



The Manchurian Candidate
(USA, 1962, 126 minutes)
Director: John Frankenheimer
Study Guide

Synopsis

Sergeant Raymond Shaw returns from the Korean War where he is declared a hero and decorated for having single-handedly rescued his patrol from behind enemy lines. But in reality the whole patrol were abducted by the Communists who then placed them all under hypnotic conditioning where Raymond was turned into the perfectly programmed assassination tool to be activated by a particular code phrase. Now back in civilian life Shaw's commanding officer, Major Bennett Marco, begins to suspect something when he investigates reports from other men in the troop all reporting similar nightmares. In doing so he uncovers a plan by Communist spies to use Marco to assassinate The President.

Themes in the Film

Cold War/McCarthyism
Paranoia/Conspiracy Theory
Book by Richard Condon

Study questions

- Who was Joseph McCarthy? What was the mood in the United States during the Cold War?
- How did that mood facilitate the rampant paranoia of McCarthyism?
- Do you think that soldiers who participate in war are easily able to put their experiences into perspective?
- How do you imagine Pvt. Jessica Lynch feels about the way her rescue was handled and portrayed in the media? How do you feel about it?
- How easy might it be for a soldier who has been asked to kill to reintegrate into society? Family life? Why do you feel this way?

Discussion Questions

- What is the perspective of the filmmaker on the anti-Communist attitudes prevalent at the time?
- Does the filmmaker represent the anti-Communist characters in a favorable way? Does the filmmaker consider their fear of communist presence in the U.S. helpful to the process of government or dangerous to democracy?
- Why do you think the writer chose to make the anti-Communist Senator a conduit of communist propaganda/espionage? What similarities exist

between Senator Islin and Senator McCarthy?

Do you think a plot like the one in the film could ever have happened? Can you think of any parallels in reality near the level of this conspiracy? Do you see any similarities between the anti-Communist fervor of the 1950's and anti-terrorism of today?