

**Displaying American Abundance Abroad: The Misinterpretation of the 1959
American National Exhibition in Moscow**

BARRIE ROBYN JAKABOVICS
Barnard College, Columbia University

Senior Research Seminar in American History
Professor Jeffrey Trask
April 18, 2007

Introduction

In the heart of a 1,500-acre park where Czars once hunted with falcons there is chaos this week...American directors, engineers and designers who have come to erect this monument to free-enterprise culture in the heart of communism's planned society say- with fingers crossed- that the miracle will be accomplished.¹

Although the United States had participated in various trade fairs and international exhibitions in the past, during the summer of 1959, America was given the opportunity to present an image of itself to the citizens of the Soviet Union as part of a cultural exchange program between the two superpowers. From the outset, President Dwight D. Eisenhower publicly stated that he hoped a mutual understanding of one another would arise from this exchange of national exhibitions. However, an undercurrent of competition between the Soviet Exhibition of Science, Technology, and Culture in New York and the American National Exhibition, which was held six weeks later in the heart of Moscow, was readily apparent. Regarding the organization of the American National Exhibition, it was undeniable that the displays chosen were intended to promote the image of United States' dominance in all fields of national production.

Although the American National Exhibition provided a comprehensive depiction of American life for its Soviet visitors, much of the exhibition's detail was curiously lost in the American press coverage of the event. Despite its prevalence in a wide variety of national news sources over the course of 1959, coverage of the exhibition was consistently narrow in scope as the press focused disproportionately on the event's representation of consumer goods.

Their skewed accounts had far more significant consequences than simply providing American citizens back home with a flawed depiction of the event. It impacted subsequent

¹ Osgood Caruthers, "U.S. Whetting Russian's Curiosity: Exhibit Aims to Project American Image Behind the Iron Curtain" *The New York Times*, 12 July, 1959, p. E4.

scholarship that emerged at the end of the twentieth century, which relied heavily on the cold-war journalists' portrayal of the American National Exhibition. As a result, these analyses show similar trends to those found in the exhibition's original coverage, namely the promotion of consumerism and the exclusion of the event's other facets, such as those that depicted American advancements in science and technology.

The journalistic phenomenon that perpetuated this flawed representation of the exhibition in the work of future scholars may be best explained as a reflection of current events, namely the raging arms race and economic competition that began at the end of the 1950s, and the ways in which they impacted the mindset of the American public. Although the beginning of the Cold War was rife with tension between the two superpowers, American anxiety concerning national survival intensified towards the end of the decade. Whereas the United States had emerged from World War II confident in its atomic capabilities, this sentiment changed in the fall of 1957 when the Soviet Union launched *Sputnik I* and the possibility of nuclear warfare with the Soviets instilled new fear in the minds of the American people. Furthermore, despite the initial technological and educational panic following the Soviet launch, anxiety over an arms race with the Soviet Union was soon accompanied by a new focus on an economic battle with the communist superpower. During the next year, in the midst of the recession of 1958, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev introduced his Seven-Year Plan for economic development, in which the Soviet Union intended to overtake the United States in an arena in which it had previously enjoyed full dominance. During the affluent 1950s, America was defined by the abundance and variety afforded by capitalism. As a result, the United States was particularly frightened by this nonmilitary battle with the Soviet Union because it threatened the country's very cultural identity.

Sputnik

Dr. Lloyd Berkner, president of the International Council of Scientific Unions... beat on a glass at the reception for silence. "I wish to make an announcement," he said, "I am informed by *The New York Times* that a satellite is in orbit at an elevation of 900 kilometers. I wish to congratulate our Soviet colleagues on their achievement." Soviet scientists beamed as he made the announcement.²

In the fall of 1957, the Soviet Union shocked the world by launching the world's first artificial Earth satellite into space. Aptly titled *Sputnik*, which, in Russian, meant "Artificial Fellow Traveler Around the Earth," the 184-pound satellite sparked a mixture of depression and panic that spread across the United States as the perception of American technological supremacy was shattered. It was in this atmosphere that the cultural exchange program of 1958 was created.

The success of the Russian satellite was particularly embarrassing because the United States had been planning its own launch for some time. In the mid-1950s, President Dwight D. Eisenhower had announced that as part of the International Geophysical Year program, an international scientific effort that spanned from July 1957 to December 1958, the United States would place a satellite into orbit. Once accomplished, this scientific feat would place America at the forefront of space exploration.

The unanticipated launch of the Russian satellite therefore caught American scientists off guard. A *New York Times* journalist quoted Dr. Joseph Kaplan, chairman of the United States National Committee for the I.G.Y. after he heard the news, "I am amazed that in the short time which they had to plan- obviously not any longer than we had- I think it as a remarkable

²"Soviet Embassy Guests Hear of Satellite From an American as Russians Beam" *New York Times*, 5 October, 1957, p. 3.

achievement on their part.”³ “I hope they give us enough information,” he continued, “so that our Moon-watch teams can help learn the scientific benefits.”⁴ Moreover, according to press reports, America’s Project Vanguard satellite, which was not scheduled to launch until the following year, was inferior in all respects: it was eight times lighter than that of the Soviets’ and employed rocket boosters that were twenty times less powerful than the three-stage rocket that blasted *Sputnik* into flight.⁵

Additionally, one month later the Soviets once again demonstrated their technological aptitude when they successfully launched *Sputnik II*. A significantly heavier satellite, *Sputnik II*, not only measured the atmosphere’s radiation levels, but also carried a passenger: a dog named Laika.⁶ In contrast, the United States had yet to attempt a public launch. As a result, the White House fast-tracked Project Vanguard’s timetable four months ahead and scheduled a December launch. Unfortunately, the American attempt failed miserably and the entire country watched as the Vanguard rose a mere four feet in the air before crashing onto the launching pad at Cape Canaveral. The Vanguard launch was both disheartening and humiliating, as indicated by a *Chicago Daily Tribune* article printed the following day. The journalist reported, “The United States figuratively picked up the pieces of its exploded Vanguard satellite launcher today and sought to carry on. Officials were clamping down on publicity and there were signs the next

³“Soviet Embassy Guests Hear of Satellite,” p. 3.

⁴“Soviet Embassy Guests Hear of Satellite,” p. 3.

⁵Barbara Barksdale Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War: The Sputnik Crisis and National Defense Education Act of 1958* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 7. Although by today’s standards, a lighter satellite would be considered more impressive, the Soviet capability to launch a satellite of that weight suggested its capacity to launch a hefty intercontinental ballistic missile as well.

⁶Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War*, 14.

attempt would be made with as little fanfare as possible.”⁷ Historian Barbara Barksdale Clowse explains that the failure of Project Vanguard was significant in that “the event reinforced fears that the United States truly had lost its ability to produce scientific and technological ‘firsts’ endlessly.”⁸

Yet the Russian launches were more than simply a technological achievement whose significance was limited to the scientific arena and the “space race.” The success of the *Sputnik* satellites had greater implications regarding the national security of the United States. In addition to what Senator Henry M. Jackson described in a *New York Times* article as “a devastating blow to the United States scientific, industrial, and technical prestige in the world,” the launches gave credence to Soviet claims that they had successfully tested intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) earlier in the year.⁹ Furthermore, Jackson predicted that “The long-range effect of the satellite launching... will be ‘a stepping up of the cold war with the Soviets throwing their weight around more than ever.’”¹⁰ *Time* magazine agreed. In “The Race to Come,” the author observed, “Militarily, Sputnik, plus Khrushchev’s bold rocket-rattling, gave a bald warning about the grim missile race to come.”¹¹ Similarly, a November *Life* magazine article suggested that the United States would have to work tirelessly in order to regain the “technological supremacy which more and more loomed as the price of very existence.”¹² While President Eisenhower assured the public that *Sputnik* was scientifically and technologically important yet

⁷ “Rush New ‘Moon’ Attempt; ‘Crash Type’ Probe Launched Into Breakdown of Vanguard” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 December, 1957, p. 1.

⁸ Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War*, 62.

⁹ “Blow to U.S. Seen” *The New York Times*, 6 October, 1957, p. 42.

¹⁰ “Blow to U.S. Seen,” p. 42.

