucks; when she reaches ten, a male voice begins to count down to one. When the girl becomes startled, the camera focuses on her eye before dissolving to black and then an atomic explosion. In a voice-over, Johnson declares, “These are the stakes—to make a world in which all of God’s children can live, or go into the dark. We must either love each other, or we must die.”³⁴ A few days later another commercial aired depicting a little girl licking an ice cream cone narrated by a woman who warns that nuclear tests had once poisoned America’s youth. The woman warns voters that Goldwater might resume nuclear tests in violation of the Test Ban Treaty.³⁵ Aired only once each, these commercials depicted

³² Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 178, 185-186, 189; “The Itchy-Finger Image,” *Time*, 25 September 1964, 15; Milton S. Katz, *Ban the Bomb: A History of SANE, the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, 1957-1985* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986), 91.

³³ Michael Mandelbaum, *The Nuclear Question: The United States and Nuclear Weapons, 1946-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 201-202.

³⁴ Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 225; Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 175.

³⁵ Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 225; “The Fear and the Facts,” *Time*, September 1964, 15-16.

young girls, presumably representing the innocence of the nation. Johnson manipulated parental instincts, warning voters that a vote for Goldwater placed their children and the future of the nation at risk. Months earlier, Kubrick had provided a similar choice to audiences, one between life without nuclear weapons and death.

Critics associated the Republican nominee with Dr. Strangelove. Goldwater was associated with Kubrick's mad characters. He was compared to Strangelove because Democrats wanted voters to believe that the Republican candidate was excited by the possibility of nuclear war and prepared to attack the Soviet Union at the expense of millions of Americans. The cover of the 25 September 1964 issue of *Time* magazine established this relationship.³⁶ It depicted Johnson clad in white, suggesting his desire to maintain peace. The cover also featured a photograph of the little girl in the "Daisy" commercial, a photograph of the Berlin Wall, and a photograph of several soldiers preparing to launch a missile. Barry Goldwater also appeared on the cover, clad in a dark suit and pounding his fist during a speech. Beneath Goldwater was a picture of Dr. Strangelove, flanked by a partially obscured headline declaring, "Fear Soviet Breakthrough in Doomsday Weapon."³⁷ Editors associated the Republican nominee with the mad scientist, suggesting that Kubrick's scenario could become a reality if voters elected Goldwater. *Time* noted the similarity in an article about the candidates' nuclear strategies, commenting, "Johnson himself conjures up Dr. Strangelove-type images of a 'madman' who unleashes nuclear war." Johnson advised audiences that casualties of a nuclear war could exceed one hundred million Americans, yet he promised that he would

³⁶ According to historians, popular media overwhelmingly favored President Johnson and demonized Goldwater.

³⁷ *Time*, 25 September 1964, cover.

not wage a nuclear war.³⁸ He conjured up “Strangelove-type images” to suggest that he would preserve peace while a Republican victory in the presidential election would prove fatal for millions of Americans. Johnson warned against the policy of a nuclear strike to settle a cold war crisis, while he claimed that Goldwater embodied this hawkish position.

Goldwater’s campaign was also complicated by his connections to the John Birch Society. Robert Welch, the society’s founder, had supported Goldwater’s senatorial campaign in 1958. The society supported Goldwater’s campaign for the Republican presidential nomination in 1960 and 1964. Goldwater attempted to distance himself from Welch while at the same time appealing to the society for support. Goldwater disagreed with Welch’s claim in *The Politician* (1958), a treatise on the international communist conspiracy and its place in America, that President Dwight Eisenhower was a Communist agent. Goldwater’s pleas to the John Birch Society could not inspire a coup to remove Welch from power. At the same time, he appeared to advocate Welch’s plan to eliminate subversive elements on domestic and foreign battlefields. Welch was prepared to suspend civil liberties in order to combat communism. Goldwater echoed Welch’s plan at the Republican National Convention, declaring, “Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. Moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.”³⁹ Goldwater’s opponents interpreted this comment as a pledge of support for organizations such as the John Birch Society.

