

Cold War Pop Culture and the Image of U.S. Foreign Policy

The Perspective of the Original *Star Trek* Series

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By any measure, *Star Trek* has been a major American cultural phenomenon. A short-lived science fiction television show that ran on the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) in the 1960s, the series by 2005 had spawned nine motion pictures, four new television series, an animated television series, more than a hundred novels, and hundreds of ancillary items ranging from children's toys to websites. In the 1960s, when the series was still in production, the creative forces behind the show—the producers, directors, and writers—attempted to use it as a forum to comment on a number of political and social issues, including foreign policy and the Cold War. Their efforts raise an interesting question: What can this television program tell us about the self-image of Americans in the mid- to late 1960s?

This article shows that the makers of the original *Star Trek* series wanted the United States to play a constructive role on the world scene and that they used the television show to critique U.S. foreign policy. They believed that the United States should promote democratic self-determination and refrain from using force in a way that would undermine the country's international image. They were uncomfortable with the salience of nuclear weapons in U.S. national security policy and with U.S. military intervention in other countries. Their views often ran counter to specific policies of the U.S. government. Hence, the television series was intended not only to shape the values of the American public but also to redirect U.S. policies abroad.

Although many scholars recognize that *Star Trek* was a significant force in popular culture, few studies of the television series have been historical in nature, and even fewer have been written on the basis of the show's production files.¹ The only three scholars who have studied the presentation of world af-

1. Scholars have studied a number of issues that were explored in the original series and the sundry

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fairs in the original series—Rick Worland, Mark P. Lagon, and H. Bruce Franklin—have come to conclusions that are difficult to sustain when compared with sources documenting the production of the television series. Worland, for example, insists: “Its progressive humanism aside, *Star Trek* neatly duplicated the configuration of international Cold War politics of the 1960s.” He wonders whether part of the show’s popularity was nothing more than a “simple reactionary nostalgia for the continuing desire to mold or force

film and television sequels. Although it is risky to make a sweeping statement about a good deal of diverse scholarship, it is safe to say that most academics writing about this phenomenon have attempted to show that the original series was a manifestation of culturally regressive elements of contemporary society. One of the subjects that the architects of *Star Trek* confronted directly was race. As a result, this subject has proven to be a popular topic of academic inquiry. See Daniel Leonard Bernardi, *Star Trek and History: Race-ing toward a White Future* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Katrina G. Boyd, “Cyborgs in Utopia: The Problem of Radical Difference in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*,” in Taylor Harrison et al., eds., *Enterprise Zones: Critical Positions on Star Trek* (Boulder: Westview, 1996), pp. 95–114; Leah R. Vande Berg, “Liminality: Worf Metonymic Signifier of Racial, Cultural and National Differences,” in Harrison et al., eds., *Enterprise Zones*, pp. 51–68; and Rhonda V. Wilcox, “Dating Data: Miscegenation in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*,” in Harrison et al., eds., *Enterprise Zones*, pp. 69–92. Many researchers have also taken an interest in gender and related topics. See Sarah Projansky, “When the Body Speaks: Deanna Troi’s Tenuous Authority and the Rationalization of Federation Superiority in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* Rape Narratives,” in Taylor Harrison et al., eds., *Enterprise Zones*, pp. 33–52; Elyce Rae Helford, “‘A Part of Myself No Man Should Ever See’: Reading Captain Kirk’s Multiple Masculinities,” in Harrison et al., eds., *Enterprise Zones*, pp. 10–32; Evan Haffner, “Enjoyment (in) between Fathers: General Chang as Homoerotic Enjoyment in *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*,” in Harrison et al., eds., *Enterprise Zones*, pp. 211–230; Mary Ann Tetreault, “The Trouble with *Star Trek*,” *Minerva: Quarterly Report on Women and the Military*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Winter 1984), pp. 119–129; Anne Cranny-Francis, “Sexuality and Sex Role Stereotyping in *Star Trek*,” *Science-Fiction Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (November 1985), pp. 274–284; Edi Bjorklund, “Women and *Star Trek* Fandom: From SF to Sisterhood,” *Minerva: Quarterly Report on Women and the Military*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Spring 1986), pp. 16–65; Karin Blair, “Sex and *Star Trek*,” *Science-Fiction Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (November 1983), pp. 292–297; Mary Henderson, “Professional Women in *Star Trek, 1964–1969*,” *Film and History*, Vol. 24, No. 1/2 (February 1994), pp. 47–59; and Lynne Joyrich, “Feminist Enterprise: *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and the Occupation of Femininity,” *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Winter 1996), pp. 61–84. Analysis of philosophical and psychological issues presented in and related to the television shows and films is another well-explored topic. See Louis A. Woods and Gary L. Harmon, “Jung and *Star Trek*: The *Coincidentia-Oppositorum* and Images of the Shadow,” *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Fall 1994), pp. 169–184; Karin Blair, *Meaning in Star Trek* (New York: Warner, 1977); Karin Blair, “*Star Trek* in Retrospect—A Celebration of the Alien,” *Television Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Summer 1979), pp. 39–47; Mary Jo Deegan, “Sexism in Space: The Freudian Formula in *Star Trek*,” in Donald Palumbo, ed., *Eros in the Mind’s Eye: Sexuality and the Fantastic in Art and Film* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 209–224; Ina Rae Hark, “*Star Trek* and Television’s Moral Universe,” *Extrapolation*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring 1979), pp. 20–37; Harvey R. Greenberg, “In Search of Spock: A Psychoanalytical Inquiry,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Summer 1984), pp. 52–65; and Richard Hanley, *The Metaphysics of Star Trek, or, Is Data Human?* (New York: Basic Books, 1997). One of the most popular topics among serious scholars of the *Star Trek* phenomenon is its popularity and role as a modern American folk story or myth. See, for example, Thomas Richards, *The Meaning of Star Trek* (New York: Doubleday, 1997); William Tyrrell, “*Star Treks* Myth of Science,” *Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Summer 1979), pp. 288–296; William Tyrrell, “*Star Trek* as Myth and Television as Mythmaker,” *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Spring 1977), pp. 711–719; Donna Reid-Jeffrey, “*Star Trek*: The Last Frontier in Modern American Myth,” *Folklore and Mythological Studies*, No. 6 (1982), pp. 34–41; John Corry, “Something about *Star Trek* Talks to Every Man,” *The New York Times*, 10 June 1984, p. H25; Karin Blair, “The Garden in the Machine: The Why of *Star Trek*,” *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Fall 1979), pp. 310–319; Jane Elizabeth Ellington and Joseph W. Critelli, “Analysis of a Modern Myth: The *Star Trek* Series,” *Extrapolation*

the world into patterns suitable only to Americans.”² Worland’s thesis parallels that of other scholars who argue that elements of popular culture are best received when they present what the audience wants to see and that the popular myths that develop from these manifestations are able to bond the society together.³ Worland’s thesis contains a good deal of truth, but his analysis is accurate only to a point. There was no great break in the philosophy of the series. The show was often critical of U.S. foreign policy and was committed to the view that the United States should be a positive and constructive force in world affairs for its own sake as well as for the benefit of foreign peoples. Mark Lagon uses two episodes from the original series as case studies to examine the rationale for U.S. intervention in the Third World in the 1960s and 1990s. The problem with Lagon’s study is that he takes these productions out of their historical context, as he readily admits. “*Star Trek* also contains metaphors which were not intended to comment on U.S. foreign policy at the time of the show, but they aptly confront new problems for the U.S. in the global context some twenty-five years later.”⁴ The work of H. Bruce Franklin focuses mainly on the presentation of the Vietnam War in the series. He argues that the four episodes that mentioned the conflict reflected the changing opinions of the American public.⁵

The conclusions of these three scholars are understandable in that they chose to limit their analysis to the finished product that was transmitted to the public. But an examination of the production process casts doubt on their interpretations. Moreover, the arguments advanced by Worland and Franklin are a misreading of how the creative forces behind the original *Star Trek* series presented U.S. foreign policy. The reasons for their misinterpretations are easy enough to understand. The collaborative creative process in television of-

tion, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Fall 1983), pp. 241–250; Robert Jewett and John S. Lawrence, “*Star Trek* and the Bubble Gum Fallacy,” *Television Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring 1977), pp. 5–16; and Jeff Greenwald, *Future Perfect: How Star Trek Conquered Planet Earth* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1998). Rick Worland, in “From the New Frontier to the Final Frontier: *Star Trek* from Kennedy to Gorbachev,” *Film & History*, Vol. 24, No. 1/2 (February 1994), pp. 19–35, discusses foreign policy and the Cold War in particular, but his main subjects of investigation are national legends and fables. A major exception to this generally negative view of *Star Trek* as a manifestation of American society—at least in the area of popular myth—is Jon Wagner and Jan Lundeen, *Deep Space and Sacred Time: Star Trek in the American Mythos* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998).

2. Rick Worland, “Captain Kirk: Cold Warrior,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Fall 1988), pp. 109–117.

3. Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), pp. 356, 626; and Russell Nye, “The Popular Arts and the Popular Audience,” in David M. White and John Pendleton, eds., *Popular Culture: Mirror of American Life* (Del Mar, CA: Publisher’s Inc., 1977), p. 26.

4. Mark P. Lagon, “‘We Owe It to Them to Interfere’: *Star Trek* and U.S. Statecraft in the 1960s and the 1990s,” *Extrapolation*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Fall 1993), pp. 251–264.

5. H. Bruce Franklin, “*Star Trek* in the Vietnam Era,” *Science-Fiction Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (March 1994), pp. 24–34.

ten results in shows with convoluted messages that are open to misinterpretation. The production documents leave no doubt that the makers of the series constantly tried to offer a thoughtful critique of U.S. involvement in international affairs that was hardly “reactionary nostalgia.” Their view was that the United States should support democratic values abroad and should be restrained in using its power. In this respect, the series did far more than simply reflect the prejudices of its audience; it acted instead as a sentinel of national virtue and conscience.

This article explores the intentions of the *Star Trek* creators rather than simply interpreting the finished product that aired on television. For two reasons, it is worth concentrating on the original series instead of the sequels. First, documents from the original series are available, and this is not the case for any of the sequels. Second, the historical context of the 1960s makes it especially worthwhile to focus on the original series. An analysis of the series can bolster one of the most fruitful recent trends in diplomatic history; namely, the growing number of studies of the intersection between foreign policy and public opinion.⁶

Foreign Policy Motifs

Of necessity, the makers of *Star Trek* worked through allegory when discussing contemporary issues of American foreign policy. Set three hundred years in the future, the show recounts the adventures of the USS *Enter-*

6. A partial listing of the contributions to this debate include Charles S. Maier, “Marking Time: The Historiography of International Relations,” in Michael Kammen, ed., *The Past before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 355–387; Gordon Craig, “The Historian and the Study of International Relations,” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (February 1983), pp. 1–11; Charles R. Lilley and Michael Hunt, “On Social History, the State and Foreign Relations,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Spring 1985), pp. 101–113; Michael J. Hogan, “Corporatism: A Positive Appraisal,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Fall 1986), pp. 363–372; Alexander DeConde, “On the Nature of International History,” *International History Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (May 1988), pp. 282–285; Christopher Thorne, “After the Europeans: American Designs for the Remaking of Southeast Asia,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Spring 1988), pp. 201–208; Akira Iriye, “The Internationalization of History,” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 94, No. 1 (February 1989), pp. 1–10; Ole Holsti, “Models of International Relations and Foreign Policy,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Winter 1989), pp. 15–43; John Lewis Gaddis, “New Conceptual Approaches to the Study of American Foreign Relations,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Summer 1990), pp. 405–423; “A Round Table: Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations,” *Journal of American History*, Vol. 77, No. 1 (June 1990), pp. 92–180; “Writing the History of U.S. Foreign Relations: A Symposium,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Fall 1990), pp. 553–605; Stephen Pelz, “Changing International Systems, the World Balance of Power and the United States, 1776–1976,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Winter 1991), pp. 47–81; “Culture, Gender and Foreign Policy: A Symposium,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Winter 1994), pp. 47–124; and Michael J. Hogan and Thomas Patterson, eds., *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

prise,⁷ a starship that is part of Starfleet, the military service of the United Federation of Planets. The Federation is a collection of diverse worlds and cultures that respect, tolerate, and celebrate their differences—it represents an idealized version of the United States. Although the *Enterprise* is a military ship, it is on a peaceful “five year mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations.”⁸ Many fans have argued that this mission makes Starfleet a scientific service rather than a military organization, but the assignment is similar to the role that the U.S. Army and Navy performed during most of the nineteenth century.⁹

The main adversary of the Federation is the Klingon Empire. A description of the Klingons in a *Star Trek* writers’ guidebook states that “their only rule of life is that rules are made to be broken by shrewdness, deceit, or power. Cruelty is something admirable; honor is a despicable trait.” The guidebook also makes clear that the creators of the series had little interest in pursuing story lines that explored these characters: “All in all, the Klingons appear to have little (by our standards) in the way of redeeming qualities.”¹⁰ According to the narrative in the original series and in several of the movies, the Federation and the Klingons were engaged in a long, hostile confrontation that constantly teetered on the edge of full-fledged war. In episodes involving foreign policy, the Klingons represent the Soviet Union. “We have always played them very much like the Russians,” producer Gene Coon explained.¹¹ The Romulans are another important Federation rival. The writers’ guidebook indicates that they are equally loathsome: “Romulans are highly militaristic, aggressive by nature, ruthless in war and do not take captives.”¹² With an Oriental tinge, isolated from the Federation, and in an alliance of sorts with the Klingons, the Romulans represent the People’s Republic of China or North Korea, or possibly some combination.

The use of allegory was intentional. In the mid-1960s the three major television networks were extremely reluctant to tackle controversial issues di-

7. The USS *Enterprise* was the name of the first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, christened in September 1960. In the *Star Trek* series, the *USS* prefix stands for “United Star Ship”; in the U.S. Navy it stands for “United States Ship.” In 1977 the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration gave the name *Enterprise* to the first space shuttle test vehicle in honor of *Star Trek*.

8. This statement is part of a soliloquy that precedes the opening credits of every episode in the original series.

9. William H. Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West, 1803–1863* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959); and John Curtis Perry, *Facing West: Americans and the Opening of the Pacific* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994).

10. Stephen E. Whitfield and Gene Roddenberry, *The Making of Star Trek* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968), pp. 257–258.

11. Gene Coon to Don Ingalls, 21 August 1967, in Arts Library Special Collections, University of California at Los Angeles (hereinafter ALSC-UCLA), Papers of Gene Roddenberry, Box 15, Folder 9.

12. Whitfield and Roddenberry, *The Making of “Star Trek,”* p. 256.

rectly. Gene Roddenberry, the creator of the series, complained: “Today in TV, you can’t write about Vietnam, politics, labor management, the rocket race, the drug problem realistically.”¹³ The format of the series provided a way around this barrier, as John Meredyth Lucas, the producer of the series in its final season, explained:

It was great to work on *Star Trek* because working in the science fiction genre gave us free rein to touch on any number of stories. We could do our anti-Vietnam stories, our civil rights stories, you know. Set the story in outer space, in the future and all of a sudden you can get away with just about anything, because you’re protected by the argument that “Hey, we’re not talking about the problems of today, we’re dealing with a mythical time and place in the future.” We were lying, of course, but that’s how we got these stories by the network types.¹⁴

Like all television productions, *Star Trek* was a collaborative effort. Roddenberry, as the creator of the show, had the greatest say in its content. William Shatner, the series’ lead actor as Captain James T. Kirk, observed: “Gene, love him or not, was undeniably the creative spark behind *Star Trek* and without him none of us would have been able to spend our lives in pursuit of such a joyful distraction.”¹⁵ In addition to establishing the basic premise of the series, Roddenberry exerted influence in a variety of ways. He devised many story ideas, wrote episode scripts, and often rewrote the work of others. The actor James Doohan, who played the starship engineer Scotty on the show, later remarked: “One of Gene’s great qualities was that an ordinary idea would come in for a show and he would turn it into something better. That’s where Gene’s great talent was, in saying to a fellow, ‘Why don’t you do this, why don’t you do that? You have to have a conflict,’ and so on.”¹⁶

Despite the common assumption among fans that Roddenberry was the sole creative force behind *Star Trek*, his influence had limits. He readily admitted as much at the time: “Nothing would please me more than to take credit for the whole thing,” he stated. “Eighty other people help make the show. They are the ones who deserve the lion’s share of the credit.”¹⁷ The myth crediting Roddenberry with the entire creative vision behind the series

13. Roddenberry, quoted in *Daily Variety*, 23 January 1968, p. 4.

14. William Shatner with Chris Kreski, *Star Trek Memories* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 326. In writing this book, Shatner and Kreski conducted interviews with a number of individuals involved with the production of the television series and included long quotations from these meetings in the final published work, even when they were critical of Shatner. As a result, it is quite useful as a source for a number of different views.

15. Shatner with Kreski, *Star Trek Memories*, p. 394.

16. James Doohan with Peter David, *Beam Me Up, Scotty: Star Trek’s “Scotty”—In His Own Words* (New York: Pocket Books, 1996), p. 160.