¹¹ “The Race to Come” *Time*, 21 October, 1957, p. 3.

¹² “The U.S.S.R. Celebrates,” *Life*, 18 November, 1957, 30.

militarily meaningless because it revealed nothing about Soviet accuracy, American fears of atomic warfare were nonetheless amplified.¹³

Although American involvement in World War II, and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in particular, first brought the reality of nuclear war to the forefront of the nation's consciousness, American use of atomic power during the war also created a sense of security in the United States' technological dominance. Therefore, despite the Soviets' claim of atomic detonation in the summer of 1957, Americans remained secure in their nation's atomic capabilities. However, the Soviet launches changed the magnitude of atomic warfare and in a sense, negated the historical advantages that had sustained American complacency. Consequently, the steady stream of panicked commentary following *Sputnik* raised profound doubts as to the country's technological status quo and its ability to guarantee its citizens' security.¹⁴

As a result, an American obsession with national survival arose. This anxiety was twofold. Historian Barbara Clowse elucidates, "First, concern focused on literal survival...Russia's successful explosion of a hydrogen bomb in 1953 and especially its launching of intercontinental ballistic missiles in 1957 brought an ever more acute sense of vulnerability to America."¹⁵ However, many Americans revealed apprehension over the more abstract concept of

¹³"The Race to Come," 3. Ironically, the Soviet Union's technological advantage did not translate into military supremacy as the Soviet government decided in 1957 not to build a first generation ICBM complex, but to wait for the second and third generation models. However, for the next few years, Khrushchev's foreign policy exploited this falsity by using Russian airwaves to quote back to the West its own exaggerated hysteria over the Soviet Union's missile capacity and thus, reinforced such overestimations. (Walter Lafeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War 1945-1966* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1967), 202.)

¹⁴Lester Louis Poehner, Jr., "The future's not what it used to be: The decline of technological enthusiasm in America, 1957-1970" (PhD diss., Iowa State University, 1999), 7-8.

¹⁵Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War*, 19-20.

cultural survival as well. This type of survival anxiety assumed that eventually the world would make a choice between the political and economic systems of each superpower. Some feared that cultural annihilation would occur if communist values and institutions triumphed globally and overshadowed those of America. “It would spell the end of ‘our’ civilization,” Clowse explains.¹⁶

Amidst this panic, a national consensus grew that the country’s educational institutions were largely to blame for this Cold War defeat.¹⁷ *Time* bemoaned the current state of the educational system and quoted former President Herbert Hoover as saying, “We are turning out annually from our institutions of higher education perhaps fewer than half as many scientists and engineers as we did seven years ago.”¹⁸ “The greatest enemy of all mankind, the Communists,” he argued, “are turning out twice or possibly three times as many as we do.”¹⁹ Another problem with American education, as explained by Rear Admiral H.G. Rickover in the article, was the misconception of the worth of the American high school. “One cannot even compare the number of hours spent in our high schools with those spent in any European or Russian secondary school,” he stated. “There,” Rickover elucidated, “an hour at school means an hour of uninterrupted serious work; here there are assemblies, errands to be run, trips to survey various adult activities, checking on the fire department or the bakery, as much time goes into preparing the school play.”²⁰ According to the Admiral, time away from the classroom naturally translated into decreased productivity and a lower level of education.

¹⁶Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War*, 20.

¹⁷Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War*, 3.

¹⁸“What Price Life Adjustment?” *Time*, 2 December, 1957, p. 1.

¹⁹“What Price Life Adjustment?” p. 1.

²⁰“What Price Life Adjustment?” p. 1.

The public expected the federal government to take action to correct these educational conditions that had allowed the country to suffer this scientific and technological “defeat” at the hands of the communists.²¹ Although the bill only passed through Congress after the acute phase of the *Sputnik* crisis had ended, President Eisenhower responded to his critics with the National Defense Education Act of 1958. This legislation primarily addressed the advancement of scholastic achievements in science and mathematics.

Nevertheless, in the direct aftermath of *Sputnik*, it is clear that the United States had overestimated its own capabilities while it underestimated Soviet technology. As NASA administrator, James E. Webb, crudely commented, “The realization that the Russians weren’t a bunch of Tartars riding around on horseback out in the Siberian Steppes was brought home vividly,” by the launch.²² Rather, they were a worthy Cold War competitor whose technological advancements directly threatened the national security and international influence of the United States.

Cultural Exchange Program

The first contacts between the two peoples only recently so painfully isolated from each other have been fascinating...The most salient effect has been that which occurs to every soul who ventures to strange lands and among strange people, and finds that, after all, they are just people- men and women and boys and girls with loves and hates and yearnings and reactions quite similar to his own.²³

It was during the months following *Sputnik*, a time of marked American insecurity, that the great cultural exchange program between the United States and the USSR was created. On

²¹Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War*, 6-7.

²²John Andrews Barbour, *Footprints on the Moon* (New York: Associated Press, 1969),

²³ Osgood Caruthers, “When Russian Meets American” *New York Times*, 6 September,

January 27, 1958, the two superpowers agreed on an exchange of national exhibitions, which would take place the following summer in New York and Moscow, respectively.²⁴

Although international exchange agreements were nothing new, the 1958 cultural exchange program was distinct in its reflection of cold-war diplomacy. While the precedent for such an agreement had been established a decade before with the Fulbright Act and later, the Smith-Mundt Act, these earlier pieces of legislation attempted to strengthen cooperative international relations and simultaneously promote a better understanding of the United States among the rest of the world.²⁵ However, as the years passed and Cold War tensions grew, American foreign relations took on new significance. The United States Information Agency (USIA), an organization that incorporated all existing government information programs formerly under the supervision of the State Department, was created in the mid-1950s in order to influence others to promote the national interests of the United States and to that end, foster cultural exchange between the United States and foreign countries.²⁶

The American National Exhibition, which opened on July 25, 1959 in Moscow's Sokolniki Park under the auspices of the USIA, attempted to do just that: promote the interests of the United States. Although the publicly stated purpose of the exhibit was "To increase understanding in the Soviet Union of the American people, their land, and their life, including

1959, p. SM8.

²⁴"US and USSR Agree to Exchange Exhibition in 1959" *Department of State Bulletin*, 20 December, 1958, 132.

²⁵Walter Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 8-11.

²⁶"USIA Program as of 6/30/60 Outlined" *National Security Council* (Issue Date: Jun 30, 1960. Date Declassified: Jul 05, 1991), Part 5, 1.

science, technology, and culture in the United States,”²⁷ a *New York Times* interview with the exhibition’s director, Harold C. McClellan, highlighted undercurrents of competition in the Moscow exhibit. “I’m not trying to prove that we’re better than they or that they’re worthless,” he said in an explanation of the Moscow show.²⁸ “I’m trying to show them what America is like,” he continued, “to give them some understanding and appreciation- and I’ve been fighting to keep the ‘cold war’ out of this thing.”²⁹ McClellan’s acknowledgment of the Cold War and subsequent concern over keeping it out of the event implies its innate presence in the project. The NSC’s declassified documents further suggest a more complex motive. When describing the exhibition, they state, “By far the most significant activity of the period was the American National Exhibition (July 25- September 4, 1959) in Moscow. This Exhibition was the largest and probably the most productive single *psychological effort* ever launched by the U.S. in any Communist country.”³⁰ The event was, therefore, not merely a friendly attempt to introduce Soviet citizens to their American neighbors’ way of life, rather it was used as a means of influencing the exhibition’s communist visitors.

Nevertheless, both the exhibition’s coordinators and President Eisenhower hoped to present the Russian people with a realistic “image of America.”³¹ As such, the exhibition’s displays were created in accordance with the following themes: America’s Land and People, America Lives, America Works, America Produces, America Consumes, America Learns, America Explores Man and Universe, America Creates, America Travels, America Plays, and

²⁷Dorothy E.L. Tuttle, *Official Training Book for Guides at the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959*: 11.

²⁸“Salesman for Capitalism” *New York Times*, 23 July, 1959, p. 6.

²⁹“Salesman for Capitalism,” p. 6.

³⁰“USIA Program as of 6/30/60 Outlined,” Part 5, 27-28.

