

Culture, Power, and *Mission to Moscow*: Film and Soviet-American Relations during World War II

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Following a sumptuous feast (and copious amounts of vodka), the guests, gathered around a banquet table deep within the Kremlin’s walls in May 1943, toasted Soviet-American friendship. Premier Joseph V. Stalin and Foreign Minister Vyacheslav M. Molotov praised the Grand Alliance. Anastas I. Mikoyan, the Soviet commissar for foreign trade, Lavrenty P. Beria, the head of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs (Narodnyi Kommissariat Vnutrennykh Del, НКВД), and Maxim Litvinov, the Soviet ambassador to the United States, offered toasts, and the Anglo-Americans present—including the British ambassador to Moscow, Adm. William H. Standley, the reigning United States representative, and Joseph E. Davies, Washington’s former ambassador—reciprocated. The American emissary from 1936 to 1938, Davies was there because President Franklin D. Roosevelt had sent him to arrange an introductory summit with Stalin, a meeting at which Roosevelt was sure all outstanding Soviet-American differences could be ironed out. Although Davies’ presence was unusual, thus far the evening had been little different from similar receptions held by Soviet leaders for their Allied comrades during World War II. On this occasion, however, the former ambassador had brought with him a movie that both he and Roosevelt hoped would convince the Soviet dictator to eschew separate peace negotiations with Adolf Hitler and to remain within the tenuous Big Three

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partnership. After the toasts were complete, Stalin, a great enthusiast for Hollywood film, asked his guests to repair to his private Kremlin theater where they were to watch *Mission to Moscow*, an American-made pro-Soviet picture based upon Davies' diplomatic career. As the lights dimmed and the projector rolled, all waited for the marshal's reaction.¹

Among the most infamous movies in American history, *Mission to Moscow* has drawn attention—and fire—from contemporaries and scholars alike. Since its release critics, investigators for the House Committee on Un-American Activities, and some scholars have charged that Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) members, abetted by the sympathetic Roosevelt administration, infiltrated the project, producing a piece of Communist propaganda. With more detachment, other historians have detailed the picture's production history, arguing that it was a well-intentioned, if overzealous and unsuccessful, attempt by FDR, Davies, Warner Bros. Studios, and the official United States wartime propaganda agency, the Office of War Information (OWI), to counter Americans' distrust of their socialist and allegedly totalitarian Soviet ally.²

Mission to Moscow, as its Kremlin exhibition suggests, was of more than domestic consequence. It was an integral, but until now overlooked, cinematic component of Roosevelt's Soviet diplomacy. That so-called grand design aimed to hasten victory and to construct a stable peace by wooing Stalin and the Soviet Union. To support that strategy, the White House pursued such measures as *Mission to Moscow*, designed to build a popular consensus for a pro-Soviet foreign policy by impressing upon Americans the view that the Soviet Union was a normal and dependable state. Abroad, FDR took the unprecedented step of integrating the docudrama into the fabric of diplomatic negotiation, where it was one of several means used to convince Stalin that the United States wanted to cooperate in war and in peace. By helping affirm the Soviet premier's conviction that a continued, if temporary and conditional, Big Three entente offered the best means for achieving Moscow's immediate interests, the film helped solidify the Grand Alliance at a particularly tenuous moment. To prepare the Soviet public for that continued tack, Stalin himself authorized the theatrical distribution of *Mission to Moscow*, one of the first American

¹ William H. Standley to Secretary of State, telegram, May 25, 1943, Russia: July 1942–1943 Folder, box 49, President's Secretary's File, Franklin D. Roosevelt Papers (Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, N.Y.); *Mission to Moscow*, dir. Michael Curtiz (Warner Bros., 1943).

² U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Un-American Activities, *Hearings regarding the Communist Infiltration of the Motion Picture Industry*, 80 Cong., 1 sess., Oct. 20, 1947, pp. 9–11, 32–39; Kenneth Lloyd Billingsley, *Hollywood Party: How Communism Seduced the American Film Industry in the 1930s and 1940s* (Rocklin, 1998), 90; John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* (New Haven, 1999), 196–201. For a directly contrary view, see Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930–1960* (Garden City, 1980), 186, 198. David Culbert, "Our Awkward Ally: *Mission to Moscow* (1943)," in *American History/American Film: Interpreting the Hollywood Image*, ed. John E. O'Connor and Martin A. Jackson (New York, 1979), 122–45; David Culbert, "Introduction: The Feature Film as Official Propaganda," in *Mission to Moscow*, ed. David Culbert (Madison, 1980), 11–41; Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (New York, 1987), 189–209; Bernard F. Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film* (Lexington, Ky., 1987), 158–59; Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (New York, 1993), 144.

movies seen by popular Soviet viewers in well over a decade. Since it also contained imagery favorable to the United States and capitalism and lay at the cutting edge of an Allied cultural penetration of the Soviet Union, the movie provided the United States a rare voice with which to speak to Soviet audiences. In light of that fact, neither the film nor Roosevelt's approach was "naïve" as critics have claimed.³

A broader view of *Mission to Moscow's* diplomatic history makes it apparent that it—certainly more than any other American film and perhaps more than any other American cultural artifact figuring in a diplomatic context—illuminates the elusive linkages between culture and power. To connect the two in the framework of international relations, some recent scholars have deconstructed such texts as diplomatic reportage, showing how concepts of gender and race shaped policy formulation.⁴ Others have traced the impact of domestic culture on foreign policy or the interaction of divergent cultural systems on a global stage. Still others have focused on cultural transmission, demonstrating that United States policy makers often attempted to promote national interests by exporting American ideas, media, and commodities. By adopting such approaches and, especially, by using empirical evidence, scholars draw convincing associations between culture and power.⁵

Based upon multiarchival research, this study of *Mission to Moscow* touches upon broad issues by exploring the construction of domestic support for foreign

³ Frederick W. Marks III, *Wind over Sand: The Diplomacy of Franklin Roosevelt* (Athens, Ga., 1988), 169; Amos Perlmutter, *FDR and Stalin: A Not So Grand Alliance, 1943–1945* (Columbia, Mo., 1993), 215, 217. Franklin D. Roosevelt's defenders include Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932–1945* (New York, 1995), 533–34; John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York, 1982), 3–16; and Warren F. Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton, 1991), 8, 14, 185, 198–200.

⁴ Frank Costigliola, "Unceasing Pressure for Penetration': Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan's Formation of the Cold War," *Journal of American History*, 83 (March 1997), 1309–39; Frank Costigliola, "The Nuclear Family: Tropes of Gender and Pathology in the Western Alliance," *Diplomatic History*, 21 (Spring 1997), 163–83; Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), 42–49. On the emerging cultural turn in the history of international relations, see Michael H. Hunt, "The Long Crisis in U.S. Diplomatic History: Coming to Closure," *Diplomatic History*, 16 (Winter 1992), 126–27. I employ "culture" to denote a widely shared collection of beliefs, customs, and artifacts, along with the means, including the mass media, by which they are organized, contested, and transmitted. See Akira Iriye, "Culture," *Journal of American History*, 77 (June 1990), 100; and Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, ed. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (Berkeley, 1991), 3. Here "power" means a nation's ability to get other nations or peoples to do or want what it wants. Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York, 1990), 31.

⁵ Akira Iriye, "Culture and Power: International Relations as Intercultural Relations," *Diplomatic History*, 3 (Spring 1979), 115–28; Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, 1987); Akira Iriye, "Culture and International History," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson (Cambridge, Eng., 1991), 221–22; Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919–1933* (Ithaca, 1984); Frank A. Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas: U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938–1950* (Cambridge, Eng., 1981); Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890–1945* (New York, 1982); Emily S. Rosenberg, "Cultural Interactions," in *Encyclopedia of the United States in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Stanley I. Kutler (4 vols., New York, 1996), II, 695–716; Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945–1961* (New York, 1997); Richard H. Pells, *Not like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture since World War II* (New York, 1997). Such approaches have been criticized for failing to establish convincing associations between national interests and culture using empirical evidence. See Robert Buzzanco, "Where's the Beef? Culture without Power in the Study of U.S. Foreign Relations," *Diplomatic History*, 24 (Fall 2000), 623–32.

policy, exemplifying the transmission and reception of ideals across national boundaries, and expanding our understanding of the possible geopolitical applications of culture. As the uses made of the film indicate, culture and statecraft were connected at intra- and extrasystemic (that is, domestic and international) levels. On the home front, the White House, the OWI, and Davies all exerted influence on the movie during its production, shaping it to persuade American viewers and to create a stable popular consensus for foreign policies that, statesmen believed, would enhance American security and strength. Although the filmmakers Harry M. Warner and Jack L. Warner were Roosevelt supporters and committed New Deal liberals, they were businessmen reluctant to sacrifice entertainment for a political message that was assumed to be anathema at the box office. It was only through a corporatist bargain that industrialists lent their cooperation in exchange for domestic and international financial considerations. Corporatism, as Michael J. Hogan and other historians have argued, involved the cooperation of elites from the public and private spheres to ensure political stability and economic profitability. Taking place at such nodes of contact as regulatory bodies and trade associations, that collaboration often manifested itself in joint campaigns to expand overseas markets. Like other Hollywood movies, *Mission to Moscow* was a commodity traded in the international marketplace. As such, the film promoted domestic prosperity by generating favorable trade balances and by acting as a salesman for other national products depicted on screen. Although it generated only token distribution proceeds in the Soviet Union, the movie helped open the potentially lucrative Soviet market to other Hollywood products. Once circulating as a form of international currency, culture—cinematic and otherwise—also sold nations and their ways of life. As they did with *Mission to Moscow*, filmmakers exported idealized versions of American life, thereby attempting to sway foreign audiences through the “soft power” of attraction.⁶

While Roosevelt’s and Davies’ original intentions were to entice Stalin through expressions of collaboration with, and enthusiasm for, the Soviet experiment, the intended messages were not always those received. The multiple, often contradictory, and occasionally counterproductive meanings derived from *Mission to Moscow* both at home and abroad demonstrated policy makers’ inability to control film as an instrument of diplomacy. Once the American product was released in the Soviet Union, its rationalizations for the Great Terror and the Nazi-Soviet Pact reinforced the Stalinist regime’s domestic ideological strength. Conversely, in *Mission to Moscow* and other American movies subsequently circulated, popular Soviet viewers gleaned

⁶ For a discussion of the internal and external connections between culture and foreign policy, see Leslie A. White, *The Concept of Cultural Systems: A Key to Understanding Tribes and Nations* (New York, 1975), 20–21. On corporatism and corporatist cooperation between Washington and Hollywood, see Michael J. Hogan, “Corporatism,” in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. Hogan and Paterson, 227, 230; Ian Jarvie, *Hollywood’s Overseas Campaign: The North Atlantic Movie Trade, 1920–1950* (Cambridge, Eng., 1992), 16–17, 319–20, 324, 326, 354; Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream*, 7–8, 202–6, 230; and Rosenberg, “Cultural Interactions,” 695. Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 31–32, 267n11; Joseph S. Nye Jr. and William A. Owens, “America’s Information Edge,” *Foreign Affairs*, 75 (March/April 1996), 20–23.

visual confirmation of the superior standard of living enjoyed by Americans, information that—both United States and Soviet policy makers believed—undermined confidence in the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).⁷ In the United States the movie was unpopular despite officials' hopes. It failed to inspire pro-Soviet thinking and, worse, stirred a minor backlash. In those divergent settings, *Mission to Moscow* became an object for contestation between Washington and American moviegoers and filmmakers, between supporters and opponents of Roosevelt's foreign policies, and between America and the Kremlin for Soviet citizens' hearts and minds.