17. Whitfield and Roddenberry, *The Making of Star Trek*, p. 301.

developed in later years, in part through his own encouragement. Initially, he did not overtly claim to have done the work of others, but he was more than willing to accept praise for contributions that were not his, making little effort to correct false or erroneous perceptions that bolstered his reputation. Studio executive Herb Solow, who helped Roddenberry develop the series, explained: “While there is no denying that Gene created the root, the core from which the series grew, there were other important contributors to its growth: Gene Coon, Bob Justman, Matt Jefferies and me. Unfortunately, the credit for our contributions was washed away in the wake of Gene’s disinclination to honor them and by doing so, he assumed their authorship.”¹⁸ Roddenberry went even further in later years. After publishing a sympathetic and complimentary book about Roddenberry, the journalist Yvonne Fern found a number of cases in which the producer had lied to her, claiming that he had created key elements of the show when in fact they had been created by someone else.¹⁹

In addition to claiming credit for the accomplishments of others, Roddenberry dismissed and belittled these contributions when they conflicted with his own mystique. The development of the Klingons is a good example. Roddenberry tried to play down their importance in a letter to a studio executive when he was formulating the new *Star Trek: The Next Generation* Series: “Klingons were invented by an episodic writer when he ran into ‘last act problems.’ They were never considered very imaginative but those of our writers who tended toward bad guys/good guys ‘hack’ scripting loved them dearly.”²⁰ This statement is simply untrue. A number of episodes feature the Klingons, and they became major rivals of the Federation as the series progressed. The person actually responsible for devising these characters and many of the other foreign policy allegories was not a writer but a producer, Gene Coon. Shatner in his memoirs praised Coon’s contributions: “Although the *Star Trek* characters were conceived and created by Roddenberry, they really came to life, fully formed and recognizably human, under the direction of Gene Coon.”²¹

The Cold War allegory of the conflict between the Federation and the Klingons was introduced in the episode “Errand of Mercy,” which first aired on 23 March 1967. The episode begins with the Federation teetering on the

18. Herbert F. Solow and Robert H. Justman, *Inside Star Trek: The Real Story* (New York: Pocket Books, 1996), p. 430.

19. This admission is found only in the paperback version of Yvonne Fern, *Gene Roddenberry: The Last Conversation: A Dialogue with the Creator of Star Trek* (New York: Pocket Books, 1996), pp. xiv–xv.

20. David Alexander, *Star Trek Creator: The Authorized Biography of Gene Roddenberry* (New York: ROC, 1994), p. 562.

21. Shatner with Kreski, *Star Trek Memories*, pp. 218–219; and “Errand of Mercy,” *Star Trek*, videotape, directed by John Newland (1967; Hollywood, CA: Paramount Studios videotape).

edge of war with the Klingon Empire. The Starship *Enterprise* travels to the planet Organia to warn its seemingly simple, agrarian society of an impending Klingon invasion. When the attack comes, Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock, the half-human, half-alien first officer of the *Enterprise* (played by Leonard Nimoy), are caught on the surface of the planet and become prisoners of the Klingons. After freeing Kirk and Spock, the Organians use their advanced mental and psychic abilities, which they had previously hidden from both belligerent parties, to force an end to combat operations. Coon used this episode to establish the basis for a Cold War–like confrontation: Disputes remain, but the two interstellar powers would challenge one another only through indirect means. He also originated the basic idea of the “prime directive,” a key element in the show’s critique of American foreign policy. According to this regulation, Federation representatives were to avoid interfering in the natural development of less developed societies, generally interpreted as those lacking the technology to travel in space. This principle was anti-colonial in nature and an acknowledgment of the limits to power, even American power.²²

The prime directive became a troublesome and contradictory element in the stories the series presented. The idea, at its core, ran counter to the Wilsonian impulse that was so pronounced in U.S. foreign policy during the administrations of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson—an impulse whereby the United States sought to remake the world in its own image. On the other hand, as Jon Wagner and Jan Lundeen have pointed out, in episode after episode the main characters implement the concept in radically different, even contradictory, ways. These inconsistencies were the product of two factors. First, television is a collective effort, and many individuals contributed to the original *Star Trek* series during its run of three years. Mistakes or logical inconsistencies were almost inevitable, and sometimes story ideas and concepts that had little to do with issues of world affairs or colonialism ran afoul of the prime directive. (The general problem is not limited to works produced in a collective manner. Arthur Conan Doyle’s stories and novels about Sherlock Holmes provide many classic examples of internal inconsistency created by an individual author.) The other factor that resulted in these contradictions was a general belief among the makers of *Star Trek* that although every culture was potentially viable, a general line of social development was evident throughout time. This line of development, they believed, would inevitably lead all coherent societies to mature into democratic, industrial, urban, and materially prosperous civilizations that bore a striking resemblance to the United States in the latter half of the twentieth century—a view

22. Shatner with Kreski, *Star Trek Memories*; and “Errand of Mercy.”

that was clearly Wilsonian in nature. *Star Trek* was different but not altogether different.²³

The writers, producers, and directors of the show worked with these allegories in future episodes to demonstrate that American principles were different from the values of other countries seeking power and that these values should allow the United States to promote democracy and show tolerance for the values of other cultures and peoples. In this respect, the show hewed to the spirit of America during Johnson's Great Society. Speaking at the 1964 commencement ceremony at the University of Michigan, Johnson declared that it was the goal of his domestic policies to remake the contemporary values of the nation rather than just deliver some economic stimulus package. This new America, he vowed, would be "a place where men are more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their goods." In a Bancroft Prize-winning study of postwar American society, James T. Patterson notes that oversell was a core element of the Johnson administration's approach to domestic legislation:

What [the overselling] did was greatly strengthen powerful attitudes, notably the rise of grand expectations, that had been gathering force since the 1950s and that were starting to dominate the culture in the early 1960s. The overselling further propelled popular feelings that the United States could have it all and do it all—that there were no limits to how comfortable and powerful and healthy and happy Americans could be.²⁴

The Great Society was the goal and an anti-Communist foreign policy was an acceptable means—though only a means—to that end. The *Star Trek* television series was a constrained reflection of these dominant social and foreign policy values.

The first episode to advance these general views was "Mirror, Mirror," which aired on 6 October 1967. In the story line of the show, the leaders of the planet Halkon refuse to allow the Federation to operate mines on their world. The pacifist society on the planet has no military resources, but a delegation from the Starship *Enterprise* abides by the Halkonians' decision and leaves without incident. As the members of the delegation return to the *Enterprise*, a freak storm transports them into an alternate universe, and their coun-

23. James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945–1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 592, 790; and Wagner and Lundeen, *Deep Space*, pp. 157–159. In the Sherlock Holmes stories, Doyle refers to an occasion when Holmes's sidekick, Dr. Watson, was wounded. In different accounts of Holmes's adventures, Doyle places Watson's wound either in the leg or in the shoulder. He also kills off Dr. Watson's wife, only to have her still married to him in a subsequent story. See Christopher Morley, "In Memoriam Sherlock Holmes," in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes* (New York: Penguin, 1981), p. 7.

24. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, pp. 454–455, 562–563, 592, 629.

terparts take their place. In this anti-universe, the real crew members from the *Enterprise* learn that they are now serving an evil empire that condones force and violence as legitimate political tools. Assassination is a common means of advancing careers. Power is the ultimate goal, and any means to attain it is acceptable. The rulers of the empire use similar methods in dealing with subject peoples. The anti-Kirk is ordered to force the Halkonians to surrender their raw materials or to destroy them. The empire is thus an example of the imperial domination that so many great powers exercised over peripheral lands—it represents everything that the Federation is not. The lighting of the scenes also helps to communicate the message: The anti-*Enterprise* is a dark, poorly lit place, whereas scenes aboard the original starship are much brighter. Viewers have no trouble telling which place is good and which is evil. The heroes of the story quickly learn what has happened to them, and after thwarting several attempts on Captain Kirk's life, they find a way to return both themselves and their anti-universe counterparts to their proper places. The *Enterprise* then leaves orbit, respecting the Halkonians' refusal to provide minerals to the Federation.²⁵

Jerome Bixby's original story idea placed Kirk and his party in a universe in which the Federation had lost a war and was being absorbed into a more powerful empire. Bixby proposed to have Kirk discuss the differences between an empire and a federation in terms of their sovereignty. Although this topic was of intellectual merit, it would probably have made for poor television. Roddenberry saw this limitation, but he also recognized the potential in the basic premise of an alternative universe and helped Bixby recast the episode. Roddenberry told Coon at the time:

Each system in each universe has its own system of checks and balances, which result in approximately the same thing. This is, in fact, close to our basic theme—i.e., there are countries ruled by fascism or military juntas, which exist and evolve just as efficiently as other countries, which are ruled democratically. The main difference is not in how things evolve—the two types of countries might end up at approximately the same place—the real difference is that in one life is valueless, full of fear and terror, never exploits the full potential of most of its citizens, whereas in the other country emphasis is on the pleasant life, security, the worth of the individual.²⁶

The message of the episode is that a democratic country like the United States is different from and better than its autocratic rival, the Soviet Union, and

25. "Mirror, Mirror," *Star Trek*, videotape, directed by Marc Daniels (1967; Hollywood, CA: Paramount Studios videotape).

26. Roddenberry to Gene Coon, 1 April 1967, in ALSC-UCLA, Papers of Gene Roddenberry, Box 14, Folder 7.

that U.S. foreign policy should reflect these merits. If the United States fails in this regard, it is no better than any other world power.