America's Community Life.³² These thematic displays were further divided and placed in three different exhibition areas: the Dome, the Glass Exhibition Hall, and the Outside Area.

The Dome, an eighty-foot high, gold-anodized aluminum geodesic structure, was the 'idea' building, which contained exhibits on American science, research, education, labor, productivity, health, social sciences, and agriculture.³³ Although a seemingly simple structure, the architecture of the building employed intricate mathematic principles and was therefore, itself, an example of American ingenuity. At the entrance of the structure stood IBM's RAMAC 305, a Russian-language "electronic brain," which answered the exhibition visitors' many questions regarding life in the United States within seconds. Inside the hall were eight exhibit panels, including: education, medical research, agricultural research, American labor, space research, nuclear research, chemical research, and basic research.³⁴

In many ways, the exhibits found within the Dome were a direct response to the upheaval caused by *Sputnik* and America's obsession with its literal survival. As John W. Gardner stated in his post-*Sputnik* study of national educational policies and purposes for the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, education was "essential to [the] achievement of our political and moral objectives....and now events have underscored its value in terms of sheer survival."³⁵ Therefore, the education exhibit was a testament to the country's scholastic progress. Dorothy E.L. Tuttle's training book, written for the American guides at the exhibition, explained, "Everything from elementary schools to adult education classes and from educational television to America's

³¹Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 9.

³²Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 11.

³³Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 12.

³⁴Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 19.

³⁵Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War*, 37.

international educational exchange program illustrated in photographs, charts, models, textual material, and maps” were exhibited.³⁶ Additionally, the display included a model of a typical secondary school and an educator, who discussed each phase of American education with the Soviet visitors.

Furthermore, the medical, agricultural, chemical, and basic research exhibits also demonstrated the advances and successes of American education. These exhibits displayed the way in which research was conducted and supported in the United States. They also included pictures of America’s Nobel Prize winners, the involvement of the nation in the International Geophysical Year, a report on the American-discovered science of radio astronomy, and investigations by the National Institute of Health on the aging process.³⁷

The display on space research was equally important inasmuch as the Soviets were now confident in their dominance in this field. The American space exhibit therefore emphasized its achievements “with graphic displays, textual materials, and...models. There [were] illustrations from the first ‘Lunar Atlas’...a section of the Palomar Observatory Sky Survey...and photographs of surface observations of Mars.”³⁸ Furthermore, perhaps as a means of challenging the accomplishments of *Sputnik II*, the display exhibited photographs of a space capsule designed to take man, rather than canine, into space, as well as a diagram of the earth encircled by the radiation belts first discovered by American scientist, Dr. James Van Allen. More importantly, “featured in the space research exhibit [were] models of America’s X-15 rocket ship... a United States satellite; and the payload of America’s rocket ship, ‘Pioneer IV.’”³⁹ This space display

³⁶Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 22.

³⁷Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 53.

³⁸Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 39.

³⁹Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 39.

typified the post-*Sputnik* cold-war ideology, which teemed with race imagery. Despite any early setbacks, the exhibit portrayed the United States as a worthy competitor in future space exploration.

Similarly, the nuclear research display, above which hung the symbol for uranium, served as a reminder for the Soviet Union of the United States' atomic capability. Tuttle describes this exhibit in the following manner: "America presents a small picture of one of its newest key industries devoted to the peace and progress of mankind. It points out how the United States is sharing American atomic production with other nations in the international development of atomic energy for peaceful purposes."⁴⁰ Despite the author's description, this display was not simply an homage to the ways in which one could employ this technology in peaceful pursuits. Instead, the display featured photographic panels that depicted 600 nuclear scientists, engineers, and technicians from all over the world, who had studied in American institutions as well as the United States' operational atomic power plants and reactors. Additionally, "President Eisenhower [was] pictured addressing the Eighth General Assembly of the United Nations...when he offered to share America's atomic production in the international development of atomic energy."⁴¹ Furthermore, textual material publicized the United States' formal agreement with 40 nations for cooperation in nuclear research. It also "pointed out that the United States has aided the Organization for European Economic Cooperation in plans to encourage joint atomic energy projects."⁴² By demonstrating the reliance of the rest of the world on America's knowledge of atomic nuclear capabilities, the exhibit downplayed the gravity of

⁴⁰Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 44.

⁴¹Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 44.

⁴²Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 44-45.

the Soviet claim that they had detonated ICBMs during the previous year.

Although quite extensive, the exhibits housed in the Dome were only a small piece of the American image that the American National Exhibition aimed to endorse. Unlike the Dome's emphasis on ideas, the Glass Exhibition Hall was considered "the 'item' building which show[ed] the results of the economic system in the United States in providing for a broad sharing by all the American people in great freedom of choice from an immense variety of products and cultural attainments."⁴³ This exhibition area addressed the American fear of cultural annihilation, which emerged during the post-*Sputnik* era. It is here that the abundance and variety that characterized the American consumer was exhibited. Tuttle's training book stated: "The display of these thousands of items related to daily living in the United States reflect the immense variety and the great freedom of choice enjoyed by the American family as the result of the nation's economic system."⁴⁴ She explained that the hall housed "Items ranging in size from small tool equipment and office machines to a full-scale, completely furnished American apartment and fully equipped and operating color television studio."⁴⁵

Although the Glass Exhibition Hall contained four display groups, namely, "cultural, industrial, home, and leisure-time," the latter two were the most comprehensive. The model apartment, for instance, contained typical American chairs, lamps, tables, sofas, linens, refrigerators, dishwashers, garbage disposals, washing machines and dryers, electric appliances such as can openers and mixers, and non-electrical appliances, such as pots and pans. However, the most intriguing aspect of the model apartment was the typical American family. John K. Jacobs, press and radio officer for the exhibition, lived with his family in the display and they

⁴³Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 12.

⁴⁴Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 68.

utilized many of the consumer items that could be found in the various exhibit areas of the Glass Exhibition Hall.⁴⁶ To illustrate American leisure, this section of the exhibition described the various ways in which Americans toured around the United States in their free time, explained popular American spectator and participatory sports, and displayed children's toys, like dolls and train sets, as well as radios, televisions, fishing rods, skis, snorkeling equipment, ice-hockey skates, and a variety of games.

The most historically memorable aspect of the Glass Exhibition Hall, however, was RCA Whirlpool's \$250,000 "miracle kitchen" display, in which Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev exchanged the words that would later be dubbed "the summit over the sink."⁴⁷ Within the model kitchen, a futuristic display described as a "pushbutton extravaganza...a collection of electronic contrivances that operate by the push of a button or the wave of a hand," the two world leaders discussed a variety of subjects ranging from the events at a recent summit to women's role in society.⁴⁸ To that end, "the 'miracle kitchen,'" the guides boasted, "show[ed] Soviet women that American scientific progress [was] helping to make life easier for the housewife."⁴⁹

The recognition of women was significant since a woman's fulfillment of her gender role as both housewife and consumer was as integral to American cultural identity during the 1950s as that of her male counterpart. Therefore, when describing the home, the guide book primarily placed these home goods within the context of women's work. At the outset it stated: "The

⁴⁵Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 68.

⁴⁶Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 90.

⁴⁷Gereon Zimmermann, "What the Russians Will See" *Look*, 21 July 1959, pp. 52-54.

⁴⁸Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 88.

⁴⁹Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 89.

demand of American homemakers for ...products is to meet the desire for a fast and simple way to do the housework to provide for other facets of a busy life.”⁵⁰ The guide further explained, “It is one of the reasons why American women have time to manage their homes and families, work at full-time employments, take part in the work of voluntary organizations, and still find leisure time for the enjoyment of the arts or other activities in which they may be interested.”⁵¹

Therefore, the cane-paneled doors were described as “easy to clean with a wet sponge”⁵² and the stove top as “versatile...which will adapt to daily fare or fancy meals, fast burners with accurate heat control; a grill for pancakes, eggs, hot sandwiches; a broiler for steaks and chops...Her cooking facilities are designed to help her be efficient and creative.”⁵³

The third section, the Outside Area, was less thematic than the other two exhibition areas. It “include[d] plastic pavilions and other structures showing a variety of exhibits ranging from the 360-degree ‘movie-in-the-round’ called ‘Circarama’ to a children’s playground.”⁵⁴ The area also boasted the “Family of Man” photographic display, an architectural exhibit, a model home, voting booths, cosmetic and beauty salons, and a daily fashion show that exhibited the latest clothing, which was described by Joan Cook in her *New York Times* article as being “as typically American as milkshakes.”⁵⁵ It seemed to have been an amalgamation of both the idea and item contents found in the Dome and Glass Exhibition Hall as well as an assertion of their purpose, namely the contention of American technological and cultural dominance.