In the United States, the White House struggled against a rich tradition of anti-communist and anti-Soviet attitudes to craft a popular consensus for its pro-Soviet foreign policies. Following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Americans found themselves allied with the Soviet Union, a nation they held in extraordinarily low regard. Most criticized the Soviet Union's socialist system and alleged that its government was totalitarian. Earlier, those charges had gained greater credence when news of the purges and of the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939 reached American shores. Stalin's terror led some, including the liberal philosopher John Dewey, to compare his internal repression to that practiced by Hitler. The mutual nonaggression treaty, according to *Collier's* magazine and others, removed "all doubt, except in the minds of incurable dreamers, that there is any real difference between Communism and Fascism." Many argued that the two totalitarian states subordinated the individual to the mass, used dictatorial methods or violence to stifle personal liberty and democracy at home, and were inherently expansionistic. Although the Soviets' stubborn resistance to the German invasion after the breakup of the totalitarian coalition in June 1941 and their co-belligerency with the United States six months later purified them in the minds of many, Americans were still suspicious. In June 1942 a poll conducted by the Office of Public Opinion Research, a private organization headquartered at Princeton University, indicated that only 41 percent of respondents professed faith that the Soviets could be trusted to cooperate with the United States once victory was achieved. Although by August 1942 that figure would reach 51 percent (a high-water mark until the war's final year), it paled in comparison to the percentage who believed in the good

⁷ On responses to American culture in the Eastern bloc and elsewhere, see Rob Kroes, Robert W. Rydell, and Doeko F. J. Bosscher, eds., *Cultural Transmissions and Receptions: American Mass Culture in Europe* (Amsterdam, 1993), ix, 302–3, 305; Richard F. Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley, 1993), 3; Pells, *Not like Us*, xiv–xv; Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War*, trans. Diana M. Wolf (Chapel Hill, 1994), xi–xiii; Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "Who Won the Cold War?," *Foreign Policy*, 87 (Summer 1992), 133–36; Gale Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down: The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe* (New York, 1993), 24–25; Frank Costigliola, "'Mixed Up' and 'Contact': Culture and Emotion among the Allies in the Second World War," *International History Review*, 20 (Dec. 1998), 792, 794–95; and Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, xii, 51, 165–67, 228. For a literature review, see Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, "Shame on us? Academics, Cultural Transfer, and the Cold War—A Critical Review," *Diplomatic History*, 24 (Summer 2000), 465–94.

faith of the nation's two other major allies—Britain (72 percent) and China (88 percent).⁸

In late spring 1942 such data concerned Roosevelt. The president, who paid careful attention to opinion polls, was fresh from a meeting with Molotov during which he had promised the opening of a second front that year. The chief executive suspected, however, that an invasion might not be possible in 1942, and he consequently feared that the Soviets either would not survive or would again make a separate pact with Berlin, enabling Hitler to turn his full might westward. Because FDR regarded the Soviet Union's survival and continued participation in the Grand Alliance as crucial ingredients for victory, he reasoned that the United States might have to take measures—perhaps increased Lend-Lease aid or even recognition of expanded Soviet postwar borders—to retain Soviet amity. But Congress, where anti-communist sentiment was acute, held Lend-Lease's purse strings. If FDR were to accede to Moscow's territorial demands, he believed, a public backlash would surely ensue, especially among Polish Americans, Catholics, conservatives, and American nationalists. Since in 1942 the maintenance of domestic unity, which he considered indispensable for an effective prosecution of the war, was among his priorities, Roosevelt was eager to improve public views of the Soviet Union.⁹

In mid-1942 Davies presented him with a proposal for doing so. The two had known each other since World War I, when Davies, a Wisconsin native, Democratic activist, and millionaire, had met and befriended Roosevelt, then serving as assistant secretary of the navy. Davies managed part of FDR's 1932 campaign and contributed heavily to his reelection effort, and in late 1936 the president rewarded him by appointing him ambassador to the Soviet Union. Although Roosevelt hoped that Davies' pro-Soviet attitudes would help reenergize bilateral relations, during his service in Moscow (from early 1937 to mid-1938), Davies failed to improve ties. He did succeed in forging a rapport with many of his Soviet counterparts, however, and his diplomatic experiences formed the basis of a book, *Mission to Moscow*. With FDR's blessing, Davies wrote it to "get better public acceptance for aid to Russia which was vital to the Christian front, and to the Boss [Roosevelt] in his magnificent crusade." Despite its pro-Soviet leanings, the book, which appeared just weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor, was a huge success. It quickly sold over seven hundred thousand copies in hardcover and paperback editions and was serialized in the *New York Times Magazine*. Either Davies or Jack and Harry Warner, co-presidents of Warner Bros. Studios, came up with the idea of turning the bestseller into a com-

⁸ "Imperialism 1939 Model," *Collier's*, Oct. 28, 1939, p. 74; Hadley Cantril, ed., *Public Opinion, 1935–1946* (Princeton, 1951), 370. On the intellectual currency of "totalitarianism," see Les K. Adler and Thomas G. Paterson, "Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of Totalitarianism, 1930s–1950s," *American Historical Review*, 75 (April 1970), 1050; and Abbot Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York, 1995), 31–32, 43–44, 47–50.

⁹ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, 337–44, 350–51, 360; Edward M. Bennett, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Search for Victory: American-Soviet Relations, 1939–1945* (Wilmington, 1990), 55; John Lewis Gaddis, *Russia, the Soviet Union, and the United States: An Interpretive History* (New York, 1990), 150. On Franklin D. Roosevelt's earlier identification of the Soviet Union as a key to victory, see Waldo Heinrichs, *Threshold of War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Entry into World War II* (New York, 1989), 105, 141, 145.

mercial movie. Before proceeding, however, the newly successful author solicited and obtained Roosevelt's approval. Thereafter, through regular White House meetings with Davies in July, October, and November 1942, the president kept abreast of the film's progress. As it neared completion in early March 1943, Davies again went to the Oval Office, where he found Roosevelt "very much interested in hearing about the picture."¹⁰

Production began in early July 1942 after Warner Bros. had contracted with Davies, who retained the right to approve the screenplay and final print. The former ambassador was clear about the messages "his" film should convey. To Stephen Early, FDR's press secretary, he wrote, "it is vital we should understand" the Soviets and "have confidence in the integrity and honesty of . . . their desire to preserve future peace." Moreover, ever since his days in Moscow, Davies had voiced a belief that Stalinist Russia was undergoing a thermidorian reaction. Incentives given to unusually productive individual workers, cultural conservatism, the purge of Old Bolsheviks, and, later, collaboration with fascist Germany misled him into thinking that the Soviet Union was gradually jettisoning its Bolshevik ideals, embracing authoritarian capitalism, and becoming more like the United States. In 1937, Davies wrote, "theoretical communists, when clothed with responsibility," had been "compelled to resort to the elementals of human nature." To the wealthy capitalist, those "elementals of human nature" included self-interest and a desire for material comfort.¹¹

During production Davies regularly invoked his contractual rights and the president's name, under whose authority filmmakers assumed he marched. Upon reading an early version of the script in September 1942, he promptly sent twenty-four single-spaced pages of comments to the startled producer and director, Robert Buckner and Michael Curtiz. Traveling to the Los Angeles area, Davies and his wife were on the set almost daily, from November 1942 through mid-January 1943, making suggestions to filmmakers and reporting to the White House. As a result, Davies had a direct hand in shaping the movie's prologue and its depictions of the purges, the Nazi-Soviet Pact, and Moscow's invasion of Finland.¹²

But Davies' and Roosevelt's were not the only hands shaping *Mission to Moscow*. Known as the "Roosevelt studio" and led by friends of the president and committed reformers, Warner Bros. had championed on screen both FDR's New Deal and his increasingly pro-Allied and interventionist foreign policies before Pearl Harbor. In part, genuine patriotism, as Jack Warner claimed, motivated the executives. But

¹⁰ Joseph E. Davies to Lowell Mellett, Dec. 31, 1941, Davies File, box 11, Lowell Mellett Papers (Roosevelt Library). See Elizabeth Kimball MacLean, "Joseph E. Davies and Soviet-American Relations, 1941-43," *Diplomatic History*, 4 (Winter 1980), 73-75. Davies to Jack L. Warner, March 4, 1943, Scrapbook File, *Mission to Moscow* Collection (Warner Bros. Archives, School of Cinema-Television, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, Calif.); [Marvin McIntyre], memo, July 23, 1942, President's Personal File 1381, Roosevelt Papers; Culbert, "Introduction," 13, 16-17, 25.

¹¹ Davies to Stephen T. Early, Jan. 6, 1943, Davies File, box 3, Stephen T. Early Papers (Roosevelt Library); Eduard Mark, "October or Thermidor? Interpretations of Stalinism and the Perception of Soviet Foreign Policy in the United States, 1927-1947," *American Historical Review*, 94 (Oct. 1989), 938-41, 946-47.