Another episode that stressed an ethical and democratic approach to foreign policy was “Patterns of Force,” which aired on 16 February 1968. In this episode, the Starship *Enterprise* travels to the planet Ekos to investigate the disappearance of a Federation researcher, John Gill, after someone fires a nuclear missile at the ship. This attack surprises the crew because Ekos lacks the necessary technology to build an elaborate weapons system. Kirk and Spock travel to the planet to look for Gill and are surprised to find that a Nazi movement identical to the one on Earth three hundred years before—right down to the same uniforms—has seized control of Ekos. The two quickly learn that Gill introduced this movement to the planet and is using the title of Führer. This revelation perplexes Kirk and Spock because Gill has the reputation of being a scholar and a man of peace. The two *Enterprise* officers join forces with the resistance movement and penetrate Nazi headquarters on the night that Führer Gill is scheduled to announce an attack against the neighboring planet of Zeon. Once inside, Kirk and Spock learn that Gill is the drugged puppet of his deputy Führer, Melakon. The ship’s doctor, Leonard McCoy, played by DeForest Kelley, quickly travels to the surface of the planet and injects Gill with a medication that partially neutralizes the influence of the drug. In a drug-induced mental haze, Gill explains that he started the Nazi movement to unify the planet, using Hitler’s Germany as a historical model. Kirk and his men persuade the Führer to call off the attack, before Melakon shoots him.²⁷

The story line for this episode underwent considerable revision during the development process. At one point, the writer Paul Schneider was working on a script idea titled “Tomorrow the Universe,” in which the crew of the *Enterprise* has an opportunity to prevent the rise of Hitler. Roddenberry realized that a Nazi story had strong potential. In a conversation with Schneider, he suggested that the episode concentrate on a government reflecting the values of a society. He later explained to Coon:

I suggested that maybe a fascistic civilization might be *right* for a certain kind of planet and certain kind of biped humanoid. What if this was the point of the story? Hitler did make the trains run on time and gave the German people a sense of purpose and suppose he had accomplished this along with a few small ugly things, but without the hate, hysteria and mass murders? A few murders,

27. “Patterns of Force,” *Star Trek*, videotape, directed by Vincent McEveety (1968; Hollywood, CA: Paramount Studios.).

okay—we murder a few under our Democratic system, too and wish it weren't necessary.²⁸

In all probability, any story with that type of message would never have been made. The cast would likely have rebelled. The lead actors, Shatner and Nimoy, were Jewish, and Doohan was a veteran of the D-Day invasion of Normandy, where he was wounded and ultimately lost a finger.²⁹

John Meredyth Lucas, working as an in-house writer during the second season of the series, took over the Nazi episode and rewrote it to eschew any suggestion that a totalitarian system in some form was acceptable. An exchange between Spock and Kirk in the Nazi party headquarters after Gill offers his explanation for his intervention makes this point clear:

Gill: Most efficient system Earth ever knew.

Spock: Quite true, Captain. A tiny country—beaten, bankrupt, defeated—rose in a few years to stand one step away from global domination.

Kirk: But that was brutal, perverted! Had to be destroyed at a terrible cost! Why that example?

Spock: Perhaps Gill felt such a state run benignly could accomplish its efficiency without sadism.³⁰

The previous forty minutes of the show leave no doubt that any such assumption would be remarkably foolish.

Two messages about U.S. foreign policy are intertwined in “Patterns of Force.” First, intervention—no matter how well intentioned—is a mistake. “I was wrong,” the dying Gill tells Kirk. “The non-interference directive is the only way.” The implication is that the United States should make no effort to impose its will on other countries. Regardless of motivation, attempts to intervene will have repercussions for which Americans will be responsible. The other message is the superiority of democracy over other forms of government. Kirk explains this point to Mr. Spock after they return to the *Enterprise* near the end of the episode: “The problem with the Nazis wasn't simply that their leaders were evil, psychotic men—they were—but the main problem was the leader principle.” In case the audience misses the point, McCoy steps in to reinforce the message: “What he's saying, Spock, is a man holds that much power, even with the best of intentions, just can't resist the urge to play God.” Spock delivers his response in the flat, even tone that was

28. Roddenberry to Coon, 1 April 1967, in ALSC-UCLA, Papers of Gene Roddenberry, Box 31, Folder 8; emphasis in original.

29. Doohan with David, *Beam Me Up, Scotty*, pp. 35, 76.

30. “Patterns of Force.”

Nimoy's trademark in the role: "Thank you, doctor. I was able to gather the meaning."³¹

One of the last but most obvious shows to stress the theme of American ideals was "The Omega Glory." Roddenberry proposed the original story idea as one of three possible pilots for the series. The studio rejected the idea because of its improbable foundation. Roddenberry refused to give up on it, and the show eventually aired on 1 March 1968. Coming in the dying days of the Tet Offensive, the episode was a patriotic but thoughtful piece of propaganda. Even though Roddenberry is credited as the writer, his script underwent considerable rewriting.³² In the version that was broadcast, the *Enterprise* receives a distress signal from the USS *Exeter*. Kirk, Spock, McCoy, and a fourth crewman board the *Exeter* only to discover that the entire crew has died from a communicable disease and that they themselves are probably now infected with it. The four then go down to the planet that the *Exeter* is orbiting and find Captain Ronald Tracey, commander of the *Exeter*, alive and in the middle of a conflict between two groups known as the Kohms and the Yangs. Tracey tells the group from the *Enterprise* that the disease has eliminated the aging process. He is determined to learn the secret behind this miraculous virus and has violated the prime directive, going so far as to join the Kohms in their fight against the Yangs. Tracey imprisons Kirk and Spock in a Kohm jail and forces McCoy to conduct biological experiments. Eventually, Kirk and Spock break out of the prison and learn that McCoy has discovered that the virus resulted from a biological war in the planet's distant past and that the environment contains a natural cure. When Tracey discovers that Kirk has escaped, he pursues him through the streets of the Kohm settlement and fires at him, just as the Yangs defeat the Kohms and seize control of the planet. The victors take the Starfleet officers into captivity. When the Yangs display a tattered U.S. flag, Kirk and Spock quickly realize that the planet is an alternative version of Earth and that *Kohm* and *Yang* are distorted pronunciations of *Communist* and *Yankee*. The Yang leader places his hand over his heart and begins reciting the Yang holy words. Kirk recognizes the words and finishes the Pledge of Allegiance. Tracey, realizing that he is in trouble, tells the Yangs that Kirk is evil. When Kirk is unable to say "e plebnista"—the "greatest of holies," which only chiefs and the sons of chiefs may speak—he is forced to fight Tracey. Kirk defeats Tracey, proving himself to the Yangs, and he then seizes the sacred "e plebnista" holy papers of the Yangs, better known to the televi-

31. Ibid.

32. Joel Engel, *Gene Roddenberry: The Man and the Myth behind Star Trek* (New York: Hyperion, 1994), pp. 63, 116.

sion audience as the U.S. Constitution. “This was not written for chiefs,” Shatner’s Kirk explains in the passionate delivery that was his trademark. “Look at these three words written larger than the rest with a special pride never written before or since. Tall words, proudly saying, ‘We the People.’ That which you call ‘e plebnista’ was not written for the chiefs or kings or the warriors or the rich or the powerful, but for all the people. Down the centuries you have slurred the meaning of the words.” Then, with dramatic music setting the mood, Kirk forcefully recites the preamble. “These words and the words that follow were not written only for the Yangs, but the Kohms as well.” When the Yang leader objects to this heresy, Kirk states, “They must apply to everyone or they mean nothing.” Confused, the Yang leader says he will try. Content to have corrected the Yangs on the error of their ways, Kirk and his crew depart.³³

The message of this episode is that American principles, such as democracy and political equality, distinguish the United States from other world powers. But the plot contains a logical contradiction in light of the previously established prime directive. Kirk had intervened in the affairs of another planet. Kirk and Spock confront this issue at the end of the episode in a way that strengthens the main message of the story. Before the *Enterprise* leaves the planet, with Tracey under arrest for violating the prime directive, Spock asks Kirk whether their actions have not violated it as well. Kirk brushes this concern aside, responding, “We merely showed them the meaning of what they were fighting for. Liberty and freedom have to be more than just words.” As the captain offers his explanation, the camera cuts to a scene of the Yangs gathering around the Constitution and reading it for the first time. When Kirk finishes, the scene shifts to a shot of the tattered flag with an instrumental rendition of the “Star Spangled Banner” audible in the background, emphasizing the patriotic sentiment of the captain’s position.³⁴

Roddenberry was quite proud of this episode. He wanted the studio and the network to promote “The Omega Glory” for Emmy award consideration, declaring, “It is deserving of a bit of promotion because of its unusual nature and an unusual patriotic theme toward the end of it, plus an unusual aspect involving East-West conflict.”³⁵ But the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences was less enthusiastic than Roddenberry. The episode received no Emmy nominations.

33. “The Omega Glory,” *Star Trek*, videotape, directed by Vincent McEveety (1968; Hollywood, CA: Paramount Studios).

34. *Ibid.*

35. Engel, *Gene Roddenberry*, pp. 116–117; and Roddenberry to Stan Robertson, 26 February 1968, in ALSC-UCLA, Papers of Gene Roddenberry, Box 17, Folder 11.