From the washing machines in the Glass Exhibition Hall to the voting booths in the

⁵⁰Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 90.

⁵¹Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 90.

⁵²Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 90.

⁵³Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 95-96.

⁵⁴Tuttle, *Official Training Book*, 13.

⁵⁵ Joan Cook, “Moscow Guides’ Clothes As Patriotic as July 4th” *New York Times*, 18

Outside Area, the American National Exhibition did indeed portray a comprehensive cross-section of American life. More importantly, it reflected a post-*Sputnik* atmosphere in which the United States chose to present an image of supremacy in all fields of national production in an attempt to regain national prestige and repair its tarnished reputation.

Interpretation of the American National Exhibition in Moscow

The American press does not reflect the American mind- it...seeks to mold the American mind to accept its prejudices. The American press seeks to shape public opinion, or even to replace public opinion, by fostering and presenting a unanimity of view which it then offers as public opinion.⁵⁶

During the summer of 1959, American journalists busied themselves with the exhibitions of the cultural exchange program, and their coverage flooded national newspapers and magazines. The extensive reporting of the events is notable because of the distinct commonalities in the treatment of the exhibitions, regardless of the wide variation of sources that covered them. This is particularly true regarding the coverage of the American National Exhibition in Moscow. Despite the comprehensiveness of the American exhibition's three exhibit areas and the event's apparent success in depicting the American way of life for its Soviet visitors, American journalists concentrated on the consumerist aspects of the exhibition, while others, such as those dedicated to technology, were simply overlooked. As a result, the news coverage, which, for many, was the only source of information, created a picture of the exhibition for readers back home that was markedly different from the event itself.

June, 1959, p. 37.

⁵⁶James Aronson, *The Press and the Cold War* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970), 78.

The extent of the American press's influence the public's perception of the American National Exhibition should not be underestimated. While historian Louis Liebovich explains, "there is no such entity as a monolithic press where foreign affairs goals and ideas and concerned. Each of the news organizations...dealt with...the Cold War in individual ways, based on their overall philosophies, personnel, and knowledge or lack of knowledge of the inner governmental circle,"⁵⁷ they nonetheless impacted public opinion. The power of the press was great because it had the ability to simultaneously reflect and impact the polity. Douglass Cater argues, "The press decides which of those words and events shall receive the prompt attention of millions, and which, like timber falling in a deep and uninhabited forest, shall crash silently to the ground."⁵⁸

In the coverage of both the American National Exhibition in Moscow and its Soviet counterpart in New York, American journalists were quick to point out the quality and quantity of consumer products as the glaring difference between them. *New York Times* reporter Osgood Caruthers, for instance, wrote, "Although the American exhibit is part of a formal agreement reached between Washington and Moscow to exchange such displays, there are many vital differences."⁵⁹ He explained, "The Soviet exhibit in New York lays strong emphasis on the nation's industrial potential and advances in science. Such things will be shown also in the American exhibit."⁶⁰ "However," Caruthers continued, "the stronger emphasis will be on

⁵⁷Louis Liebovich, *The Press and the Origins of the Cold War, 1944-1947* (New York: Praeger Publications 1988), 149.

⁵⁸Douglass Cater, *The Fourth Branch of Government*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1959), 14.

⁵⁹Caruthers, "U.S. Fair," p. E4.

⁶⁰Caruthers, "U.S. Fair," p. E4.

American abundance and how it is distributed among great masses of American consumers.”⁶¹

The observation that the exhibition emphasized American abundance rather than technology or science revealed more about the scope of press coverage than it did actual exhibit content.

Although, the United States did provide various displays of both technology and science, much of this seems curiously lost in the general press coverage of the event. For instance, a *New York Times*’ review of the exhibition’s debut seemed captivated by the displays of consumerism. The reporter observed, “[the exhibition] that opened here today is a glittering, colorful acclaim of consumer America. It is chock-full of the frills of American life. It is also amply stocked with the products of American art and culture.”⁶² Overall, the reviewer noted, “It is a lavish testimonial to abundance...[and] the products of competition that serve the needs and whims of consumer goods and ideas.”⁶³ From this review, as well as numerous other articles that described the consumer content of the exhibition, it seems the non-consumer displays were blatantly overshadowed, if not completely ignored. In *Look* magazine, G.G. Zimmermann’s coverage of the exhibition only described the model kitchen and the “mechanical aids for housewives” located inside of it.⁶⁴ Ironically, Zimmermann opened his article by stating: “Five million Russians are expected to flock to Sokolniki Park in Moscow this summer to see a panorama of U.S. life.”⁶⁵ Zimmermann’s word choice of “panorama” implies a comprehensiveness that, while present in the American National Exhibition, was clearly lacking from his depiction of it.

⁶¹Caruthers, “U.S. Fair,” p. E4.

⁶²“U.S. Gives Soviets Glittering Show,” *New York Times*, 25 July, 1959, p. 2.

⁶³“U.S. Gives Soviets Glittering Show,” p. 2.

⁶⁴Zimmermann, “What the Russians Will See,” p. 52.

⁶⁵Zimmermann, “What the Russians Will See,” p. 52.

Similarly, the press coverage focused on the Soviet reactions to the American consumer goods more than any of the technological displays. In a *New York Times* article, the author stated, “The gadgetry at the demonstration kitchen excited Russians. They look in awe at the electric can openers, the Pyrex dishes that do not break on electric stoves, the paper cup-cake holders, the wall ovens.”⁶⁶ Moreover, the reporter described the visitors of the exhibition as “comparison shoppers, habitués of Moscow’s G.U.M. department store,” which further promoted one-dimensional consumerism at the event.⁶⁷ Although McClellan, and later Vice President Nixon, publicly claimed that the United States had no intention of impressing the Soviet people in order to promote the superiority of American consumerism, the press seemed to imply that the exhibition intended to do just that.

American journalists’ tendency to overemphasize the consumerist content of the American National Exhibition reflected the trends of the greater society. American society had reached an apex of abundance and prosperity over the course of the 1950s. Consumerism was both a field in which Americans were secure in their dominance and a fundamental aspect of their national identity. Perhaps this helps elucidate why the press coverage stressed the differences between the Soviet and American exhibitions as well as why they chose to underscore the American National Exhibition’s displays of consumerism rather than those that exhibited American education or democracy. The dearth of coverage of these displays was such that Henri Peyere, a *New York Times* reader found this cause for concern. In a letter to the editor, he wrote: “We grossly underestimate ourselves. We assume that ‘the American way of life’ can

⁶⁶“Russians Feel, Thump, Sit Upon, and Above All Price U.S. Goods,” *New York Times*, 27 August 1959, p. 4.

⁶⁷“Russians Feel, Thump, Sit Upon,” p. 4.

be characterized solely by comfort placed within the reach of the common man, the possession of a big car, of a noisy machine or of a glittering kitchen.”⁶⁸

The journalistic trend that valued consumerism over all else seems consistent within the American press coverage of the Soviet Exhibition of Science, Technology, and Culture at the New York Coliseum, as well. Most of this coverage illustrated the failures of the Soviet exhibit and the disappointment of its visitors in the displays of consumer products or lack thereof. Homer Bigart, for instance, looked at the exhibit’s guest books to gauge visitor reactions. He noted that Cathy Sardelich of Dumont, NJ, wrote, “I think you should have had more kitchen items which would have interested the women, i.e., dishwashers, washing machines, irons, stoves, refrigerators, etc., also sewing machines.”⁶⁹ Moreover, Bigart observed that a few comments “found the show ‘too technical’ and proposed ‘a little humanizing please.’”⁷⁰ Others noted the lack of price tags on the merchandise and the absence of product variety. These two complaints, as well as the author’s choice to include them in his article, indicate the value of consumerism as they highlight the importance of one’s ability to appraise and purchase goods. This is furthered by Bigart’s depiction of visitors as “comparison shoppers turned loose in a rival department store.”⁷¹

Journalists also criticized the New York exhibit’s failure to accurately depict Soviet citizens’ standard of living and purchasing power. This sentiment was most notably expressed by *New York Times*’ Moscow correspondent, Max Frankel. Frankel, who had spent numerous years

⁶⁸Henri Peyere, “Presenting American Abroad: Exhibits’ Failure to Depict Our Cultural Heritage Noted” *New York Times*, 16 August 1959, p. E12.