Critics also compared Welch and Goldwater to Adolf Hitler. *Time* magazine equated *The Politician* with Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. Similarly, *Fact Magazine* claimed that

³⁸ “The Fear and the Facts,” 17.

³⁹ Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 126, 137, 158-160, 206-207; Robert Welch, *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society* (Boston: Western Islands, 1961), 108.

Goldwater “had a mask of sanity covering an inner political madness” not unlike the “mask” worn by Hitler as he seized much of Central Europe in the late 1930s. Critics accused right-wing conservatives that waved the banner of patriotism of advocating the same Gestapo tactics used by Hitler to conquer most of Europe and to exterminate the Jews and other groups that did not fit the Aryan model.⁴⁰ Goldwater and Welch appeared willing to arrest and jail critics of their total war on communism and revive the Palmer raids of the first Red Scare and the anti-Communist hearings led by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the second Red Scare during early 1950s. In *Dr. Strangelove*, Kubrick had also suggested that a relationship existed between conservatives such as Welch, men who wished to wage nuclear war against communism, and the leaders of Nazi Germany. Kubrick expressed this relationship through Peter Sellers’ performance as Dr. Strangelove, the character that alternated between his American and Nazi halves and appeared obsessed with the various aspects of nuclear warfare. These associations and comparisons coupled with Goldwater’s statement at the party convention and Johnson’s claims that the Republican was willing to wage nuclear war hindered Goldwater’s campaign. The candidate proved to be his own worst enemy, providing Democrats and the media with imagery that portrayed him as a warmonger not unlike Dr. Strangelove.⁴¹

The similarity was not lost on critics and audiences. Reviewer Brian Forbes suggested that Goldwater and the John Birch Society would “attempt to burn the cinemas” that displayed *Dr. Strangelove* because the film challenged the conservatives’ faith in the bomb as a peacekeeping tool and their belief in the existence of domestic

⁴⁰ Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 223; “The Americanists,” *Time*, 10 March 1961, 22.

⁴¹ Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 223.

communist conspiracies. Goldwater and the John Birch Society, said Forbes, had acquired a reputation for censorship of “subversive” material. Ronald K. Johnson accused *Citizen-News* film critic Hazel Flynn of supporting the “nonsensical causes” of Barry Goldwater and the John Birch Society when she claimed that *Dr. Strangelove* was an un-American film.⁴² Some viewers began to associate the madness displayed in *Dr. Strangelove* with right-wing conservatives’ cold war strategies, not simply U.S. nuclear policies.

Some viewers disagreed with Kubrick’s indictment of the United States, instead blaming Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev for the arms race and recent crises. In the 5 October 1964 issue, *US News and World Report* questioned, “Is Khrushchev ‘Dr. Strangelove?’” The article attempted to redirect the film’s criticism of U.S. nuclear policies onto the “real” Dr. Strangelove, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. The article was inspired by Khrushchev’s claims that Soviet scientists had developed “terrible new weapons” believed to be a doomsday device or biological and chemical weapons. Citing Khrushchev’s pursuit of more powerful nuclear weapons and his threat to launch nuclear weapons against Western Europe, the article claimed that Khrushchev had forced the United States to threaten nuclear war to defend America’s European allies.⁴³

Audiences and critics disputed the quality of the film’s message, but this dispute created a forum to discuss the validity of U.S. nuclear policies. Not every American readily accepted Kubrick’s criticism of these policies, but many recognized the dangers posed by men such as Goldwater and Welch. In 1964, the film provided images and

⁴² “Veritable Barrage of Blasts, Bouquets,” *Citizen-News*, 29 February 1964, *Dr. Strangelove* file, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences Library.

⁴³ “Is Khrushchev Dr. Strangelove?,” *US News and World Report*, 5 October 1964, 51.

language that were associated with Goldwater, and these associations proved detrimental to Goldwater's campaign. Despite Johnson's victory, the arms race expanded beyond the control of treaties. "Dr. Strangelove" gradually became a derogatory reference to man's inability to control the machines of mass destruction he created and also a reference to some men's belief that a nuclear arsenal capable of destroying the world several times over could preserve peace.