¹² Joseph Davies Diary, Nov. 23, 1942, in *Mission to Moscow*, ed. Culbert, 251.

because, like other industrialists, he and his brother were in the movie business to make money and not to educate, they needed financial inducements to make diplomatically charged films. A large portion of that incentive arrived just before American intervention when the White House, at the Warners' urging, protected the industry from domestic antitrust litigation, insuring Hollywood's domestic profitability and making executives more amenable to the administration's publicity needs. In July 1939, at the request of small producers and independent theater owners, the Justice Department had charged the major studios—which dominated production, distribution, and exhibition—with violating the Sherman Antitrust Act. The Justice Department's suit portended financial ruin by threatening to force the studios to divest themselves of their distribution and exhibition arms. The Warners, along with Will H. Hays, president of Hollywood's trade association, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA), beseeched the president and his confidant, Secretary of Commerce Harry L. Hopkins, for relief. By mid-1940 Hopkins intervened and persuaded the Justice Department to issue a consent decree permitting the industry to remain intact while discontinuing some of its unfair trading practices. In exchange for the White House's help, the trade periodical *Variety* reported, Hollywood pledged to lend cinematic support to the administration's domestic and foreign policies. Soon afterward, Lowell Mellett, the head of an official information agency created by Roosevelt in 1939 (the Office of Government Reports) and the administration's main contact with Hollywood, lent greater credence to such assumptions when he informed the president that an "effective plan" for securing filmmakers' cooperation was "being developed." Roosevelt sent a note, which was read during the 1941 Academy Awards ceremony, thanking the industry for its help. To FDR, Mellett privately added, "the motion picture industry is pretty well living up to its offers of cooperation. Practically everything being shown on the screen . . . that touches on our national purpose is of the right sort." Just one month after acquiring the rights to *Mission to Moscow*, a film designed to satisfy their internationalist patron in the White House, the Warners offered their "services and experience in the motion picture field" to the administration.¹³

The United States intervention in World War II helped coalesce Hollywood's client-patron relationship with Washington, forming a corporatist arrangement with international overtones that had a direct bearing on *Mission to Moscow*. Because the demands of total war required a concerted propaganda effort, in June 1942 the president consolidated several poorly coordinated information agencies into a newly created Office of War Information (OWI). Charged with explaining the United States

¹³ Mellett for Roosevelt, memo, Dec. 23, 1940, White House—1940 File, box 5, Mellett Papers; Richard W. Steele, *Propaganda in an Open Society: The Roosevelt Administration and the Media, 1933–1941* (Westport, 1985), 155–58, 160–62. On the relationship of Harry M. Warner and Jack L. Warner with the Roosevelt administration, see Harry M. Warner to Roosevelt, Sept. 5, 1939, Official File 73, box 4, Roosevelt Papers; Nicholas John Cull, *Selling War: The British Propaganda Campaign against American "Neutrality" in World War II* (New York, 1995), 51–52, 108, 112–13, 137; and Nick Roddick, *A New Deal in Entertainment: Warner Brothers in the 1930s* (London, 1983), 65. Mellett for Roosevelt, draft memo, [1941], White House—1941 File, box 5, Mellett Papers. On the Warners' offer, see Marvin McIntyre for Roosevelt, memo, Aug. 14, 1942, Official File 73, box 5, Roosevelt Papers.

war effort to audiences at home and abroad, the bureau worked with the mass media to publicize official information themes. Initially, the owi's Domestic Operations Branch, Bureau of Motion Pictures (domestic BMP), enjoyed little success because it had authority only to "advise" Hollywood regarding official propaganda themes and had virtually no power over filmmakers, who were reluctant to spice entertainment with political messages that turned customers away. By late 1942—early 1943, however, official propagandists had gained the leverage necessary to shape Hollywood's production. Mellett had created a Los Angeles branch of the owi's Overseas Operations Branch, Bureau of Motion Pictures, led by Ulric Bell, the former head of the interventionist pressure group Fight for Freedom. Under Roosevelt's executive order permitting the owi to conduct foreign information programs, Bell's bureau, in conjunction with the Office of Censorship, had authority to determine which commercial films received export licenses. Since the industry reportedly realized up to half its gross revenues overseas, the owi's promotion (or lack thereof) of Hollywood's foreign markets, which grew as Allied forces liberated areas from Axis control, enabled it to inject movies with propaganda themes while avoiding charges of domestic censorship.¹⁴

Official publicists used their growing strength to craft Hollywood's presentation of the allies of the United States. Along with its better-known campaigns to fire domestic support for the nation's war effort, rationing, and home front unity, the owi articulated a "united nations" theme, which strove to overcome inter-Allied differences about ideology, former international policies, and future geopolitical objectives. This was particularly important when the Grand Alliance first coalesced and German propaganda portrayed it as hopelessly fractured due to the inclusion of the Soviet Union. The campaign claimed that the United States could not win the war alone. It required the assistance of its allies, including most prominently Great Britain and the Soviet Union, which, although diverse, were all fighting for freedom from the Axis, whose eventual defeat would produce a better and more democratic future. In June 1942 a government information manual distributed to all Hollywood studios insisted, "we must understand and know more about our Allies" by counteracting "unity-destroying lies about England and Russia."¹⁵

Because both FDR and other United States opinion makers portrayed the war as a movement for the global extension of freedom, democracy, and regulated capitalism, the Soviet Union presented a particular problem. Performing intellectual gymnastics, publicists responded by generally avoiding the sensitive issues of socialism and Stalin, rationalizing past Soviet behavior, suggesting the Soviet Union was evolving into a less revolutionary state, and focusing on the heroic wartime efforts of the Russian people. Nelson Poynter, the chief of the domestic BMP, cautioned

¹⁴ Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, 56–60, 80–81, 105, 108–9, 112. For a discussion of the administration's intercession on the industry's behalf in the United Kingdom, see Jarvie, *Hollywood's Overseas Campaign*, 351–60, 368–72.

¹⁵ *Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry*, June 8, 1942, Manual Material—Hollywood Office File, box 1438, Records of Mellett, Bureau of Motion Pictures, Domestic Operations Branch, Records of the Office of War Information, RG 208 (National Archives, College Park, Md.).

filmmakers that although “we Americans reject Communism . . . *we do not reject our Russian Ally.*” There was a sense among movie executives that the American public would in fact reject productions about their Soviet ally. Just before work began on *Mission to Moscow*, the first pro-Soviet feature film of the war years, the dearth of such movies led Poynter to implore studios to “give us a *Mrs. Miniver* [a well-received 1942 pro-British production] of China or Russia, making clear our common interest with the Russians or Chinese in this struggle.”¹⁶

By reviewing scripts and prints, OWI propagandists exercised authority over *Mission to Moscow*, insuring that it promoted the “united nations” theme. Poynter praised the film for emphasizing the Soviet Union’s supposed interwar support for collective security and for demonstrating that “Russians are an honest people trying to do an honest job with about the same total objectives as the people of the United States.” Poynter met with Davies to remind him and Warner Bros. executives of opinion surveys showing that many Americans feared Moscow would either sign a separate peace with Berlin or fail to adhere to its postwar treaty obligations. To counter such pessimism, he advised the project’s principals to offer explanations for the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the Red Army’s invasion of Finland.¹⁷

After reading the final script, in November 1942 the OWI expressed its hope that *Mission to Moscow* would “make one of the most remarkable pictures of this war” and “a very great contribution to the war information program.” It would “be a most convincing means of helping Americans to understand their Russian allies. Because it is a true story told by a man who cannot possibly be accused of Communist leanings, it will be doubly reassuring to Americans.” Along with emphasizing Soviet support for collective security, the story

presents the Russian people most sympathetically. Every effort has been made to show that Russians and Americans are not so very different after all. The Russians are shown to eat well and live comfortably—which will be a surprise to many Americans. The leaders of both countries desire peace and both possess a blunt honesty of address and purpose. Both peoples have great respect for education and achievement.

One of the best services performed by this picture is the presentation of Russian leaders, not as wild-eyed madmen, but as far-seeing, earnest, responsible statesmen. It is pointed out that essentially it is none of our business how they keep house—what we want to know is what kind of neighbors they will make in case of fire. They have proved very good neighbors, and this picture will help to explain why, as well as to encourage faith in the feasibility of post-war cooperation.¹⁸

Government information specialists were equally enthusiastic about the com-

¹⁶ *Ibid.*; “Worksheet,” [1942], Propaganda File, box 213, Harry L. Hopkins Papers (Roosevelt Library); *Mrs. Miniver*, dir. William Wyler (MGM, 1942); *Variety*, June 17, 1942, p. 1.

¹⁷ Nelson Poynter to Robert Buckner, memo, Dec. 3, 1942, Poynter File, box 16, Mellett Papers; “Notes re. Rushes on ‘Mission to Moscow,’” Jan. 6, 1943, *Mission to Moscow* File, box 3521, Motion Picture Reviews and Analyses, Motion Picture Division, Los Angeles Office, Overseas Operations Branch, Office of War Information Records; Nelson Poynter, “Weekly Log of Activities,” Dec. 26, 1942–Jan. 2, 1943, Weekly Log File, box 3510, Records of the Chief, Los Angeles Office, *ibid.*

¹⁸ Script reviews, Nov. 28, 30, 1942, Reviews and Activities Reports File, box 1439, Mellett Records, Bureau of Motion Pictures, Domestic Operations Branch, *ibid.*

pleted print. Judging it “a magnificent contribution” to wartime propaganda, the OWI believed the picture would “do much to bring understanding of Soviet international policy in the past years and dispel the fears which many honest persons have felt with regard to our alliance with Russia.” That was particularly so since “the possibility for the friendly alliance of the Capitalist United States and the Socialist Russia is shown to be firmly rooted in the mutual desire for peace of the two great countries.”¹⁹