⁶⁹Homer Bigart, “Guest Books Attract Strong Opinions on Prices and Policy” *New York Times*, 6 July 1959, p. 1.

⁷⁰Bigart, “Guest Books Attract Strong Opinions,” p. 7.

in the Soviet Union, stated that the New York Coliseum's exhibition "strives for an image of abundance with an apartment that few Russians enjoy, with clothes and furs that are rarely seen, and with endless variations of television, radio and recording equipment, cameras and binoculars that are not easily obtained in such...range in Soviet stores."⁷² Likewise, in a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, M.J. Lovell, a member of the United States track team, affirmed, "I was in Russia last July...I can assert that the exhibit, with but few exceptions, is but another instance of typical Russian boastfulness, unsupported by fact, if in existence at all." He continued, "It is merely an extension of their propaganda line which feeds pie in the sky and empty promise to millions of eager listeners who have no other alternatives nor the means to dispute the facts."⁷³ *Time* magazine also noted, that "for all Kozlov's pride in the chock-full Soviet exhibit, the plain fact was that it mirrored not Russian life today but a combination of genuine achievements...and a happy dream of the future."⁷⁴ Similarly, an article run in both *The Washington Post* and *Times Herald*, illustrated a reporter's skepticism concerning the Soviet housing display. As he stated, the exhibition "will show American visitors a vast variety of Russian achievements ranging from three Sputniks and the model of the last stage of the Soviet cosmic rocket to a housing display...No one, we presume, will dare decry the Sputniks."⁷⁵ However, regarding consumerism, "captious critics may contend with some justification that the delightful new

⁷¹Bigart, "Guest Books Attract Strong Opinions," p. 1.

⁷²"Kremlin Man" *Time*, 3 July 1959, p. 2. Interestingly, after Frankel made these comments about Soviet consumerism, he was denied a visa renewal by the Soviet government.

⁷³M.J. Lovell, "Soviet Exhibit Called Propaganda" *New York Times*, 3 July 1959, p.16.

⁷⁴"Kremlin Man," p. 2.

⁷⁵"Kremlin Man," p. 2.

dwelling houses in Cheryomushki, Moscow, depicted...are unlikely to be available in more than sample numbers for a long time to come.”⁷⁶

Time magazine’s July 6th article, “Red Sales,” further exemplifies this trend of journalistic skepticism. Most notably, the author shrugged off Russian technological accomplishments and condemned their industrial displays as propaganda while he simultaneously lauded American consumerism. He stated, “No envy. When it comes to consumer goods, there is no doubt that the Russians are far behind.” Moreover, the author described their merchandise as a bastardization of Western consumer products. He stated:

The textiles- mostly thick, heavy-textured woolen suite- are more impressive for their usefulness against the Russian winter than for their styles, which are clumsy attempts to copy Western designs. The Russian TV sets might have come out of U.S. living rooms (one bore the Russian brand name Admiral). The Russian cars looked like copies of small West European autos. In a two-bedroom apartment, the paint easily rubs off the prefabricated walls. The furniture is frail and imitative. The kitchen contains a small...refrigerator that...is more like a 1939 than a 1959 U.S. model...While the Russians have stewed about the \$13,000 American home to be shown at the U.S. exhibition...no one can expect the U.S. consumers to envy the Russian products on display in Manhattan.⁷⁷

As a result, the author contended that the 10,000 Soviet exhibits displayed at the New York exhibition were “good, bad, and indifferent by U.S. standards.”⁷⁸

Although journalist Murray Illson was not skeptical of the products displayed in the Soviet exhibit, concern over consumer goods is nonetheless apparent in his *New York Times* article. In it, he stated that while the models of sputniks, steel mills, and electronic computers interested the event’s thousands of American visitors, it was the Soviet fashion show that

⁷⁶“Glass Houses” *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, 29 June 1959, p. A14. The reporter came to this conclusion after Ambassador Menshikov’s criticism regarding the typicality of the American house that would be shown later in the summer in Sokolniki Park.

⁷⁷“Red Sales” *Time*, 6 July 1959, pp.1-2.

fascinated them. “A theatre at the Coliseum,” he reported, “was jammed with 1,200 spectators, and guards had a hard time keeping out those for whom there were no seats.”⁷⁹ Although this article with one-liners such as, “It seemed clear proof that an atom smasher is a poor match for an attractive young woman in a well fitted blouse,”⁸⁰ exhibited characteristics of a fluff piece, it nevertheless alluded to the importance of consumer merchandise to the American public.

The coverage appears to have been so biased that N. Osipenko, in his article for *New Times* magazine, felt a need to defend the Soviet exhibition as both innovative and enlightening to the average American visitor. As such, the author depicted the experience of “John Q. Public” as he made his way through the Soviet displays and described the way in which his opinions about his communist neighbors changed over the course of the afternoon. He wrote, “Now John Q. looks with new eyes...Gradually he becomes convinced that life in the Soviet Union is not a bit like he was told” and finds many aspects of communism, such as national healthcare and free higher education, quite attractive.⁸¹ Additionally, Osipenko, in a similar manner to Bigart, looked to the comments written in the exhibition’s guest books as a means of gauging visitor reactions. “I wish to congratulate my Soviet colleagues on their brilliant success in technology, culture, and science,” wrote one guest.⁸² “We’re beginning to realize that we were grossly misinformed,” stated another.⁸³

⁷⁸“Red Sales,” p. 1.

⁷⁹Murray Illson, “Style Show S.R.O. At Soviet Exhibit” *New York Times*, 2 July 1959, p. 3.

⁸⁰Illson, “Style Show S.R.O. At Soviet Exhibit,” p. 3.

⁸¹N. Osipenko, “Window to a New World: the Soviet exhibition in New York [June 29-Aug 10, 1959]” *New Times* (1959) No. 29, p. 28.

⁸²Osipenko, “Window to a New World,” p. 28.

⁸³Osipenko, “Window to a New World,” p. 28.

Osipenko argued that despite the apparent admiration of the Soviet exhibition's visitors, much of the mainstream news coverage sought to belittle the significance of the event and its impact on the American people.⁸⁴ Most notably, he cited the *Daily News*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Newsweek* among the most slanted of publications. He claimed that these papers created a trend in which "they began to play up the idea that the two-room apartment, motorcars, refrigerators and all the other good things are 'not typical' and 'beyond the reach' of the ordinary Soviet citizen."⁸⁵ However, Osipenko's article, while enlightening, seems to have been an aberration from mainstream coverage.

According to the sources reviewed above, there is a distinct commonality evident in reporters' coverage of the events. Journalists consistently magnified the exhibitions' cultural exhibits and those displays that depicted consumer goods whereas they disregarded the technological exhibits, which, as a result, faded into the background of American news coverage. It is therefore no wonder that scholars have since analyzed the exhibitions of the cultural exchange program of 1958 through the lens of consumerism.

In reviewing the primary and secondary sources available, the scholarship that emerged during the last decade of the twentieth century regarding the American National Exhibition seems incomplete. These historians, similar to the American journalists who first covered the event, have overlooked the breadth of the exhibition. Instead, they have chosen to analyze only one facet of it, namely its representation of consumer goods. Rather than provide an even-handed analysis of the exhibition, scholars have taken a decidedly narrow perspective. Even those who

⁸⁴Osipenko, "Window to a New World," p. 29.

⁸⁵Osipenko, "Window to a New World," p. 29.

mention aspects of the exhibition other than its consumerist bent do not lend them credence and point them out only tangentially.