In addition to dealing with questions of military intervention abroad, the makers of the series tackled a number of other foreign policy issues. Several popular episodes cast doubt on the value of nuclear weapons and implied that the use of such immense and indiscriminating force was immoral and that the United States should take the lead in bringing about the abolition of these weapons. The creators of *Star Trek* were ahead of their time in addressing this important issue, which most of the country and even many government officials were ignoring. In the latter half of the 1960s, the Soviet Union undertook a massive buildup of its nuclear forces. Despite the serious consequences of this development for U.S. national security, the immediate foreign policy concern for most Americans was Vietnam. Nuclear arms control did not emerge as an important topic for the public until the 1970s. The first episode to deal with this issue was “The Doomsday Machine,” which aired on 20 October 1967. As the episode begins, the *Enterprise* is answering the distress beacon of the USS *Constellation*. Kirk and his crew find a battered starship, and a small party boards the derelict vessel. The only person remaining on the *Constellation* is its commander, Commodore Matt Decker, who warns Kirk that his ship has just lost a battle to a giant, planet-destroying death machine. Decker explains that he gave the order to abandon ship and that his crew had escaped to the third planet in the system. Decker himself had decided to go down with the *Constellation*, but he had instead watched in horror as the “doomsday machine” returned and destroyed the third planet. Upon hearing the story, Kirk orders a few members of the landing party to take Decker back to the *Enterprise*. Kirk and the others stay behind to try to salvage the *Constellation*. When the cone-shaped doomsday machine returns, Decker uses his rank to assume command of the *Enterprise* and proceeds to wage battle with the machine again. The results of this second engagement are no different from those of the first, but Kirk is able to bring the weapons systems of the *Constellation* back on line just in time to save the *Enterprise*. He then orders Spock to ignore Decker’s rank and to take control. Humiliated and despondent, Decker sets out on a small shuttlecraft, which he rams straight into the maw of the planet-killing machine to destroy it. Decker dies in the process, but a drop in power from the device convinces Kirk that the procedure might work if he rams the machine with a larger ship. He rigs the *Constellation* to explode and steers the ship into the planet killer, escaping just before a detonation of 97.835 megatons destroys the doomsday device. Although this episode is mainly a story of action and adventure, it ends with an exchange between Kirk and Spock about nuclear weapons: “Ironic isn’t it. Way back in the Twentieth Century, the H-Bomb was the ultimate weapon—their doomsday machine. And we used something like it to destroy another doomsday machine. Probably the first time such a weapon has ever been used for con-

structive purposes.” Spock’s reply is succinct: “Appropriate, Captain.”³⁶ The message is clear: Nuclear weapons must never be used in the defense of the United States or any other country. They will destroy the planet, including the country that used them.

The next episode to deal with nuclear weapons policy was more direct. In “Assignment: Earth,” the crew of the *Enterprise* travels back in time to the contemporary 1960s. Kirk has been ordered to make a secret historical observation of the U.S. military as it deploys a nuclear weapons platform in space. Before the deployment occurs, the starship intercepts a transporter beam from a distant planet carrying a human named Gary Seven. He is a human from Earth, but he has a different understanding of time and knows the future. Kirk and his crew are startled to find an individual from the 1960s who possesses technology that is superior to theirs and who can foresee the future. Seven explains that he works for a planet that wishes to remain secret even in Kirk’s day and age. He manages to escape from the *Enterprise*, and, after he arrives on Earth, the viewer learns he is trying to keep the countries on the planet from destroying themselves. His specific mission is to make the nuclear weapons platform malfunction, veer off course, and descend on the Eurasian landmass. He will then detonate the hydrogen bomb safely above the atmosphere, preventing the various nuclear powers from initiating an arms race in space. Kirk and Spock, unsure of Seven’s purpose, complicate his efforts, but are forced to allow him to finish his task as the platform hurtles toward Earth. The warhead explodes 104 miles above the ground, and when Kirk and Spock subsequently check historical records aboard the *Enterprise*, they find that this is exactly how the event occurred and that it did indeed prevent an arms race in space.³⁷

The original purpose of the “Assignment: Earth” episode was to serve as a pilot for a spin-off series, but it contains an obvious critique of what the writers and producers of the series considered the foolish nature of the nuclear arms race. An in-house writer, D. C. Fontana, told Roddenberry, “I find the story material very timely, due to the recent headlines regarding the Soviet capability to orbit a warhead. And I believe the audience will also identify with the plot and theme because of this.”³⁸ The moral of the episode is that unless the two global superpowers of the 1960s change direction, they will take their

36. James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945–1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 597; and “The Doomsday Machine,” *Star Trek*, videotape, directed by Marc Daniels (1967; Hollywood, CA: Paramount Studios).

37. “Assignment: Earth,” *Star Trek*, videotape, directed by Marc Daniels (1968; Hollywood, CA: Paramount Studios). The episode first aired on 29 March 1968.

38. D. C. Fontana to Roddenberry, 12 November 1967, in ALSC-UCLA, Papers of Gene Roddenberry, Box 18, Folder 11.

own societies and the rest of humanity down the same path of ruin chosen by the inventors of the planet-destroying device in “The Doomsday Machine.”

Confronting the Vietnam War

From its inception, the original *Star Trek* series struggled with modest ratings (in contrast to its immense popularity in reruns), and it therefore required a notable degree of courage for Roddenberry and company to tackle the most divisive issue in American foreign policy in the mid- to late 1960s—the Vietnam War. The antiwar movement was a house with many chambers. Some opponents of U.S. involvement were pacifists who argued that all wars were wrong; others were foreign policy “realists” who believed that a meaningful victory in Vietnam was impossible; and still others were simply afraid that they or their children might be drafted and sent into combat. A number of individuals associated with *Star Trek*, including Bixby and Roddenberry, signed a petition declaring “We oppose the participation of the United States in the war in Vietnam,” which was published as an advertisement in a science fiction magazine. The motivations and reasoning of the *Star Trek* signatories had little to do with concerns about the draft; rather, they believed that the United States was squandering its moral capital in Southeast Asia.

The episode that focused most explicitly on the Vietnam conflict, “A Private Little War,” was broadcast on 4 February 1968 at the height of combat operations during the Tet Offensive. Television executives at the time were reluctant to permit overt references to Vietnam in dramatic or comedy series for fear of provoking unnecessary and undesired controversy. The only reason *Star Trek* could deal with the war was the program’s futuristic setting. But the process of making the episode and getting it on the air was a long and tortuous one.

Work on the episode began in the spring of 1967 when Don Ingalls, a friend of Roddenberry’s since their days together in the Los Angeles Police Department, submitted a story outline. His original proposal was for Kirk to return to a densely forested tropical planet he had visited thirteen years earlier. In the story outline, Kirk is stunned to find that the inhabitants of the planet are using flintlock guns. During his previous visit they were just beginning to learn to forge iron. When Kirk learns that the Klingons have given the weapons to a specific political faction, he urges the Federation to supply comparable firearms to a rival faction in order to maintain a balance of power.³⁹

39. Franklin, “*Star Trek* in the Vietnam Era,” p. 32; Don Ingalls, “A Private Little War,” story outline, 10 June 1967, in ALSC-UCLA, Papers of Gene Roddenberry, Box 15, Folder 8; and Gene Coon to Don Ingalls, 21 August 1967, in ALSC-UCLA, Papers of Gene Roddenberry, Box 15, Folder 9.

Ingalls attacked the rationale for Federation intervention on the tropical planet—and, by extension, the rationale for U.S. involvement in Vietnam—by highlighting the failure to distinguish between areas of vital and peripheral importance. The tropical planet and Vietnam were important solely as symbols of commitment. By that standard, every piece of territory was an important battlefield in a larger conflict, even if the people of the local area had no interest in the wider confrontation. As Ingalls wrote in his story line, if the Federation allowed the Klingons to

move in here, or anywhere and do as they wish . . . disrupt, provide superior weapons to one segment of a people against another for certain political considerations . . . the Klingons gain not only satellite-group strength, but also discredit the Federation's word and soon other border-line planets who haven't yet taken sides, will see that our word is useless. They too will swing to the enemy orbit, seeking the best deal they can make . . . and the strength of a dangerous, fanatical enemy will grow . . . and grow. We must protect those we say we will protect . . . *we must keep our promises.*⁴⁰

By this reasoning, a country like the United States, rather than being a constructive force in world affairs, could rationalize the destruction of another land regardless of its intrinsic worth. For the makers of the show, such a policy was indefensible, no matter the reason or result.