Completed in late April 1943, the film was, in the words of Buckner, the film’s producer, “an expedient lie for political purposes, glossily covering up important facts with full or partial knowledge of their false presentation.” It whitewashed the purges, rationalized Moscow’s participation in the Nazi-Soviet Pact and its invasion of Finland, and portrayed the Soviet Union as a nontotalitarian state that was moving toward the American model and was committed to internationalism. Following a prologue, in which the real Davies assured American audiences he was no Communist, his character (portrayed by actor Walter Huston) traveled to the Soviet Union in 1937 at Roosevelt’s request. There, according to the movie, citizens were well fed and happy, the NKVD “protected” people, and a consumer economy was emerging. In one scene, which was added at the last minute at the Davies family’s insistence, Mrs. Davies (played by Ann Harding) visited the “USSR Cosmetic Factory” run by Polina Molotov, the foreign minister’s spouse. Commenting on the shop’s attractive window display of perfumes and beauty products that resembled something one might find on Fifth Avenue in New York City, Marjorie Davies expressed surprise that such luxury goods were available in the Soviet Union. Madame Molotov, whom the *New York Times* found “suspiciously” aristocratic and “Elizabeth Ardenish,” replied that the Soviets had “discovered that feminine beauty was not a luxury.” Through such scenes, according to *Life* magazine, the Soviets were “made to look and act like residents of Kansas City, and the American standard of living appears to prevail throughout the Soviet Union.”²⁰

If Americans’ perceptions of Stalinist Russia were to be altered, however, it was essential that *Mission to Moscow* present the purge victims as being guilty of treason. Here Joseph Davies’ influence proved critical. As they had in the book *Mission to Moscow*, the meaning of the purges and the defendants’ guilt or innocence had remained ambiguous throughout early screenplays. Insisting that the defendants’ complicity be made explicit, Davies reportedly threatened to compensate the Warner brothers one million dollars for money thus far spent on the project and to leave Burbank with the negatives of the unfinished picture if filmmakers failed to do so. The Warners relented, and the final version clearly identified Nikolai Bukharin, Marshal M. Tukhachevskii, Karl Radek, and others as saboteurs and traitors who

¹⁹ Feature review, April 28, 1943, *Mission to Moscow* File, box 3521, Motion Picture Reviews and Analyses, Motion Picture Division, Los Angeles Office, Overseas Operations Branch, *ibid.*

²⁰ Robert Buckner to David Culbert, Jan. 1, 14, 1978, in *Mission to Moscow*, ed. Culbert, 254; *New York Times*, May 9, 1943, sec. 2, p. 3; “‘Mission to Moscow’: Davies Movie Whitewashes Russia,” *Life*, May 10, 1943, p. 39. Polina Molotov was in fact commissar of the Soviet cosmetic industry. Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), 80.

had participated in a plot, directed from abroad by Leon Trotsky in conjunction with Japan and Nazi Germany, to soften up the Soviet Union in advance of a foreign invasion that would topple the Stalinist government. Although the real Davies privately acknowledged the fatuousness of such a scenario, during the Moscow show trial scenes his character informed the audience, "Based on twenty years' trial practice, I'd be inclined to believe these confessions."²¹ *Mission to Moscow* thereby tried to assure Americans that the purges, far from being Stalin's bloodthirsty assaults on innocent victims, were necessary to eliminate quasi-fascist fifth columnists.

Finally, the production justified Moscow's prewar diplomacy and aggression, presenting the Soviet Union as a bellwether of internationalism. It privileged Maxim Litvinov's prewar collective security efforts in the League of Nations. In a key scene, the cinematic Davies visited Stalin (portrayed by Manart Kippen), who expressed his desire for an antifascist alliance with the Western democracies. But the Soviet Union, he informed the ambassador in a veiled reference to the Western appeasement of Hitler at Munich in 1938, would not "be put in the position of pulling other people's chestnuts out of the fire. Either we must be able to rely on our mutual guarantees with the other democracies or . . . well, we may be forced to protect ourselves in another way." The Soviet Union, *Mission to Moscow* instructed audiences, thus had cooperated with Berlin from August 1939 to June 1941 only because it had to protect itself once it was abandoned by Britain and France. In addition, claiming that he was privy to secret information, Davies insisted filmmakers justify the Soviet Union's invasion of Finland in winter 1939–1940, an action heavily criticized in the United States. As a result, the movie ultimately suggested that Stalin had ordered the Red Army's advance only because Finland's government was collaborating with Hitler and had resisted the Soviet Union's preinvasion requests to occupy "defensive" positions on Finnish soil.²²

Premiering in American theaters on April 30, 1943, *Mission to Moscow*, which some dubbed "Submission to Moscow," stirred a storm of criticism despite Warner's lavish half-million-dollar advertising budget. A few defended the picture. Believing that it would facilitate a military victory by solidifying the Grand Alliance, such conservative nationalist groups as local American Legion councils offered their endorsements. On the other end of the political spectrum, the CPUSA's the *Daily Worker* and Jack McManus of the left-leaning periodical *PM* praised "the first clean break with Hollywood's persistent policy of silence or deceit about the Soviet Union." While bemoaning *Mission to Moscow's* counterproductive lack of objectivity and historical fidelity, most film critics, including Bosley Crowther of the *New*

²¹ On Joseph E. Davies' influence and private views, see *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1943* (6 vols., Washington, 1963–1965), III, 504–5; and Culbert, "Introduction," 24.

²² Culbert, "Introduction," 21, 23–24. The movie's explanation for the Nazi-Soviet Pact was the one voiced by Moscow and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Nikolai Sivachev and Nikolai N. Yakovlev, *Russia and the United States*, trans. Olga Adler Titelbaum (Chicago, 1979), 122–23. This rationale fails to note that in dealing with Berlin, the Kremlin sought territory in the Baltics and eastern Poland. Steven Merritt Miner, *Between Churchill and Stalin: The Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the Origins of the Grand Alliance* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 3–6.

York Times and Dwight Whitney of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and some liberals conceded that its alliance-building intentions were laudable. According to the *New Yorker*,

If the greater part of the public is startled by the information it offers and is sympathetic to its message, it is a good picture. If it attracts the notice of high social circles and in some way allays congressional anxieties about Russia as an ally, it is a good picture . . . because those congressional anxieties need allaying, and quick. There is a perilous likelihood, however, that because it is a very top-heavy flimsy affair, the film will fail to achieve the important ends it should.²³

Other liberals and leftists were more disturbed by the movie's departures from both the historical record and Davies' own book in rationalizing the purges and Moscow's international behavior. Dwight Macdonald, editor of the *Partisan Review*, circulated a letter protesting the film that was also signed by Max Eastman, James T. Farrell, Sidney Hook, Alfred Kazin, A. Philip Randolph, and Norman Thomas. Although pleased with the picture's criticism of conservative isolationists and its portrayal of the Soviet Union's staunch fight against Nazism, the *Nation's* James Agee claimed *Mission to Moscow* was

A mishmash: of Stalinism with journalism with opportunism with shaky experimentalism with mesmerism with onanism, all mosaicked into a remarkable portrait of what the makers of the film think that the American public should think the Soviet Union is like—a great glad two-million-dollar bowl of canned borscht, eminently approvable by the Institute of Good Housekeeping.²⁴

Manny Farber of the *New Republic* declared himself “ready to vote for the booby prize” because *Mission to Moscow* had made “up its own facts” and mindlessly praised the Soviet Union. Henry R. Luce's *Life* magazine, normally a bastion of liberal internationalism that only weeks earlier had dedicated its cover to Stalin, claimed the “U.S.S.R., its leaders and its foreign policies are whitewashed to a degree far exceeding Davies' book.” Such historical inaccuracies led the liberal intellectuals Suzanne La Follette and John Dewey, both of whom had earlier participated in an independent inquiry into the Moscow trials' charges, to claim in an influential letter written to the *New York Times* that the movie was “the first instance in our country of totalitarian propaganda for mass consumption.”²⁵

The harshest criticisms came from an odd assortment including the non-Stalinist

²³ Eugene Lyons, “Memo on Movie Reviewers,” *American Mercury*, 56 (July 1943), 81; Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, 207–8; David Lardner, “Repercussions Would Help,” *New Yorker*, May 8, 1943, pp. 58–59; *New York Times*, May 9, 1943, sec. 2, p. 3; *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 12, 1943, Scrapbook File, *Mission to Moscow* Collection.

²⁴ James Agee, “Films,” *Nation*, May 22, 1943, p. 749; Herman Shumlin et al. to Walter White, June 1, 1943, in *Mission to Moscow*, ed. Culbert, 257.

²⁵ Manny Farber, “Mishmash,” *New Republic*, May 10, 1943, p. 636; “Mission to Moscow,” p. 39; *New York Times*, May 9, 1943, sec. 4, p. 8. For a challenge to the charges made by John Dewey and Suzanne La Follette, see *New York Times*, May 16, 1943, sec. 4, p. 12. For Dewey's critique of propaganda, see Brett Gary, “Modernity's Challenge to Democracy: The Lippmann-Dewey Debate,” in *Cultural Transmissions and Receptions*, ed. Kroes, Rydell, and Bosscher, 43.

Left, Catholics, and the far Right. Calling the film “grotesque,” the Marxist Eugene Lyons claimed that “Stalin-Worship” had reached new heights. Trotskyites in Los Angeles and New York held mass rallies protesting the production’s claim that the exiled Bolshevik had engineered a conspiracy against the Soviet Union. Noting that the Warner Bros. movie avoided the issue of religion, Philip T. Hartung of the Catholic periodical *Commonweal* called it “obviously one-sided” and “straight propaganda.” In a letter to that publication, one reader expressed a widely held view when he wrote, “of course, from a military standpoint, we are happy to have Russia as our ally. . . . but it is hardly necessary that we should also love Stalin, his judicial and political system and his international diplomacy; nor are we obliged, because of our military alliance, to encourage the spreading of communist propaganda.”²⁶

Similarly, such diehard anticommunists as Rep. Marion T. Bennett, a Republican from Missouri, charged that Hollywood had “lost its head and gone completely overboard in its attempt to make Communism look good. Our temporary military alliance with Russia must not make us forget that, except insofar as treatment of Jews is concerned, there is no difference between Communism and nazi-ism as it affects the common man.” Such sentiments led some congressional Republicans, including Sen. Robert A. Taft, a Republican from Ohio, to call for an investigation of movie propaganda and the administration’s links with Hollywood.²⁷

General audiences did not care for *Mission to Moscow*, which they regarded as a boring film or an example of Communist propaganda. In January 1944 *Variety* ranked the film only eighty-fourth out of the year’s top ninety-five films in box office gross. Warner Bros., which spent a slightly higher than normal \$1.5 million on production, lost about \$600,000 on the project. Orville F. Grahame of Worcester, Massachusetts, expressed his displeasure to the studio:

I regret the liberties you have taken with truth in . . . *Mission to Moscow*. It is unfortunate that a film on Moscow should have to be in accord with the traditional attitude of American Communists and hew to their line. The American people admire the Russian people and their fight, and perhaps even the realism of their leaders. But we admire most our own attitudes towards life and truth.