Historian Karal Ann Marling, for instance, limits her study of the American National Exhibition by confining it to the context of consumerism. She spends the entirety of her analysis discussing the variety of consumer products displayed at the exhibition and describes the event as a shopping center on a grand international scale.⁸⁶ Additionally, the numerous black-and-white photographs Marling includes in her work are of consumer goods, such as kitchen appliances and television sets. As a result, she incorporates no photographs of the exhibits housed in the Dome or the Outside Area. Although the historian concedes that “there was a heart-lung machine in the dome, an art show in the pavilion, and a shed housing farm machinery adjacent to the restrooms and the exit,” she states that regardless of these more ascetic, technologically-focused displays, “the overall tenor of the U.S. Exhibition in Moscow was as effervescent as a Pepsi-Cola.”⁸⁷

Although Marling asserts that the exhibition was light in tone, she argues that the strong presence of American consumer goods, specifically the household products, were strategically employed to illustrate the superiority of the American way of life. She explains, “The America conjured up in [Moscow]...was a look, a dream, something tantalizing to touch kept just beyond the reach of [the Soviet’s] yearning fingers.”⁸⁸ To Marling, this dream was represented by a materialistic abundance that suggested a new ideal of personal freedom and choice, which while

⁸⁶ Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Harvard University Press: 1994), 250.

⁸⁷ Marling, *As Seen on TV*, 248-249.

⁸⁸ Marling, *As Seen on TV*, 246-247.

characteristic of America in the 1950s, was unavailable to citizens of the Soviet Union.⁸⁹

Nonetheless, her analysis is lacking. She ignores the presence, as well as the importance, of the non-consumer displays, such as those that depicted the progress of America's exploration of space or the country's educational system.

Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War 1945-1961 by Walter L. Hixson posits a similar theory to that of Marling, namely that the United States had hoped to expose Soviet citizens to the attractiveness of daily life in America. However, according to Hixson, who dedicates his entire book to the analysis of America's non-military cold-war tactics, the American National Exhibition was simply the culmination of a campaign that had begun over a decade earlier, which sought "cultural infiltration" of the Soviet Union. The author explains that after World War II, with the advent of the Marshall Plan, American economic and cultural influence expanded simultaneously with its military occupation of Europe. In the meantime, as discussed in an earlier section regarding the creation of the USIA, the United States began to employ propaganda and psychological warfare in an effort to undermine Soviet authority and orient Eastern Europe toward the West. Hixson states that America's "aim was to apply external pressures, short of direct military conflict, that would promote instability behind the Iron curtain with the ultimate goal of 'rolling back' communism in Eastern Europe and, to the extent possible, in the USSR itself."⁹⁰ While American policy by the mid 1950s may have created some unrest in the region, it failed to meet its ultimate goal, as evidenced by the steady presence of communism in Eastern Europe. As a result, the United States began to modify its stratagem by

⁸⁹Marling, *As Seen on TV*, 282.

⁹⁰Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War 1945-1961* (St. Martin's Press: 1997), xii.

cultivating East-West exchange programs and cultural exhibitions in order to bolster previously established news and information propaganda programs.

Although Hixson spends the majority of his analysis discussing the ways in which the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU) mobilized a counterattack against the Western cultural invasion, he nevertheless views the American National Exhibition as simply “a massive exhibition of consumer capitalism.”⁹¹ While the historian credits the event as the most influential single cold-war initiative since the Marshall Plan in that it achieved “cultural infiltration,” his definition of culture, and by extension, his analysis, seems limited from the outset. In his introduction, Hixson states: “We must explain what is meant by this elusive term ‘culture’...the one I employ here, views culture as ‘indicative of a way of life’ of a group or society.”⁹² While the definition Hixson provides in his introduction would seem to give the word “culture” a wide scope, the author actually uses the term quite narrowly in the rest of his work. In it, he refers exclusively to the country’s popular and consumer culture and then describes the exhibition’s success within these narrow parameters. He boasts, for instance, that as a result of the exhibition, “the teeming crowds at Sokolniki now knew, from first hand experience, that their country lagged well behind the United States in the quality of life that it could provide to consumers. The images and symbols of American life had made a profound impression.”⁹³ Similarly, the author explains that “Soviet actions in the wake of the American exhibition bolstered... [the] argument that...consumerism appealed to average citizens, while putting pressure on the Kremlin

⁹¹Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 185.

⁹²Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, x.

⁹³Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 213.

leaders.”⁹⁴

This limited analysis of the American National Exhibition is found in various other scholarly sources as well. In *Pavilions of Plenty*, for instance, Robert H. Haddow states “that the Soviet authorities were indeed frightened by the lavish display of U.S. consumer goods, but it was not the quantity of products on display that unnerved them so much as the emphasis on style and conspicuous consumption.”⁹⁵ Haddow perhaps exemplifies this tendency best with his rhetorical question regarding how to impact the citizens of the Soviet Union. “What better way to build mutual understanding,” he asks, “than allowing the Soviets to steal a leg of chicken, or take home a can of Campbell soup, a packet of pink sugar, or a pocketbook edition of Philip Wylie’s *Generation of Vipers?*”⁹⁶

Historian Michelle Hill also chooses to concentrate on the exhibition’s consumerism. She explains that while the United States and the Soviet Union were accelerating the nuclear arms race, they used trade fairs and cultural exchanges to spread ideological messages. The United States, she asserts, created “a stage for dramatizing the story of the free system that produces [these consumer goods].”⁹⁷ While accurate in her analysis of the reasons behind the cultural exchange program of 1958, Hill overlooks the way in which other aspects of the American National Exhibition, such as the voting booths or the answers of the RAMAC 305 to questions

⁹⁴Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 211.

⁹⁵ Robert H. Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty: Exhibiting American Culture Abroad in the 1950s* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press: 1997), 208.

⁹⁶Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty*, 213.

⁹⁷ Michele Hill, “My Kitchen’s Better Than Yours” *Michigan History Magazine*, Vol 83, No 4, (1999), 50.

like “What is meant by the American dream?” or “What is American Rock and Roll music?,” also introduced American ideology to the Soviet Union.⁹⁸

This trend in scholarship regarding the American National Exhibition cannot be coincidental. Although academics build off the work of one another, information must originate somewhere. In this case, the American press coverage of the event in Moscow, as well as its Soviet counterpart in New York, follow similar patterns found in these later academic works. Hence, it seems that Marling, Hixson, Haddow, and Hill, among others base their analyses on this original news coverage. Late twentieth century historians mistakenly rely on the authority of American cold-war press coverage and as a result, repeat the journalists’ flawed depiction of the American National Exhibition as an event almost exclusively concerned with consumer goods.

The Economic Battle

That evening I officially opened the American National Exhibition ...I used the exhibition as a means of describing our way of life, our standard of living, and our aspirations to the Russian people. It was my chance...The caricature of capitalism was as out of date as a ‘wooden plow.’ ...I cited figures to show that the 44 million families in America own 56 million cars, 50 million television sets, 143 million radio sets, and that 31 million of those families own their own homes...the world’s largest capitalist country, has from the standpoint of distribution of wealth come closest to the ideal of prosperity for all in a classless society.⁹⁹

In many ways, the American news coverage of the consumerist aspects of the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow reflected the particular brand of anxiety that plagued the American people during this time. Whereas earlier stages of the Cold War had been fraught exclusively with fears of nuclear warfare, the end of the 1950s marked the beginning of an

⁹⁸Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 204.

⁹⁹ Richard Nixon, *Six Crises* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1962), 259-260.

economic battle with the Soviet Union. A new era had begun, in which old concerns of atomic annihilation were compounded with economic insecurities and tensions between the two superpowers would reach a head.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower's 1958 State of the Union Address, delivered in January of that year, echoed this shift in cold-war consciousness. The president began his speech by addressing the recent shock over the *Sputnik* launches and the fear that the technology needed to propel these satellites into space would be employed to send ICBMs to decimate the United States. Although he quickly assured the American people of their safety, he moved on to warn them that a military battle with the Soviet Union was not the only threat facing the nation. He cautioned that "We could make no more tragic mistake than merely to concentrate on military strength."¹⁰⁰ "For if we did only this," he warned, "the future would hold nothing for the world but an Age of Terror."¹⁰¹ Eisenhower then shifted gears and told America, "I now want to talk about the strength we need to win a different kind of war- one that has already been launched against us."¹⁰² "It is the massive economic offensive," he explained, "that has been mounted by the communist imperialists against free nations."¹⁰³ In his discussion of the impending economic battle facing the United States, the president educated the American people about a dimension of the Cold War that may have seemed less pressing than nuclear warfare and therefore, less of a concern. However, the President underscored that such an assumption was incredibly dangerous.