Ingalls also made a gratuitous and fairly severe critique of the U.S. military establishment in his story outline, blaming the troops for the destruction in Vietnam even when they were simply carrying out a mission devised by their civilian leaders. In the proposed story, Kirk speaks to McCoy in a rigid and amoral way, comparing himself to his Klingon counterpart: "I'm like him Bones. I obey orders and I hope my way is right . . . this 'little' war has been fought a million times before in a million different places and it will be fought a million times more . . . and there isn't a damn thing you or I can do about it . . . but in *this* little war it happens that my orders are to help *these* people and keep the *other side* from winning . . . and that's what I intend to do."⁴¹

Roddenberry welcomed Ingalls's story idea, but he wanted the episode to explain why the Cold War had induced the two superpowers to rely on pawns in their struggle. He believed that the overwhelming strength of both the United States and the Soviet Union actually contained international conflict because each country could destroy the other only by risking its own existence. The two sides therefore had to avoid a direct confrontation. This constraining factor made covert operations and the waging of proxy wars critical features of the Cold War. As Ingalls put it: "If Earth *knew* the Klingons were

40. Ingalls, "A Private Little War"; emphasis and ellipses in original.

41. *Ibid.*; emphasis and ellipses in original.

on this planet, if they had proof of it, then Earth obviously would be obligated to not only set things right here, but take action against the Klingons. In other words, the situation is even closer to the Viet Nam situation. North Viet Nam tries to preserve the illusion, or at least tried to preserve it for some time, that they were not sending men and material to South Viet Nam. And that way they insisted it was the United States which was the meddler and the aggressor.”⁴²

The makers of the series were interested in dealing with the war and liked the general story idea, but they all had artistic and political reservations. Roddenberry’s views were especially influential in the debate about this proposed episode. He emphasized to Coon the importance of the Klingons’ attempts at deception:

I think it is terribly important that the Klingons are operating in complete secrecy. It is vital to this story, to the whole logic of it, that the Klingons attempt to preserve the illusion that all this is “normal” planet development. That the people with their guns developed gunpowder themselves. Thus, if Earth people interfere, the Klingons can argue that it is Earth people who are upsetting the delicate balance of a world here.⁴³

Until Ingalls changed important story elements, Roddenberry believed that the proposed episode would be nothing more than just another entertaining story. As he told Coon:

Don has done a good Viet Nam parallel in this but somehow I sense something is missing. Perhaps it is carrying the parallel all the way—i.e. in the Viet Nam situation if either side makes a mistake there will be a worldwide holocaust. So the stakes are terribly great. In this story, not to be unkind, mistakes seem merely that Earth or the Klingon Empire will prove the other side is “cheating” and there will be angry words but it will end there.⁴⁴

Associate producer Robert Justman also expressed artistic reservations about the story, arguing that it required further development. “Why,” he asked, “have the Klingons introduced rifles to this civilization instead of their own particular weapons, which we have previously established in another show? I think I know why, but perhaps we ought to spell it out, so that the audience understands that the Klingons still wish to retain absolute control and

42. *Ibid.*; emphasis in original.

43. Roddenberry to Coon, 9 June 1967, in ALSC-UCLA, Papers of Gene Roddenberry, Box 15, Folder 9.

44. *Ibid.*

don't want this civilization to get too advanced, or to be difficult to handle eventually."⁴⁵

The political objections voiced by Coon and Justman were more specific than those of Roddenberry. They were dismayed by the sharp attack on the U.S. military. Justman complained of several instances in the story that had

Kirk going stiff and refusing to "break the rules." Why is Kirk so autocratic with McCoy and Spock? Why does he insist so strongly upon following orders? I realize that you are attempting to draw . . . a parallel between this story and the Vietnam situation with respect to escalation and balance of power, but I don't think that we are doing our moral position in Vietnam any appreciable good at all—but we are certainly causing our Captain to behave like a schmuck!⁴⁶

Coon agreed with this assessment: "I would like a little more rationality from Kirk besides simply saying he has to do this because he is ordered. After all, in the current situation in Vietnam we are in an intolerable situation. We are doing that which we are forced to do and we can find no other way to do it."⁴⁷

Coon had the difficult task of explaining these reservations to Ingalls. In a letter to the writer, Coon focused on two points. First, he suggested that Ingalls concentrate more on the moral dilemma in which the United States found itself in Vietnam:

A point we should bring out is that, despite our good intentions, quite technically we are meddling, even though we are forced into it by prior Klingon meddling. What we don't want to happen is for our meddling to become common knowledge. Granted, we are forced into it, but it is still a violation of the treaty. Captain Kirk and his men, in this particular show, are put rather in the situation of the current day CIA which has secret instructions to go in and overthrow a government. This is not necessarily a moral or a decent thing to do, but it is something that must be done.⁴⁸

The second area in which Coon advised Ingalls to revise the story proposal was its thinly veiled criticism of the U.S. military. One reason for doing so, he argued, was to avoid diverting viewers' attention from the real policy issue:

45. Robert Justman to Coon, 26 May 1967, in ALSC-UCLA, Papers of Gene Roddenberry, Box 15, Folder 9.

46. Justman to Coon, 11 August 1967, in ALSC-UCLA, Papers of Gene Roddenberry, Box 15, Folder 9.

47. Coon to Don Ingalls, 21 August 1967, in ALSC-UCLA, Papers of Gene Roddenberry, Box 15, Folder 9.

48. *Ibid.*

Certainly there are rules and orders and Kirk is operating under rules, but they are not arbitrary rules. They outline the only course we have been able to figure out to take. If we are to honor our commitments, we must counter-balance the Klingons. If we do not play it this way and it is admittedly the hard way, the Klingons will take over and threaten the Federation, even as the situation is in Vietnam, which is, as I remember, if Vietnam falls all Southeast Asia falls. Please let us have Kirk give a logical presentation of his own and the Federation's dilemma. Yes it is evil, but we have never been able to figure out another alternative.⁴⁹

Coon also reminded Ingalls that in the United States the armed forces were mere instruments of policy and that military personnel had an obligation to carry out the orders of top government officials: "Why don't we follow the Johnsonian line in Kirk's speech throughout, because he is, after all, a man in the military service and he must, as do our own ambassadors, follow the line which is the official line of our government."⁵⁰

Over the summer, Ingalls revised the story. A number of issues, including artistic vision, creative ownership, and political differences complicated his effort. Roddenberry eventually took over and wrote the final script. "Don writes best when he has a meaningful powerful theme," Roddenberry observed. "What is he saying here—don't screw up simpler societies? If he is aiming for a Viet Nam theme that certainly can't be it. The things at stake in Viet Nam are much more important and powerful than a charitable attitude towards simpler people in the world."⁵¹ According to the credits, Roddenberry wrote the script based on a story by Don Ingalls. Angry and bitter, Ingalls insisted on using a pseudonym. Believing his old friend had crucified him, he picked the name "Judd Crucis," a play on the Latin words for "Jesus Christ."⁵²

By the time the final version of "A Private Little War" aired on 2 February 1968, it had been reworked to suggest that the United States was attempting to do the right thing in a situation in which there really was no good course of action. This assessment was a far more positive appraisal of U.S. actions in Vietnam than Ingalls had intended. The story starts with Kirk's return to a planet he had visited thirteen years earlier. He and Spock are on a mission to collect biological samples, and they notice a group of villagers waiting to ambush a hunting party led by Tyree, an old friend of Kirk's. Kirk is surprised to

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Roddenberry to Coon, 8 May 1967, in ALSC-UCLA, Papers of Gene Roddenberry, Box 15, Folder 9.

52. Alexander, *Star Trek Creator*, pp. 314–315.

see that the villagers are using flintlock rifles. During his previous visit to the planet, the inhabitants were just starting to develop primitive metalworking technology. Kirk manages to thwart the ambush, but Spock is wounded during their escape. Returning to the *Enterprise*, Kirk learns that a Klingon ship is also orbiting the planet. He orders the crew of the *Enterprise* to stay on the far side of the planet to avoid exposure, and he then returns to the surface with Dr. McCoy to find Tyree and to learn how the villagers made such rapid technological advances. When they locate Tyree, he tells them that the villagers initiated the war and that they obtained the flintlock guns roughly a year ago. Kirk and McCoy sneak into the village and discover that Apella, the leader of the group, has a Klingon adviser and that the Klingons are secretly providing weapons to Apella's men in violation of treaty provisions. After escaping from the village, Kirk decides that the only way to counter the Klingons' intervention while complying with the prime directive and the treaty provisions is by giving similar weapons to Tyree and his people. Tyree initially declines Kirk's offer because he does not want to begin killing members of the rival group, but he changes his mind after they murder his wife. The fact that she was trying to betray Tyree by seducing Kirk and seizing his weapon so that she could hand it over to the villagers adds an ambiguous note to Tyree's decision.⁵³

In the unlikely event that viewers missed the Vietnam allegory, the episode features an exchange between Kirk and McCoy that explicitly draws the comparison. The captain pointedly responds to McCoy's objections by reminding him of an example from Earth's history similar to the situation they now face:

McCoy: I don't have a solution—but furnishing them firearms is certainly not the answer.

Kirk: Bones, remember the Twentieth Century brush wars on the Asian continent? Two giant powers involved much like the Klingons and ourselves. Neither felt they could pull out.

McCoy: I remember. It went on bloody year after bloody year.