W. F. Flowers of Encino, California, sardonically began,

Allow me to congratulate you on a very open faced piece of communistic propaganda. I believe you have done a good job from the standpoint of propaganda work, but a work that is going to backfire . . . on Warner Bros. I am convinced that a great many people will do as my family are going to do and . . . attend theatres only where Warner Bros. films are *not* being shown.

²⁶ Eugene Lyons, “The Progress of Stalin-Worship,” *American Mercury*, 56 (June 1943), 693–97; “Trotskyists Protest ‘Mission to Moscow’ Film,” press release, [1943], Scrapbook File, *Mission to Moscow* Collection; Philip T. Hartung, “Hollywood’s Mission,” *Commonweal*, May 21, 1943, p. 125; Nathan D. Shapiro, “Mission to Moscow,” *ibid.*, June 4, 1943, p. 168.

²⁷ *Congressional Record*, 78 Cong., 1 sess., May 24, 1943, p. A2570; *New York Herald Tribune*, Oct. 10, 1943, Propaganda File (microfilm: reel 8), Motion Picture Association of America General Correspondence (Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, Calif.).

And with a hint of xenophobia (the Warner brothers were Jewish and Harry was born in Poland), Alice McCarthy of Jackson Heights, New York, wrote, "As a *native-born* American citizen, I am hereby submitting a violent protest against your propaganda film 'Mission to Moscow.'" She continued, "Why such films are not considered subversive is far beyond me and a sign of ill omen and, further beyond me, is why you don't go to Russia and stay there."²⁸

All told, these responses and criticisms suggest that elite and popular audiences generally rejected *Mission to Moscow*, which did little to increase, and may have actually decreased, domestic support for both the Soviet Union and Roosevelt's accommodationist policy. Just weeks before the film's release, a Gallup Poll indicated that 44 percent of Americans, the lowest figure since the previous July, believed the Soviets would cooperate with the United States once the war was finished. Following the movie's premiere, that number increased only slightly to 47 percent, where it would remain until early 1945.²⁹ Given the generally critical reception of the film, that small improvement probably had more to do with the Red Army's integral role in defeating Nazi Germany than with *Mission to Moscow*.

Just prior to the film's unsuccessful domestic premiere, Davies took a copy to Roosevelt, which the two viewed in the White House's makeshift theater. At the time, the war, the Soviet Union, and Moscow's geopolitical intentions preoccupied the chief executive. His concerns about the Grand Alliance's cohesiveness ran much deeper than they had been the previous summer. Following the Red Army's watershed victory at Stalingrad, the Office of Strategic Services, the wartime American intelligence bureau, learned that Moscow, disenchanted with the still-absent second front and desirous of obtaining international recognition of its distended 1941 borders, was conducting secret peace talks with Berlin. This was crushing news to FDR, for a separate Soviet-German peace would enable Hitler to concentrate his remaining forces in western Europe, thereby making Anglo-American military operations and victory there much more difficult and costly. Along with the impending Anglo-American invasion of Italy, Stalingrad brought other considerations to the fore. First, with American military planners expecting the ultimate war with Japan to result in heavy United States casualties, Roosevelt desired eventual Soviet intervention in the Pacific theater. Second, it was now clear that the Red Army had the initiative on the eastern front, opening the possibility that through future offensives it would soon occupy portions of eastern Europe. While FDR was willing to concede a Soviet sphere of influence, such a development might inflame American opinion. He hoped to work with the Soviet dictator and to persuade him to take those attitudes into account by either limiting expansion or holding plebiscites, which would soothe the American electorate by giving the appearance of democracy and self-determination. Finally, although his plans for an international peace-keeping system

²⁸ Orville F. Grahame to Warner Brothers, May 10, 1943, Scrapbook File, *Mission to Moscow* Collection; Culbert, "Introduction," 34; W. F. Flowers to Warner Bros. Studios, May 21, 1943, Scrapbook File, *Mission to Moscow* Collection; Alice McCarthy to Warner Bros. Studios, May 18, 1943, *ibid.*

²⁹ George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935–1971* (3 vols., New York, 1972), I, 382, 419, 492.

were still vague, the commander in chief believed that a stable peace was simply not possible without Soviet participation.³⁰

Combined, these considerations further stimulated Roosevelt's "grand design" of accommodating Stalin, who, he reasoned, was not ideologically incapable of cooperating with the Western democracies. Because he had concluded that insecurity, rather than socialist thinking, drove the Soviets to isolate themselves and seek a territorial buffer, FDR believed that an atmosphere of trust had to be built between Stalin and Western leaders that would assure him he had nothing to fear. At their Casablanca Conference in January 1943, FDR and British prime minister Winston S. Churchill tried to allay Soviet concerns about a separate capitalist peace by announcing their commitment to an unconditional, indivisible German surrender. Reflecting the administration's renewed drive for cooperation with Moscow, in spring 1943 the OWI numbered among its major foreign propaganda goals preventing "the allies [from] making a separate peace," diminishing inter-Allied "frictions" that could "impede the successful co-ordinated prosecution of the war," and maintaining "an atmosphere of cordial co-operation beyond the immediate crisis of the war." Roosevelt, however, was unsatisfied. Confident in his own powers of persuasion, he felt that if only he could meet face-to-face with Stalin, the two could forge a personal relationship and eliminate any outstanding differences. For almost a year he had tried to arrange a summit, but the Soviet premier had demurred, claiming the need to be near the front. Roosevelt believed Davies, whose optimism about the Soviet Union and bilateral relations had earned him a benign reputation among Soviet leaders, could persuade Stalin. He decided to send the ex-ambassador on a second "mission" to Moscow. FDR instructed Davies to let the Soviet dictator know that "there should be no differences now" to divide the allied strength against Hitler" and that the United States was "on the level—had no axes to grind, and [was] concerned first with winning the war."³¹

It was in this context that *Mission to Moscow* became an integral part of both Davies' diplomatic undertaking and the foreign half of Roosevelt's Soviet policy. Standley, then the United States ambassador to Moscow, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, and the president had learned that Stalin was a movie enthusiast. Both before and during the war, the marshal, usually accompanied by Molotov, regularly screened Western-made pictures in the private theater he had had installed near his Kremlin quarters. During the terror, after reportedly signing 3,187 execution orders, the two

³⁰ For discussions of FDR's thinking, see Bennett, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Search for Victory*, 88; Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, 379–82; and Gaddis, *Russia, the Soviet Union, and the United States*, 153–60. On Soviet-German peace talks and their implications for American policymakers, see Vojtech Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War: Diplomacy, Warfare, and the Politics of Communism, 1941–1945* (New York, 1979), 73–80, 84–85; and John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941–1947* (New York, 1972), 73.

³¹ George Taylor, "The Potentialities of Psychological Warfare," March 29, 1943, Washington Office File, box 125, Correspondence with Government Agencies, Office of Policy Coordination, Director of Overseas Operations, Office of War Information Records; Gaddis, *Russia, the Soviet Union, and the United States*, 153–59; Gaddis, *United States and the Origins of the Cold War*, 64–65; MacLean, "Joseph E. Davies and Soviet-American Relations," 85–86; Bennett, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Search for Victory*, 88.

settled down for an evening's entertainment filled with Hollywood productions. In the Soviet Union, Stalin, who not only enjoyed Hollywood's output but also sensed its communicative powers, permitted select Soviet filmmakers to watch American movies and to draw upon them in their own creations. The end results were Stalinist movies that incorporated stars, characteristically American happy endings, and elements from Hollywood westerns and musicals to make the requisite socialist propaganda more palatable to popular viewers. The premier was deeply involved in Soviet motion picture production. He censored prints before their public release, occasionally revised scripts, and at night oftentimes called frightened directors with "suggestions" for plot or title changes. According to Peter Kenez, a leading authority on Soviet film, Stalin became somewhat obsessed with cinema. In part that was because, unlike the real world, the fictional one depicted on screen was highly susceptible to manipulation and, thereby, to the full attainment of ideal outcomes. As he withdrew into the make-believe world, Stalin lost some touch with reality "in the sense of seeing actual factories, collective farms, villages, and even streets of Moscow." And "more and more his view of the world was determined by what he saw on the screen."³²

Although Roosevelt and Davies did not know the full extent of Stalin's enthusiasm, after previewing *Mission to Moscow* they hatched a plan. The ex-ambassador was to take the movie to Moscow and there to exhibit it for Stalin, Molotov, and other leading Soviet policy makers. By showing it to the Soviet dictator, they hoped to entertain him and put him in a pliable mood. But they had deeper goals, believing that the movie's plot and the fact that it was privately made and broadly distributed in the United States would serve as further proof of American sincerity and willingness to collaborate. In short, they introduced *Mission to Moscow* into the diplomatic realm, where they hoped it would act as an agent of "soft power" in persuading Stalin to remain with the alliance. As the historian David Culbert has noted, it was among "the few examples one can point to of Roosevelt's being able to show Stalin that America had experienced a change of heart and that friendship and understanding were the new watchwords of the day."³³

Three days after his May 20, 1943, arrival on an airplane emblazoned with the words "Mission to Moscow," Davies went to the Kremlin, where Stalin had arranged the farewell feast in his honor. Davies most likely took this precious opportunity to provide Stalin with evidence of the American people's revised attitudes about the Soviet Union. Before leaving the United States, Davies had asked Poynter

³² Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917–1953* (Cambridge, Eng., 1992), 148. On Joseph Stalin's interest in film and Hollywood's influence on Soviet cinema, see Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 82; Dmitri Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy*, trans. Harold Shukman (New York, 1991), 127, 131; Richard Taylor, "Red Stars, Positive Heroes, and Personality Cults," in *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema*, ed. Richard Taylor and Derek Spring (London, 1993), 76–77; Maya Turovskaya, "1930s and 1940s: Cinema in Context," *ibid.*, 237; Denise J. Youngblood, "Americanitis: The *Amerikanshchina* in Soviet Cinema," *Journal of Popular Film & Television*, 19 (Winter 1992), 151–52; and Denise J. Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society* (Cambridge, Eng., 1992), 174. Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Soviet Union and the United States Ambassador to the Soviet Union, memo of conversation, April 23, 1942, in Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del SSSR (Soviet Union Ministry of Foreign Affairs), *Sovetsko-Amerikanskie otnosheniia vo vremia Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny, 1941–1945: Dokumenty i materialy* (Soviet-American relations during the Great Patriotic War, 1941–1945: Documents and materials) (2 vols., Moscow, 1984), I, 171.