¹⁰⁰Dwight D. Eisenhower, "1958 State of the Union Address" (9 January, 1958), <http://www.asksam.com/ebooks/releases.asp?file=StateoftheUnion.ask&dn=1958> (accessed February 20, 2007).

¹⁰¹Eisenhower, "1958 State of the Union Address."

¹⁰²Eisenhower, "1958 State of the Union Address."

¹⁰³Eisenhower, "1958 State of the Union Address."

According to cold-war historian Kenneth Osgood, Eisenhower believed that the real war with the Soviet Union would not be fought with hydrogen bombs or missiles, but rather by nonmilitary means.¹⁰⁴ “This non-military drive, if underestimated,” the President warned, “could defeat the free world regardless of our military strength.”¹⁰⁵ As such, he redirected the public’s focus from weapons programs to other arenas of cold-war competition. Eisenhower emphasized the importance of continuing to build the American economy and equated the dangers of an economic battle with that of a military one. “Admittedly, most of us did not anticipate the psychological impact upon the world of launching the first earth satellite,” he said.¹⁰⁶ “Let us not make the same kind of mistake in another field, by failing to anticipate the much more serious impact of the Soviet economic offensive.”¹⁰⁷

Although the second half of the president’s speech was markedly different from the first inasmuch as it spoke of a peaceful and mutually productive relationship with the rest of the world, it too indicated the changing nature of the Cold War. In it, Eisenhower addressed the Soviets directly. “My last call of action is not primarily addressed to the Congress and people of the United States,” he explained. “Rather, it is a message from the people of the United States to all other peoples, especially those of the Soviet Union.”¹⁰⁸ Eisenhower suggested that the most successful way of creating a peaceful environment would be “For...our people...to know each other better.”¹⁰⁹ He, therefore, urged the Soviets “to cooperate in...actions that will break down

¹⁰⁴ Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s secret propaganda battle at home and abroad* (Lawrence, University of Kansas, 2006): 346-347.

¹⁰⁵ Eisenhower, “1958 State of the Union Address.”

¹⁰⁶ Eisenhower, “1958 State of the Union Address.”

¹⁰⁷ Eisenhower, “1958 State of the Union Address.”

¹⁰⁸ Eisenhower, “1958 State of the Union Address.”

¹⁰⁹ Eisenhower, “1958 State of the Union Address.”

the unnatural barriers that have blocked the flow of thought and understanding between our people.”¹¹⁰ However, while Eisenhower claimed that the upcoming cultural exchange program would be a path to genuine peace, his closing remarks revealed his true intentions. “It makes no sense whatsoever to spend additional billions on military strength to deter a potential danger, [but] let the world succumb to a present danger in economic guise,” he explained.¹¹¹ Rather, through the actions taken by the United States, “Mankind...will see more clearly than ever that the future belongs not to the concept of a regimented atheistic state, but to the people- the God-fearing, peace-loving people of all the world.”¹¹² Eisenhower indicated that American economic policy and its battle with the Soviet Union were clearly linked.

President Eisenhower’s predictions of an impending economic competition with the USSR were realized later that year. In the midst of the recession of 1958, Premier Nikita Khrushchev announced his new Seven-Year Plan for the economic development of the Soviet Union. During the postwar years, the Soviet economy had increased its output at a much faster rate than the United States, and Khrushchev’s goals for 1965 indicated his belief that this pace could be sustained, much to the dismay of the United States. *New York Times* journalist, Harry Schwartz’s analysis agreed with Khrushchev’s view of Soviet economic abilities. Schwartz explained that the Soviet Union’s abundant reserves of raw materials and large educated population would “seem to guarantee that significant economic progress will continue indefinitely.”¹¹³

¹¹⁰Eisenhower, “1958 State of the Union Address.”

¹¹¹Eisenhower, “1958 State of the Union Address.”

¹¹²Eisenhower, “1958 State of the Union Address.”

¹¹³ Harry Schwartz, “U.S.-Soviet Race in Output Decried” *New York Times*, 26 October, 1959, p. 2.

Although an affluent Soviet Union would threaten the United States, Khrushchev's plan for increasing private Soviet citizen's standard of living was particularly alarming to the American people. For years, American citizens had prided themselves on the supremacy of the capitalist system as evidenced by their superior purchasing power. However, the target figures of the new Soviet Seven-Year Plan threatened this American dominance since Khrushchev's economic plan provided for an increase in the material and cultural standards of Soviet citizens.¹¹⁴ According to a *New World* review's economic projections, the Soviet national income would increase by 62-65 per cent, while real wages and salaries would improve by an average of 40 per cent. The article indicated that improvements would be made in the pension program as well.¹¹⁵ In addition to raising the average salary, Khrushchev planned to introduce a shorter workday and five-day workweek. As a result, the USSR would boast the world's shortest workday and work-week.¹¹⁶ The combination of an increase in wages and leisure time in which to spend this extra money would naturally translate into a higher standard of living for the average citizen in the Soviet Union.

The economic competition between the two superpowers also seeped into the political discourse of the American National Exhibition, which was held in Moscow the following summer. Marling explains that Nixon's meeting with Khrushchev in Sokolniki Park should have been a routine ceremonial affair. This, however, was not the case. The Captive Nation Resolution, legislation that required Eisenhower to proclaim a week of prayer for all those living under communist regimes, was issued just as Nixon left for Moscow. "The coincidence enraged

¹¹⁴ "Soviet 7-Year Plan Targets" *New World Review* Vol 27, 1959, p. 29.

¹¹⁵"Soviet 7-Year Plan Targets," p. 29.

¹¹⁶""Soviet 7-Year Plan Targets," p. 29.

Khrushchev,” she writes, “With millions of Americans praying for the overthrow of his government, along came the U.S. Vice President trying to stir up discontent with his TV sets and automatic washers!”¹¹⁷ Thus, as Nixon and Khrushchev wandered the grounds of the exhibition, they began to debate the differences between the communist and capitalist economic systems. Their tense discussion came to a head in the display most emblematic of American consumerism, namely, the model kitchen.

Although many topics were discussed over the course of the Kitchen Debate, it was Khrushchev’s skepticism regarding the purpose of the American displays of domestic consumerism that alluded to the current economic competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. “You Americans think that the Russian people will be astonished to see these things,” he said with disdain, “The fact is that all our new houses have this kind of equipment.”¹¹⁸ Although Nixon replied that the intention of the display was to illustrate American diversity and the freedom to choose, Khrushchev remained unimpressed. He queried, “How long has America existed? Three hundred years?” Nixon replied that the United States was one hundred and fifty years old. “One hundred and fifty years?” Khrushchev retorted, “Well, then, we will say America has been in existence for 150 years and this is the level she has reached.”¹¹⁹ “We,” he continued, “have existed not quite forty-two years and in another seven we will be on the same level as America. When we catch you up, in passing you by, we will wave to you. Then if you wish we

¹¹⁷ Marling, *As Seen on TV*, 272.

¹¹⁸ “Better to See Once,” *Time*, 3 August, 1959, p. 9.

¹¹⁹ “The Two Worlds: a Day-Long Debate” *New York Times*, 25 July 1959, p. 1.

can say: Please follow up.”¹²⁰ Here, Khrushchev made a direct reference to his Seven-Year Plan and mocked American overconfidence in the superiority of its economic system.

Thus, as Robert Haddow explains in *Pavilions of Plenty*, the Kitchen Debate was significant not because of the way in which the two leaders discussed the merits of household appliances, but rather because it captured the ongoing debate of the merits of the United States’ society of abundance.¹²¹ This cultural dialogue was especially pertinent during the 1950s, a time in which Americans enjoyed unparalleled economic prosperity and the conspicuous consumption that accompanied it.