Kirk: But what would you have suggested? That one side arm its friends with an overpowering weapon? Mankind would never have lived to travel space if they had. No—the only solution is what happened, back then, balance of power.

McCoy: And if the Klingons give their side even more?

Kirk: Then we arm our side with exactly that much more. A balance of power, the trickiest, most difficult, dirtiest game of them all—but the only one that preserves both sides.⁵⁴

53. "A Private Little War," *Star Trek*, videotape, directed by Mac Daniels (1968; Hollywood, CA: Paramount Studios).

54. Don Ingalls (story) and Gene Roddenberry (script), "A Private Little War," in *ALSC-UCLA, Papers of Robert Justman*, Box 5, Folder 50, p. 55; and Worland, "Captain Kirk: Cold Warrior," p. 114.

Kirk's comments are designed to illustrate the morally ambiguous position of the United States in Vietnam. An analysis of this section of dialogue in isolation could easily create the impression that Roddenberry was trying to offer an unqualified defense of U.S. actions in Southeast Asia, but many elements in the closing moments of the episode give it a morally uncertain tone. Kirk displays his own qualms when he asks Scotty to produce enough flintlock rifles for Tyree's people, calling them the "serpents" for a planet he once considered a paradise. McCoy puts his hand on Kirk's shoulder, offering him emotional support for what both recognize as an inadequate resolution of the problem. The show ends with a melancholy tune playing as the *Enterprise* leaves orbit.⁵⁵

Television is a collaborative medium, and in this particular instance the effort to graft commentary onto a story that was designed for different purposes proved less than successful. The story never directly indicated why reliance on proxy wars would weaken America's role as a progressive force in world affairs. The final version of the script was convoluted and easily misinterpreted. Even though Roddenberry had signed an antiwar petition, many people regarded "A Private Little War" as an unqualified endorsement of the Johnson administration's policy. Although Rick Worland acknowledges that the show ends on an ambiguous note, his analysis concentrates on the exchange between Kirk and McCoy. "Taken as support for the Vietnam War," Worland writes, "Kirk and McCoy's debate might have been written by Lyndon Johnson himself. Both Kirk and Johnson resorted to [d]oublespeak—war is peace." Walter Koenig, a supporting actor in the series, also had reservations about the message of the episode:

I never understood why "A Private Little War" conceived by Jud[d] Crucis was commissioned and why Gene Roddenberry went on to write the teleplay. Here we were trying to espouse a philosophy which held that in the twenty-third century all civilizations would be better by a decrease in weapons use. Yet the driving statement in this episode was that the balance of power between feuding sides was best achieved by a mutual buildup of arms. It seemed reactionary to me and out of touch with our desire to deal with topical issues in an enlightened manner.⁵⁶

The Vietnam allegory in "A Private Little War" was clear, but the diverse elements of the story muddled the episode's commentary.

A year before, Coon had made a clearer statement about the use of prox-

55. "A Private Little War"; and Worland, "Captain Kirk: Cold Warrior," p. 115.

56. Walter Koenig, *Warped Factors: A Neurotic's Guide to the Universe* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing, 1997), p. 186; and Worland, "Captain Kirk: Cold Warrior," p. 115.

ies in the Cold War when he produced “A Taste of Armageddon,” which aired on 23 February 1967. In this episode, the *Enterprise* visits Eminiar VII, a planet that is waging war with neighboring Vendikar through computer simulation. Anyone who is “killed” in this simulated war must report to a disintegration chamber. An attack takes place during the visit of the *Enterprise*, and the computer reports that the starship was hit and destroyed. Kirk is told to order his crew to beam down to the planet for execution. Kirk refuses and eventually manages to destroy the computer system that ties the two planets together. “Death. Destruction. Disease. Horror. That’s what war is all about, Anan,” Kirk tells the leader of the Eminiar council, explaining his actions. “That’s what makes it a thing to be avoided. You have made it neat and painless. So neat and painless, you had no reason to stop it and you have had it for 500 years. Since it seems to be the only way I can save my crew and my ship, I am going to end it for you, one way or another.” A stunned and horrified Anan asks Kirk whether he realizes what he was doing. “I have given you back the horrors of war,” Kirk replies. “Yes, councilman, you have a real war on your hands. You can either wage it with real weapons or you might consider an alternative—put an end to it! Make peace!”⁵⁷

Other Foreign Policy Commentaries

Although *Star Trek* critiqued U.S. foreign policy from an idealistic perspective, the writers and producers were more than willing to support and reaffirm American actions when they believed the United States was in the right. A good example of this comes in “The Enterprise Incident,” an episode that aired in the final season of the series. The inspiration for the show was the North Korean seizure of the USS *Pueblo*, an American electronic surveillance ship operating in waters off the eastern coast of the Korean peninsula in January 1968.⁵⁸ In April 1968 the scriptwriter D. C. Fontana suggested a story in which the Romulans would seize the *Enterprise* and put Kirk on trial in a rigged proceeding, which the ship’s crew eventually would thwart. As Rodenberry noted, the proposed plot bore a number of similarities to the events surrounding the seizure of the *Pueblo* and its crew: “You will have a memo later with my comments on this story by D. C. F. but in the meanwhile

57. “A Taste of Armageddon,” *Star Trek*, videotape, directed by Joseph Pevney (1967; Hollywood, CA: Paramount Studios).

58. For an account of the seizure and the prolonged crisis that followed, see Mitchell B. Lerner, “A Dangerous Miscalculation: New Evidence from Communist-Bloc Archives about North Korea and the Crises of 1968,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Winter 2004), pp. 3–21.

I wanted to point out that it is, of course, actually THE PUEBLO INCIDENT.”⁵⁹

The basic premises of the story underwent significant revision. With the crew of the *Pueblo* still captive in North Korea and their fate undecided (they were not released until December 1968), sensitivity to public sentiment demanded such a move. Going forward with the suggested story could have easily led to charges that the studio and NBC wanted to profit from the plight of the *Pueblo* and its crew. Almost everyone associated with the show realized as much. “I think that D. C. Fontana is correct in her assumption that NBC will not like the premise of this story,” Justman observed. “For some reason, the seizure of our *Enterprise* by the North Koreans . . . I mean the Romulans . . . is liable to give the network the idea that we are attempting to draw a parallel between our story and current events.”⁶⁰

The finished version of the story aired on 27 September 1968 and had an unmistakable message that the still-captive crew had acted properly. When the show begins, Kirk, apparently under stress, orders the *Enterprise* into Romulan space. Suddenly, three Romulan ships materialize and surround the *Enterprise*. Trapped and cornered, Kirk agrees to a hostage exchange. He and Spock board the enemy flagship, and Kirk claims that a navigational error caused the *Enterprise* to violate Romulan territory. Spock refuses to corroborate this story and instead calmly announces that Kirk intentionally ordered the ship across the border and that he is mentally unbalanced. Kirk attempts to escape but is injured. When McCoy comes aboard to treat Kirk, he confirms Spock’s testimony. When Spock announces that he will take command of the *Enterprise*, Kirk attacks him. Spock defends himself using the “Vulcan death grip.” McCoy returns to the *Enterprise* with the supposedly dead body of Kirk. But when a nurse discovers that Kirk is not dead, the viewer learns that there is no such thing as a Vulcan death grip and that Kirk and Spock are operating under secret orders. Their mission is to steal a “cloaking device,” a piece of equipment that makes ships invisible to detection. After undergoing plastic surgery to resemble a Romulan, Kirk returns to the enemy ship and steals the mechanism. Spock is still on board the ship when Kirk’s theft is exposed, and he calmly informs the Romulan commander that the Federation actions were in the right. “The oath I swore as a Starfleet officer is both specific and binding. As long as I wear the uniform, my duty is to protect the security of the Federation. Clearly, your new cloaking device is a threat to that security. I carried out my duty.” The crew of the *Enterprise* is

59. Roddenberry to Fred Freiberger, 3 April 1968, in ALSC-UCLA, Papers of Gene Roddenberry, Box 21, Folder 7; emphasis in original.

60. Justman to Freiberger, 3 April 1968, in ALSC-UCLA, Papers of Gene Roddenberry, Box 21, Folder 7; ellipses in original.

able to rescue him just before they escape with the secret Romulan technology.