³³ Culbert, "Our Awkward Ally," 136–37.

to provide him with an inventory of Hollywood movies about Soviet Russia then in production. The domestic BMP chief promptly responded with information about *The North Star*, *Song of Russia*, and *Three Russian Girls*—all forthcoming Hollywood features with pro-Soviet messages. Poynter suggested to Davies that he inform Soviet leaders of the significance “that private companies, *not just United States government*, films are being made to interpret Russia to the American people.”³⁴ It was improbable that Davies missed this opportunity to interject the cinematic evidence of decreasing anti-Soviet attitudes collected by Poynter.

After retiring to the Kremlin’s private movie theater, Davies and Standley—accompanied by Molotov, Beria, Mikoyan, Litvinov, and Red Army marshal Kliment E. Voroshilov—tried to decipher the marshal’s response. Opinions differed. Standley, who had submitted his resignation only a month earlier, was increasingly critical of Roosevelt’s Soviet policy. He also resented the fact that the chief executive had gone around him in dispatching Davies, who, he believed, was encroaching not only upon his diplomatic turf but also upon his pet project. With the approval of both the State Department and the OWI, the former United States Navy public relations officer had launched a motion picture information program the previous summer. Including only official newreels and informative short films, it sought to improve bilateral relations by informing Soviet leaders about the United States, thereby lessening their distrust. The reigning ambassador’s hostility fueled his critique of the diplomatic use of the movie. After meeting Davies at the Moscow airport, Standley privately expressed his disdain for a trip that he deemed a mere publicity stunt. “To send a man 30,000 miles around the world using an American Army plane, a crew of nine men, gas and oil, the prestige of the U.S. Government, and the entire facilities of the American Embassy in Moscow to advertise and increase the box office receipts for Mr. Davies’ movie doesn’t sit so very well,” he wrote his wife. In a memorandum later given to FDR by Hull, Standley reported the Soviet leadership had received the film “with rather glum curiosity.” He

doubted if the Hollywood treatment of events described in Davies’ book met with the general approval of the Russians. They successfully refrained from favorable comment while the film was being shown but Stalin was heard to grunt once or twice. The glaring discrepancies must have provoked considerable resentment among the Soviet officials present. Its abject flattery of everything Russian and the ill-advised introduction of unpleasant events in Soviet internal history that I am inclined to think the Kremlin would prefer to forget makes me believe that the Russians will not desire to give publicity to the film at least in its present form. In any event I feel that the film will not contribute to better understanding between the two countries.³⁵

³⁴ Poynter to Davies, memo, May 8, 1943, Poynter File, box 16, Mellett Papers; *The North Star*, dir. Lewis Milestone (Goldwyn Pictures, 1943); *Song of Russia*, dir. Gregory Ratoff (MGM, 1943); *Three Russian Girls*, dir. Fedor Ozep and Henry Kesler (United Artists, 1944).

³⁵ William H. Standley and Arthur A. Ageton, *Admiral Ambassador to Russia* (Chicago, 1955), 380. Several diplomatic and propaganda historians have briefly mentioned the film’s Kremlin exhibition, including Gaddis, *United States and the Origins of the Cold War*, 44–45; William Taubman, *Stalin’s American Policy: Entente to Détente to Cold War* (New York, 1982), 59; Culbert, “Our Awkward Ally,” 136–37; and Culbert, “Introduction,” 36–37. Standley to Secretary of State, telegram, May 25, 1943, Russia: July 1942–1943 Folder, box 49, President’s Secretary’s File, Roosevelt Papers; Cordell Hull for Roosevelt, memo, May 27, 1943, *ibid.*

Davies held a very different view. He wrote Harry Warner, telling him of “the favorable and even enthusiastic comments by some of the living characters portrayed in the film. . . . The Marshal [Stalin] and Premier Molotov were generous in their praise of the picture.” At the end of his journey, he informed the president that the Soviets “feel kindly toward us” and that the “mission here could not have been more satisfactory.”³⁶

Davies was right. His reporting clouded by growing bitterness, Standley erred in thinking that Soviet elites would neither like nor release *Mission to Moscow* because it dredged up the purges. In fact, the opposite was true. A foreign capitalist film’s justification for the Nazi-Soviet Pact and its insistence that the purge victims had been guilty were made-to-order domestic propaganda that only lent credence to previous explanations offered by party opinion makers. That realization helped lead Stalin to approve *Mission to Moscow*’s release to the Soviet public, making it one of the first American movies to receive general distribution in well over a decade. However, the production’s unintentional provision of ideological support to the Stalinist regime not only exposed a weakness in Roosevelt’s approach, it also demonstrated the inability of American policy makers to control culture’s uses and meanings once it passed from their hands into the international marketplace. According to a correspondent for the *New York Times* who attended the July 27, 1943, Moscow premiere, Muscovites watched the trial scenes with “intense interest.”³⁷

That said, in spring 1943, when Washington was trying to forge a stable peace and win the war, FDR’s integration of *Mission to Moscow* into his personal diplomacy paid dividends by helping coalesce the alliance. Although neither Roosevelt’s appeals nor *Mission to Moscow* could persuade Stalin to reconsider either his core values or his national security agenda, they—along with the collapse of Soviet-German peace talks, intelligence reports, and other bits of information—helped convince him that a temporary and conditional entente was feasible. The dictator had been persuaded that continued Big Three collaboration offered the best means for achieving Moscow’s immediate geopolitical interests. Given that the Soviet Union had sustained heavy wartime damage and was in no condition to challenge the Anglo-Americans, Moscow needed the Allies’ assistance in attaining German neutralization and reparations, Allied financial assistance to fuel domestic reconstruction, an enduring peace that would give the Kremlin breathing space to retool, and its *sine qua non* of a security ring in eastern Europe. As a gesture of friendship, Stalin timed the dissolution of the Comintern, which had been criticized in the United States for allegedly fomenting revolution there, to coincide with Davies’ visit. More important, despite learning in June that there would be no second front in 1943, he remained within the coalition and fulfilled a pledge

³⁶ Davies to Warner, May 24, 1943, in *Mission to Moscow*, ed. Culbert, 261; *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1943*, III, 657.

³⁷ *New York Times*, July 28, 1943, sec. 1, p. 18. Critics have argued that both Roosevelt’s Soviet policy and the film fostered a belief in the Kremlin that the United States would acquiesce to any action, thus encouraging its postwar expansion in eastern Europe and elsewhere. Taubman, *Stalin’s American Policy*, 39, 59; Mastny, *Russia’s Road to the Cold War*, 84–85.

made during Davies' trip by meeting with Roosevelt and Churchill in Tehran at the first Big Three summit in November.³⁸

With its plentiful imagery of collective security and Soviet-American friendship, *Mission to Moscow* enabled the Kremlin to prepare the Soviet people for that continued diplomatic tack. At the insistence of Stalin, the version of the film released to the Soviet public retained its pro-alliance and internationalist flavors. Although they eliminated a minor scene suggesting that the NKVD had bugged the American embassy, in a departure from both pre- and postwar policy, censors kept others favorably portraying Roosevelt, Davies, and other liberal internationalist Americans and their efforts to work with Stalinist Russia. Soviet audiences heard Davies, in his subtitled prefatory remarks, say that "unity, mutual understanding, confidence in each other was necessary to win the war. It is still more necessary to win the peace, for there can be no durable peace without an agreement among those nations who have won the war that they will project that peace, and maintain that peace, and protect that peace." Sequences in which Litvinov's character, before the League of Nations, and Stalin's character, during his meeting with Davies, enunciated their hopes for great-power cooperation also remained. Censors retained depictions of Soviet and American citizens freely interacting within the Soviet Union's borders. When the Davies' limousine stopped in front of Polina Molotov's cosmetics factory, several Soviet boys rushed to it, admiring both the modern automobile and its prominently displayed American flags. Soviet viewers also saw Ambassador Davies, his wife, and their daughter enjoying warm personal relationships with leading Soviet citizens, including Stalin, Molotov, Ambassador Litvinov and his family, and a fictional Red Army officer.³⁹

Official reactions, most of which were closely monitored by the CPSU, indicated that in ruling circles *Mission to Moscow* was received as an expression of Soviet-American condominium. Although like others Ivan G. Bol'shakov, head of the Soviet film monopoly, the Council of People's Commissars' Committee on Cinematography Affairs (Komitet po Delam Kinematografii, KDK), privately found its ste-

³⁸ On Moscow's mid-1943 foreign policy, see Taubman, *Stalin's American Policy*, 38–40, 74–75; Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928–1941* (New York, 1990), 233–35; Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 6, 12, 26–35; Vladimir O. Pechatnov, *The Big Three after World War II: New Documents on Soviet Thinking about Post-War Relations with the United States and Great Britain*, Cold War International History Project, Working Paper no. 13 (Washington, 1995), 5–6, 8–9, 16–17; Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years* (New York, 1996), 6, 21, 23; and Volkogonov, *Stalin*, 484–86. Although the Kremlin did abolish the Comintern in May 1943, the Party Central Committee's Department of International Information clandestinely continued to direct the worldwide Communist movement. See Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (New York, 1997), 204–11. On the Kremlin's fear of the secret Anglo-American project to develop atomic weapons, see David Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic Energy, 1939–1956* (New Haven, 1994), 84, 96, 364–65, 368.