American Cultural Identity of the 1950’s

Faith in mass consumption...came to mean much more than the ready availability of goods to buy. Rather, it stood for an elaborate, integrated ideal of economic abundance and democratic political freedom...that became almost a national civil religion.¹²²

Although by today’s standards perhaps less sensational than the prospect of atomic warfare, the economic developments of the late 1950s were particularly threatening to the United States insofar as its cultural identity was, in many ways, defined by the abundance and variety characterized by capitalism. At the end of World War II, a great emphasis was placed upon mass consumption as a means of curtailing a postwar depression. This phenomenon helped create an economic boom and simultaneously generated an unprecedented culture of consumerism throughout the country.

¹²⁰ “The Two Worlds,” p. 1.

¹²¹ Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty*, 229.

¹²² Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 127.

Historian Lizabeth Cohen explains that during the long period of reconversion from a wartime economy to one of peacetime, the role of the American consumer changed. She explains, at this time, “Americans in the Consumer’s Republic learned that consuming for personal and national benefit was not only right, but a duty of citizenship.”¹²³ By purchasing goods for themselves, consumers were not only fulfilling their personal desires, but their civic obligations as well. Suddenly, self-indulgence became a necessary tool for economic recovery as the federal government promoted a Keynesian approach as the key to postwar stability. This contrasted greatly with the culture of suppression the American consumer had faced during wartime. Nevertheless, in “postwar America....the general good would be best served not by frugality or even moderation, but by individuals pursuing personal wants in a flourishing mass consumption marketplace.”¹²⁴

This mass consumption included everything from houses to automobiles to television sets. Furthermore, the purchase of a new home provided the opportunity to fill it with myriad products ranging from Whirlpool dishwashers to patio furniture to china sets, all of which conveyed the consumerism typical of the middle-class lifestyle. As a result, Americans found both economic and social incorporation through mass consumption.¹²⁵ Even after reconversion had come to an end, the importance of personal consumption remained embedded in American culture.

This connection between consumerism and America’s cultural identity during the fifties is most apparent when one analyzes the cultural critiques of the time. Cohen explains that “when

¹²³ Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*, 408.

¹²⁴ Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*, 121.

mass consumption was extensively reshaping the nation...theorists and critics most consistently identified it as a key influence in defining American society.”¹²⁶ 1950s historian David Potter, for instance, claimed in *People of Plenty* that American identity was derived from an economy of abundance. For Potter, the influence of economic abundance on the formation of the national character was twofold. First, he explained, it was “a factor whose presence and whose force may be clearly and precisely recognized in the most personal and intimate phases of the development of personality in the child.”¹²⁷ Abundance, according to the author, dictated what an individual ate, what he wore, where he lived, how many siblings he had, and his relationship with his parents. Additionally, Potter argued that “the presence and force of this factor are recognizable with equal certainty in the whole broad, general range of American experience, American ideals, and American institutions.”¹²⁸ As a result, he asserted that many of the nation’s cornerstones, such as democracy, would have been impossible without the presence of an inexhaustible abundance.

Additional theories regarding the effect of consumerism on American identity were put forth in the late 1950s by David Riesman and John Kenneth Galbraith. Both scholars were concerned with how affluence was necessary in both the formation and destruction of the country’s national culture. Riesman, for instance, argued in *The Lonely Crowd* that the booming economy had caused American society to slowly become other-directional, which forced its

¹²⁵ Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*, 388.

¹²⁶ Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*, 10.

¹²⁷ David Morris Potter, *People of Plenty: economic abundance and the American character* (University of Chicago Press: 1954): 208.

¹²⁸ Potter, *People of Plenty*, 208.

members to respond to conformist pressures rather than individual desires.¹²⁹ Galbraith was also troubled by the effect of the economy on the country's character. He asserted in *The Affluent Society* that in the past, "more production meant more food for the hungry, more clothing for the cold, and more houses for the homeless."¹³⁰ However, the country's overabundant economy had caused America to become "a world where increased output satisfies the craving for more elegant automobiles, more exotic food, more erotic clothing, [and] more elaborate entertainment."¹³¹

These cultural critiques were not unique to elite intellectual theorists; they permeated popular culture as well. Marling, for instance, refers to an editorial piece printed in *Life* in December of 1959, which "wondered aloud if high living in the form of credit cards, overdecorated, gas-guzzling Cadillacs, and an incessant rage of hedonistic advertising had begun to sap the national purpose."¹³² Even Democratic Presidential candidate John F. Kennedy stated: "The harsh facts of the matter are that we have gone soft...We are in danger of losing our will to fight, sacrifice, to endure. The slow corrosion of luxury is already beginning to show."¹³³ Historian Wendy Kozol explains, "Cultural critics worried that mass culture was producing a weakened society of conformists akin to those unthinking automatons living in totalitarian states.

¹²⁹ David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).

¹³⁰ John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958), 117.

¹³¹ Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, 117.

¹³² Marling, *As Seen on TV*, 252.

¹³³ "The Issue of Purpose" *Time*, 16 November, 1959, p. 1.

This association between social concerns and anti-Communist rhetoric permeated discussions about American society.”¹³⁴

American consumerism was not simply an indicator of the economic prosperity enjoyed by the United States during the fifties. Instead, conspicuous consumption and the economic system that created it had become integral to the cultural identity of the country. This indicates why the prospect of a strong communist Soviet Union was so threatening to the American way of life.

Conclusion

A little after 9:00 PM on September 4, 1959 the lights were turned out at “Sokolniki”...The visitors did not want to go. They hung back as much as they could, begging a last look at the Sears Roebuck catalog, trying for one more conversation, one more question, one more contact, one more glimpse.¹³⁵

After months of planning, the American National Exhibition came to a close in early September of 1959. Much to the delight of the event’s organizers, the Sokolniki fair attracted approximately three times as many visitors as its Soviet counterpart in New York, which caused officials to conclude that the United States had “won” the battle of the exhibitions.¹³⁶

Furthermore, as Frankel reported in a *New York Times* exposé, “The fair was most effective in leading many Russians toward taking an open mind on opportunities available to the common man in the United States.”¹³⁷ It also, according to the USIA’s critical analysis, portrayed the

¹³⁴ Wendy Kozol, *Life’s America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 121.

¹³⁵ NARA Archives II State Department File RG 59 Box 3 “Six Weeks in Sokolniki: Foreign Service Dispatch” as quoted in Tracy Fleischman’s *Airbrushed America: the 1959 American National Exhibition* (M.A. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2004), 117.

¹³⁶ Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 210.

¹³⁷ Max Frankel, “American Exhibition Puts Ideas of U.S. Across, Analyst Finds” *New*

United States as “a middle-of-the-road country with elements of Social Security, unemployment benefits, and educational opportunities for ambitious youngsters.”¹³⁸ Additionally, officials noted that the American National Exhibition had directly influenced a conscious imitation of American trends, “ranging from blond streaks in the hair-dos of fashion models, to clothing styles, to the projected modernization of refrigerator and washing machine design.”¹³⁹

Unfortunately, despite its comprehensive cross-section of American life in the fifties, much of the displays that exhibited the United States’ progress in technology and science and those that boasted the country’s educational and political systems were lost in the historical recollections of the event. The emergence of a strong and vocal press that focused disproportionately on the American National Exhibition’s displays of consumerism had lasting effects on the interpretation of the event. Future scholars looked to the news coverage of the time and theorized about the usage of consumerism as a Cold War battle tactic rather than analyzing the significance of the exhibition in its entirety.

However, this phenomenon is useful in its own right as it indicates an evolution in America’s cold-war mindset, namely newfound fears of the economic threat posed by the Soviet Union. The United States, characterized by its postwar abundance, developed a new national identity, one which was as equally threatened by Khrushchev’s Seven-Year Plan as it was by the 1957 *Sputnik* launches. In many ways, the Cold War events of the first decade following World

York Times, 5 September, 1959, p. 3.

¹³⁸ Frankel, “American Exhibition Puts Ideas of U.S. Across,” p. 3.

¹³⁹ “Some Developments Affecting the Soviet Consumer Since Summer 1959,” USIA Office of Research and Analysis, 11 February, 1960, Box 2, Sprague Committee Report, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library as quoted in Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 211.

War II as well as the battles yet to be fought were embodied in the exhibitions that emerged from the cultural exchange program of 1958.

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