The theme of the episode is that efforts to preserve international peace and stability, even actions such as theft, deception, and espionage that would be unacceptable in some other context, were legitimate because they served the moral and ethical purpose of preventing large-scale death and suffering. This message made Kirk's decision to escalate the violence in "A Private Little War," as well as the American position in Vietnam, seem even more suspect.⁶¹

The *Star Trek* Films and the End of the Cold War

"The Enterprise Incident" was part of the third and final season of the original series. In mid-1969 NBC cancelled *Star Trek* because of poor ratings. Nonetheless, the show lived on in syndication and acquired a large and devoted following. The huge growth in the popularity of the series in the 1970s spurred interest among executives at Paramount Studios in developing new *Star Trek* projects. After many false starts, the television series was turned into a successful movie in the late 1970s and continued in the 1980s as a popular series of action films.⁶²

The first five movies made no real effort to comment on foreign policy, but the sixth film, which was the last that drew exclusively on cast members from the original series, was originally intended to deal with the end of the Cold War. In 1990 a studio executive, Frank Mancuso, asked Leonard Nimoy whether he would agree to make a film for release in conjunction with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the television series. Nimoy spent three days considering the offer and trying to develop a story idea. "It seemed to me that this movie presented us with a perfect opportunity to explore our favorite villains," the actor explained in his memoirs. "I was mulling all this over and thinking about the similarities between Federation/Klingon Empire relations and U.S./Soviet Union relations—the 'Cold War.'" He called Mancuso and suggested that the movie focus on the transformation of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. As he explained: "I want to do a movie about the Berlin Wall coming down in space." In the story he suggested, the Klingon Empire is facing serious internal unrest as its economy collapses. The empire then suffers a major disaster similar to the meltdown of the nuclear reactor at Chernobyl. A Klingon character based on Mikhail Gorbachev uses this cata-

61. "The Enterprise Incident," *Star Trek*, videotape, directed by John Meredyth Lucas (1968; Hollywood, CA: Paramount Studios).

62. Solow and Justman offer a good description of the various efforts to bring *Star Trek* back to life in the 1970s in Solow and Justman, *Inside Star Trek*, pp. 413–446.

strophic accident to initiate a political settlement with the Federation that will end their long rivalry. Mancuso liked the idea and agreed with Nimoy's suggestion to give the job of writing and directing to a veteran of the franchise, Nick Meyer. Meyer had directed the second movie and helped write the script for the fourth.⁶³

Nimoy then flew to Massachusetts to speak with Meyer, and they spent two-and-a-half hours walking along the beach in a "lively, spirited, creatively exciting" conversation, working out the details of the plot. They sensed that Kirk, given his long record of combat against the Klingon Empire, must lead the diplomatic rapprochement. Nimoy suggested a line that would explain this choice, and it ended up in the final version of the film: "Only Nixon could go to China." Nimoy would later say about that line: "To me, that's what this film was all about." Nimoy and Meyer proposed that Kirk would be framed and wrongfully imprisoned for the assassination of the Gorbachev character. Spock and the crew of the *Enterprise* would investigate and expose a conspiracy designed to subvert the peace process and save Kirk. Nimoy hoped that these adventures would force Kirk and the rest of the crew to overcome their hatred of the enemy and gain insight into Klingon history and culture, which would explain why the Klingons behaved as they did. "I wanted that knowledge to change Kirk and the rest of us as well," Nimoy explained later.⁶⁴

The final version of the film, *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, retained these basic plot elements but had little commentary about the end of the Cold War. Nimoy admitted as much in his memoirs: "As it turned out the finished film was a serviceable but simplistic *Manchurian Candidate* in outer space." Among the reasons that the movie had little to say about such a rich topic is that international affairs had changed dramatically during the making of the film. In August 1991 hardliners in Moscow had attempted to stage a coup that was quickly rebuffed, and it was followed four months later by the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The topic of overcoming hostility and hatred toward the USSR suddenly seemed much less relevant. A more important reason the film failed to offer much commentary was the artistic differences between Nimoy and Meyer. In the section of the film in which Kirk is imprisoned, Nimoy wanted to introduce Klingon characters who would give Kirk new insight. "To be candid," Nimoy stated, "we [Nimoy and Meyer] didn't see eye-to-eye about it and became involved in a tussle that continued through the making of the film." Nor was this the only point of disagreement. Nimoy made a number of other suggestions—some major, some minor—in an effort to improve the film. This criticism, though offered in a constructive

63. Leonard Nimoy, *I Am Spock* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), pp. 313–315.

64. *Ibid.*; and Shatner with Kreski, *Star Trek Memories*, p. 363.

spirit, frustrated Meyer greatly, as he later admitted: “Leonard really pushed hard. He just kept saying, ‘There are ways to make this better,’ and I remember he ultimately made me very angry, but the truth is that he was right.” Meyer heeded many of the suggestions, but Nimoy failed to convince him on the issue of developing the Klingons’ perspective. The main reason that Meyer was so reluctant to revise this key aspect of the film is that he faced an extremely tight deadline. Production work had to be completed early enough for a release date coinciding with the scheduled anniversary celebrations.⁶⁵

Roddenberry also raised serious objections to the story. Nearing the end of his life, he had little influence over the final content. Studio executives had eased him out of power in the late 1970s after he went over budget and did a poor job producing the first film, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. But Roddenberry’s popularity with the *Star Trek* fan base afforded him some leverage and forced the studio to give him a position as an adviser on subsequent productions, albeit with no real power. Although he had increasingly been relegated to the periphery with each film, he still sought to offer his advice. He had many objections to the script that Meyer and Denny Martin Flinn had written for *Star Trek VI*, which included near-racist comments by a number of the established characters. These remarks ran counter to well-known traits of the individual characters and the general moral role that viewers expected of the Federation. Roddenberry thought the Nixon line was absurd and objected to the negative and obstructionist attitudes of the crew of the *Enterprise*. In a move that was nothing more than a gesture, studio executives arranged for a conference that would give Roddenberry a chance to express his concerns. Meyer walked out of the meeting after five minutes. The studio insisted on a second meeting at which Meyer apologized and listened to Roddenberry’s comments, but he subsequently made few changes. When filming ended, Roddenberry attended a special screening on the Paramount lot. Afterward, he returned to his office and called his lawyer, demanding that roughly a quarter of the scenes be edited out. Nothing came of this effort, and within forty-eight hours Roddenberry was dead. Even if he had lived, it is unlikely that anything would have happened. The film was scheduled for release in two weeks. The screening was nothing more than a courtesy.⁶⁶

Some cast members had expressed similar objections to the Meyer-Flinn script. Overcoming racism and hatred was a major theme of the movie. “I believe that the way the crew’s prejudice against the Klingons was presented in the film was wrong,” actress Nichelle Nichols (who played Uhura) noted in

65. Nimoy, *I Am Spock*, 316–318; and Shatner with Kreski, *Star Trek Memories*, 363–364.

66. Nimoy, *I Am Spock*, pp. 316–317; Shatner with Kreski, *Star Trek Memories*, pp. 365–367, 394; and Alexander, *Star Trek Creator*, pp. 588–590.

her memoirs.⁶⁷ The main complaint was that several lines of scripted dialogue assigned to various characters reflected attitudes contrary to the established views of those figures. Shatner objected to an exchange between Kirk and Spock about the fate of the Klingons if the peace process ended in failure. When Spock declares that the Klingons will die as a race, Kirk responds: “Then let them die.” Shatner later recalled that “when I initially read that line, I requested that Nick change it. I just couldn’t imagine Kirk, even after the death of his son, being *that* rigid, *that* cold, *that* unfeeling. At the same time, you couldn’t doubt for an instant the dramatic strength of Nick’s scripted moment.” Meyer, for his part, had no interest in compromising with the actors and used a variety of methods to skirt their protests. When certain actors objected to dialogue, he gave the disputed lines to other characters. In another instance, he agreed to let Shatner use facial gestures that would convey Kirk’s shock at his own bitterness, but Meyer ended up cutting the reaction shots from the final version of the film.⁶⁸

The motion pictures that followed *Star Trek VI* focused primarily on the characters from the television sequel *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Characters from the original television series made cameo appearances in the subsequent films and in the new *Star Trek* television shows, but the original franchise was finished except in reruns.

Conclusion

The original *Star Trek* series became a major pop culture phenomenon for many reasons. Not least among these was the allegories it contained about the Cold War. The series cast the United States in a positive light and depicted it as a progressive force in international affairs. This style of presentation, however, in no way means that the makers of the show were patriotic simpletons or dupes. The writers, directors, producers, and other creative forces behind the series were more than willing to offer criticisms of U.S. foreign policy, but they did so in the belief that U.S. interactions with the world could and should be moral, just, and ethical. Why is this point significant? First, it highlights the influence of the Cold War on popular culture. The amount of time and energy that the makers of the show spent commenting on these issues illustrates the far-reaching effect of major foreign policy issues, such as Vietnam and the standoff with the Soviet Union, on American society. Second, it sug-

67. Nichelle Nichols, *Beyond Uhura: Star Trek and Other Memories* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1994), p. 290.

68. Shatner with Kreski, *Star Trek Memories*, p. 366; emphasis in original.

gests that much of the anger and frustration that characterized the turmoil of the late 1960s and early 1970s was the product not of competition between radically different agendas for the future of American society, but of conflicting views about the best way for the United States to remain true to its democratic values. Both before and immediately after World War II, Americans had debated the proper role for their country in world affairs. Eventually, a majority concluded that the United States must play a central role on the international scene, offsetting the influence of Soviet Communism. But they also believed that U.S. foreign policy must not simply be about power. Power was important, but if it was the only consideration, the United States would be no different from the other major actors in the Cold War. The makers of *Star Trek* shared this view and reflected it in the series, using allegories to show how the United States could play a constructive role in the world.