³⁹ *New York Times*, July 28, 1943, sec. 1, p. 18. On negative pre- and postwar presentations of capitalists and the United States in Soviet culture, see *Tsirk'* (The circus), dir. Grigorii Aleksandrov (Mosfilm, 1936); Vsesoiuznyi Gosudarstvennyi Fond Kinofil'mov (All-Union State Film Foundation), *Sovetskie khudozhestvennyi filmy: Annotirovannyi katalog* (Soviet feature films: An annotated catalog) (3 vols., Moscow, 1961), I, 487–88; J. D. Parks, *Culture, Conflict, and Coexistence: American-Soviet Cultural Relations, 1917–1958* (Jefferson, 1983), 121–22; Turovskaya, "1930s and 1940s," 47.

reotypical displays of “enormous samovars, bearded men, dancing gopaks, sledges decorated with flowers and the like” laughable and “naïve,” the press offered public praise. According to the Soviet newspapers *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, *Vechernaia Moskva*, and *Izvestiia*, the movie, which played in at least six separate Moscow theaters, was “an act of friendly gratitude towards the Soviet Union and the Red Army.” In *Pravda* reviewer N. Sergeev approvingly noted that *Mission to Moscow's* aim was “to promote mutual understanding and [to] strengthen the bonds between two great countries.” Moscow's approval of the picture's message reached a peak in early 1944, when Vladimir Dekanozov, an NKVD agent assigned to the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del, MID), informed the American embassy that his government wanted to confer official awards on *Mission to Moscow's* producers for their work in strengthening bilateral ties.⁴⁰

While popular viewers in the Soviet Union also welcomed the American picture's expressions of political goodwill, some clandestinely derived alternative interpretations that neither American nor Soviet elites intended to communicate. As they did, *Mission to Moscow* emerged as an engine of American influence. Those popular interpretations exemplified the inability of propagandists, even Stalinist opinion makers, to regulate the multiplicity of public meanings made from cultural artifacts.⁴¹

Frederick C. Barghoorn, a junior officer stationed at the American embassy in Moscow, spoke with several Soviet citizens, all of whom said that *Mission to Moscow's* depictions of the standard of living in the Soviet Union were “funny.” To Soviet viewers unaccustomed to personal comforts, plentiful necessities, and consumer goods, the window display at the “USSR Cosmetic Factory,” the ubiquity of food and modern automobiles, and the well-dressed American and Soviet citizens depicted in the movie were all “fantastically luxurious.” Rather than simply dismissing the American production as hopelessly parochial, however, Barghoorn's contacts confided that such scenes revealed to them the expectations of its original American audience, who enjoyed higher standards of living. For Barghoorn that view was confirmed when, sometime after the war on a flight from Tbilisi to Moscow, he struck up a conversation with a well-educated and relatively wealthy Georgian woman. The wife of a Red Army officer, she confessed to having watched such American movies as *Mission to Moscow*, but she had found them “depressing” because they so clearly contrasted the material quality of life in the Soviet Union with that in the United States. In light of those revelations, other Soviet reactions made more sense. Stefan Sharff, a Moscow correspondent for the *New York Times*, reported that Mus-

⁴⁰ The British embassy in Moscow monitored the Soviet press. See “Monthly Report on the Distribution of British Films in the USSR,” July 1943, document N 5651/9/38, FO 371/36921, Foreign Office Records (Public Record Office, Kew, Eng.). On official Soviet commendations, see W. Averell Harriman to Secretary of State, telegram, Jan. 22, 1944, 861.4061 Motion Pictures/79, Records of the Department of State, RG 59 (National Archives).

⁴¹ On the popular deconstruction and then reassembly of American culture at home and abroad, see Rob Kroes, “Americanisation: What Are We Talking About?,” in *Cultural Transmissions and Receptions*, ed. Kroes, Rydell, and Bosscher, 303; and John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Boston, 1989), 5, 11, 15, 19–20, 25, 36, 44, 103–6, 126. Distinctions between popular and elite responses are made by Richard Pells, “Who's Afraid of Steven Spielberg?,” *Diplomatic History*, 24 (Summer 2000), 500–501.

covites were “amused” by a scene showing Tania Litvinov, the ambassador’s daughter, and other Russians “ice skating in an Alpine resort atmosphere.” While American and Soviet policy makers had sought to use the production to build bilateral ties, in the unique context of Stalinist Russia many viewers had disassembled *Mission to Moscow*, taking from it imagery of capitalist life-styles that both fulfilled their own desires and, according to Barghoorn, provided a basis for quiet opposition to the Kremlin. Although unforeseen by Roosevelt, Davies, or the OWI, such interpretations worked to Washington’s long-term advantage.⁴²

Soviet viewers were especially eager to seize upon *Mission to Moscow* because it was one of the first Hollywood movies to play in the Soviet Union in nearly a generation. During the relatively liberal 1920s, American films had been extremely popular in the Soviet Union, in 1927 accounting for almost 59 percent of all those exhibited there. Stalin’s rise to power, however, was accompanied by a cultural revolution, which beginning in 1928 sought to build “socialism in one country” and a socialist consciousness among the masses by cleansing national culture of foreign and bourgeois influence. Among other things, the campaign targeted Hollywood films as the CPSU’s Central Committee purged film libraries of foreign pictures, suppressed domestic productions deemed too Western, and, more important, erected an import ban on foreign movies.⁴³

In late 1942, following a decade in which American cinema was absent from the Soviet Union, Standley had launched attempts to overcome that cultural barrier, which he and Soviet experts in Washington believed bred xenophobia and both ignorance about and hostility toward the United States. With the nations allied, Soviet cultural authorities were also interested, if only hesitatingly, in expanding cultural and informational contacts with the United States and Great Britain. Since it was recognized that the populace was more likely to defend family, home, Mother Russia, and the Eastern Orthodox Church than socialism, for the duration of the wartime emergency the Kremlin loosened social restrictions, muting ideological themes and permitting public displays of Russian nationalism and religious iconography. Given party propagandists’ need to fire domestic morale by informing Soviet citizens about their international antifascist comrades, this temporary liberalization also included the limited dissemination of Allied information and culture. Furthermore, the German invasion, which resulted in the loss of a studio at Kiev and the relocation of other parts of the movie industry either beyond the Ural Mountains or to Central Asia, had gravely weakened a Soviet motion picture industry that even before the hostilities had succeeded in meeting only 20 to 30 percent of its production quotas. Because party propagandists in the Central Committee’s Propaganda and Agitation Administration (Upravlenie Propagandy i Agitatsii, UPA) were thus less able to stoke morale by entertaining the masses and conveying war information

⁴² *New York Times*, July 28, 1943, sec. 1, p. 18; Frederick C. Barghoorn, *The Soviet Image of the United States: A Study in Distortion* (1950; Port Washington, 1969), 229, 242.

⁴³ Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses*, 6–7, 19–20, 31–34; Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, 133–34. Other forms of American popular culture, including jazz, were also suppressed. See S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917–1980* (New York, 1983).

to them, this development impaired the Soviet war effort and stimulated interest in obtaining both supplements to domestic production and cinematic technical assistance from the United States.⁴⁴

After a Moscow conference on Allied film held in summer 1942 at which Bol'shakov indicated the Soviet Union's nascent openness, Standley organized a program sending official United States newsreels and short documentaries to the Soviet capital. To Hull and Roosevelt the ambassador expressed his belief "that much could be accomplished in the development of good will and understanding between the United States and the USSR by making available technical, educational and propaganda . . . films to the Russians." Once Washington indicated its approval, these productions seeped into Stalinist Russia. Standley's program aimed to build Soviet-American comity by countering criticism of the second front's absence through publicity about Lend-Lease aid to the Soviet Union and Anglo-American military activities in North Africa, Italy, and the Pacific. Upon the films' arrival in Moscow, the United States embassy organized demonstrations for, and loaned copies to, the Kremlin, MID, All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (Vsesoiuznoe Obshchestvo Kul'turnykh Sviazei s Zagranitsej, vokS), KDK, the military, and the Soviet Information Bureau (Sovinformburo). On occasion, Bol'shakov's committee edited portions of American newsreels into its own serial, *Soiuzkinozhurnal* (All-Union newsreel), which was widely circulated among popular Soviet audiences.⁴⁵

For some time, Ambassador Standley had tried to leaven his program with Hollywood pictures. The war, defined by FDR and the OWI as a crusade for freedom and democracy, had rekindled Standley's faith in the American way. Eager to share and propagate that outlook, he believed that Hollywood movies were powerful communicators of American cultural influence. That was particularly true in the Soviet

⁴⁴ On Soviet domestic wartime propaganda, see John Barber and Mark Harrison, *The Soviet Home Front, 1941–1945: A Social and Economic History of the USSR in World War II* (London, 1991), 68–79; Mikhail N. Narinsky, "The Soviet Union: The Great Patriotic War?," in *Allies at War: The Soviet, American, and British Experience, 1939–1945*, ed. David Reynolds, Warren F. Kimball, and A. O. Chubarian (New York, 1994), 271, 273; and Sergei Drobashenko and Peter Kenez, "Film Propaganda in the Soviet Union, 1941–1945: Two Views," in *Film and Radio Propaganda in World War II*, ed. K. R. M. Short (Knoxville, 1983), 96. For discussions of wartime shortages and imports of foreign information, see *ibid.*, 96, 111; R. N. Iurenev, "Kinoiskusstvo voennykh let" (Film art during the war years), in *Sovetskaia kul'tura v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny* (Soviet culture during the Great Patriotic War), ed. M. P. Kim (Moscow, 1976), 236; and Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, 105–7, 130–32, 134, 137, 140–44, 186–88, 192–93. For Soviet industrialists' views on the United States, see Joan Hoff Wilson, *Ideology and Economics: U.S. Relations with the Soviet Union, 1918–1933* (Columbia, Mo., 1974), 8–9.

⁴⁵ Standley to Hull and Roosevelt, telegram, Aug. 23, 1942, 861.4061 Motion Pictures/15, State Department Records. On the Moscow conference on Allied film and Soviet expressions of openness, see Ivan G. Bol'shakov, speech, "American and English Films," Aug. 21, 1942, fond 5283, opis' 14, delo 122, list 129, Records of the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (Vsesoiuznoe Obshchestvo Kul'turnykh Sviazei s Zagranitsej, vokS) (State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow); and "Moscow Conference on American and British Cinema," Aug. 21–22, 1942, Vladimir I. Bazykin File, box 1432, Mellett Records, Bureau of Motion Pictures, Domestic Operations Branch, Office of War Information Records; Division of European Affairs, memo, Aug. 27, 1942, 861.4061 Motion Pictures/15, State Department Records; D. W. Spring, "Soviet Newsreel and the Great Patriotic War," in *Propaganda, Politics, and Film, 1918–45*, ed. Nicholas Pronay and D. W. Spring (London, 1982), 280, 284–86. For brief discussions of the program, see Parks, *Culture, Conflict, and Coexistence*, 84–86; and Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 6.

Union, where the wartime cultural liberalization offered unprecedented informational opportunities but Soviet law, although sporadically enforced, still technically criminalized personal contact with foreigners. Finding “the conditions of the common people” in the Soviet Union to be “very low,” Standley wanted to improve their lot by teaching them “about America and Americans, about our ideals, our standards, the way we think, the way we live, [and] our wants and needs in this modern world.” Meanwhile, Assistant Secretary of State Adolf A. Berle Jr. informed foreign missions of the State Department’s belief that commercial movies could promote American power abroad by generating foreign trade surpluses, by acting as salesmen for other American products, and, most important, by projecting “a picture of this nation, its culture, its institutions, [and] its method of dealing with social problems which may be invaluable from the political, cultural, and commercial point of view.” Responding to Berle’s circular, W. Averell Harriman, who in October 1943 replaced Standley as ambassador, agreed that popular cinema was important as a “vehicle for publicizing the American point of view and as a cultural instrument, especially in the Soviet Union.”⁴⁶

Before permanently leaving his post, Standley briefly returned to Washington, where he obtained approval from Hull, Roosevelt, and the head of OWI’s Overseas Operations Branch, Robert Sherwood, to incorporate Hollywood productions into his motion picture information program. Despite strenuous efforts by the ambassador and his cultural attaché Young, by May 1943 only a handful of the program’s feature films had reached the Soviet Union, and none had appeared in public theaters there. Frustrated, Standley concluded, “it is well known that the Soviet Government has long followed a policy of giving the Soviet people a minimum of information concerning foreign countries and in my opinion any radical departure from that policy in the near future is unlikely.”⁴⁷

With those rare exceptions when *Soiuzkinozhurnal* did incorporate United States newsreel footage, before *Mission to Moscow*’s release American statesmen had succeeded in communicating with only a very thin veneer of Soviet elites using official motion pictures. Stalin’s decision to permit *Mission to Moscow*’s general distribution changed that. Responding to this signal of openness from above, the previously reluctant Andrei N. Andrievsky, head of Soiuzintorgkino, the Soviet agency in charge of foreign film trade, signed an agreement with the American embassy codifying the bilateral exchange of nontheatrical shorts and newsreels.

⁴⁶ Standley and Ageton, *Admiral Ambassador to Russia*, 244; Costigliola, “‘Mixed Up’ and ‘Contact,’” 797. On Americans’ newfound cultural confidence, see Robert Dallek, *The American Style of Foreign Policy: Cultural Politics and Foreign Affairs* (New York, 1983), 125–26, 134–37, 150; Tony Smith, *America’s Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, 1994), 114; Warren Susman, “Introduction,” in *Culture and Commitment, 1929–1945*, ed. Warren Susman (New York, 1973), 9–16, 20, 23; Adolf A. Berle Jr., “American Motion Pictures in the Postwar World,” telegram, Feb. 22, 1944, 800.4061 Motion Pictures/409A, State Department Records; Harriman to Secretary of State, “American Motion Pictures in the Postwar World,” telegram, April 13, 1944, 800.4061 Motion Pictures/458, *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Standley for Secretary of State, “Report on the Exchange of Information between the United States and the Soviet Union,” telegram, April 7, 1943, 861.4061 Motion Pictures/45, State Department Records; Standley and Ageton, *Admiral Ambassador to Russia*, 306, 315; Standley Diary, n.d., Correspondence—John Young/Will H. Hays File, box 17, William H. Standley Papers (Doheny Library, University of Southern California, Los Angeles).

Heartened by Stalin's decision and Andrievsky's reversal, Standley dispatched Young to secure Hollywood's participation. Although it was cooperating with Washington's efforts to build domestic support for the Grand Alliance, the American motion picture industry had been hesitant to provide the Moscow embassy with feature films because it saw no compelling financial interest in doing so. Since 1932 MPPDA members—including the eight major studios: Warner Bros., Loew's Inc.'s Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Twentieth Century-Fox, Paramount, Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO), Columbia, Universal, and United Artists—had sold nary a picture in the Soviet Union. To add insult to injury, when the Red Army had invaded Poland, Romania, and the Baltic states in 1939, the Soviets had appropriated hundreds of the industry's copyrighted movies, and executives saw little point in again risking their intellectual properties in a closed market.⁴⁸

Their reticence quickly disappeared when Young informed the MPPDA president, Will H. Hays, and other industry leaders that the Kremlin had sanctioned *Mission to Moscow's* release and that Soiuzintorgkino was interested in purchasing its distribution rights for around \$25,000. Once they also learned that the Soviet industry had been virtually destroyed by the war and that British competitors were making inroads into the burgeoning market, Hays and managers from the MPPDA companies recognized that they had a unique opportunity to recapture a long-lost, but once profitable, market and to satisfy their corporatist patron, the Roosevelt administration. Fox's Murray Silverstone wrote to George R. Canty, the head of the State Department's Telecommunications Division, "it would be a great achievement if our industry were permitted to open offices and operate directly in Russia. . . . I hope this will be more than a pious thought." Hays had received assurances that the administration, which had protected the industry from domestic antitrust litigation and was then promoting its overseas market interests, was "very much interested in facilitating the distribution of suitable American films in the Soviet Union." Hays encouraged the studios to provide Young with an initial supply of forty-eight features and thirty-seven theatrical shorts. Once feature films arrived in the Soviet Union, the United States embassy hosted premieres and then loaned copies to Bol'shakov's KDK and Andrievsky's Soiuzintorgkino. While Bol'shakov and Andrievsky decided whether to contract for their distribution rights, they circulated the movies among an "approved list," including Stalin, Molotov, the MID, VOKS, the military, Sovinformburo, and various party-controlled actors' and artists' clubs. As a result, the United States embassy estimated that even before their public exhibition, most Hollywood pic-

⁴⁸ Andrei N. Andrievsky for Solomon A. Lozovskii, "Agreement," Aug. 30, 1943, fond 13, opis' 5, papka 14, delo 246, listy 2-3, Secretariat of Vice-Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Solomon A. Lozovskii (Sekretariat Zam. Narkoma Inostrannykh Del Solomon A. Lozovskogo) (Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, Moscow); Vassily Zarubin, memo, Oct. 4, 1943, fond 13, opis' 5, papka 14, delo 246, list 7, *ibid.* On Poland, see A. M. Loew to Hull, Oct. 10, 1939, 840.6 General, London, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, RG 84 (National Archives); and letter for Harold L. Smith, Dec. 13, 1939, Poland File (reel 5), Motion Picture Association of America General Correspondence.

tures had played before audiences of at least twelve thousand intellectuals and Soviet state, military, and party elites.⁴⁹

Following a rigorous selection process involving the KDK, the UPA, and ultimately Stalin, during the war years Soiuzintorgkino purchased the public distribution rights to almost two dozen pictures for prices ranging from \$25,000 to \$50,000 each. Although compared with receipts generated in other markets such fees were quite small, movie industrialists hoped that the initial sales would eventually lead to larger revenues. As had *Mission to Moscow*, several of the American movies seen by popular Soviet viewers conveyed pro-Soviet sentiments. The majority, however, presented the United States as a prosperous, free, and amusing country. By detailing what one reviewer called the Horatio “Algeresque” tale of Thomas A. Edison’s mythical rise from obscurity to world renown as an inventor, MGM’s *Edison, the Man*, suggested that the American dream was alive and well, permitting citizens to rise up and achieve prosperity by dint only of their hard work. The Jack Benny comedy *Charley’s Aunt* and the Sonja Henie musical *Sun Valley Serenade* conveyed the sense that the good life of personal fulfillment and entertainment was available to most Americans, who also had the means and leisure time to pursue it. Like *Sun Valley Serenade*, other pictures, including the Deanna Durbin musical *His Butler’s Sister*, *Appointment for Love* starring Charles Boyer, and Columbia’s *The Men in Her Life*, were set in such relatively opulent surroundings as upper-middle-class urban apartments, the estates of Broadway playwrights, or winter resorts. As had *Mission to Moscow*, those films, while entertaining Soviet audiences, empowered them to compare celluloid westerners’ standards of living with their own. One American review of *Sun Valley Serenade*, for instance, noted that its presentation of people enjoying “luxuries in one of the world’s most magnificent Winter resorts” was a “visual delight” and a “poor man’s substitute” for actually being there.⁵⁰

United States and Soviet officials felt that the overall effect of Hollywood movies, which by all accounts were both popular and effective in communicating ideal versions of the American way of life, was a corrosion of the Kremlin’s ideological

⁴⁹ Murray Silverstone to George R. Canty, Jan. 30, 1945, 861.4061 Motion Pictures/1-3045, State Department Records; “Sales of American Films to Soviet Russia,” memo, June 16, 1943, Foreign Relations—Russia File (reel 10), Motion Picture Association of America General Correspondence; Hays to John G. Bryson, June 15, 1943, *ibid.*; Breckinridge Long to Hays, June 28, 1943, Correspondence—John Young/Will H. Hays File, box 17, Standley Papers. For the embassy’s estimation, see George F. Kennan, “Motion Picture Program for U.S.S.R.,” telegram, Feb. 18, 1946, 840.6 Motion Pictures, Moscow, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State.

⁵⁰ For American-made pro-Soviet movies receiving general circulation, see *The North Star*; *Song of Russia*; and *The Battle of Russia*, dir. Frank Capra and Anatole Litvak (U.S. Army Special Service Division, 1943). The lone exception to positive portrayals of American life was *The Little Foxes*, a “socially conscious” picture based upon a screenplay by the leftist writer Lillian Hellman that criticized a turn-of-the-century southern family’s greed. See *The Little Foxes*, dir. William Wyler (RKO, 1941). Kennan, “Motion Picture Program for U.S.S.R.”; *New York Times*, June 7, 1940, sec. 1, p. 27; *Edison, the Man*, dir. Clarence Brown (MGM, 1940); *Charley’s Aunt*, dir. Archie Mayo (Twentieth Century–Fox, 1941); *Sun Valley Serenade*, dir. H. Bruce Humberstone (Twentieth Century–Fox, 1941); *His Butler’s Sister*, dir. Frank Borzage (Universal Pictures, 1943); *Appointment for Love*, dir. William A. Seiter (Universal Pictures, 1941); *The Men in Her Life*, dir. Gregory Ratoff (Columbia Pictures, 1941); *New York Times*, Sept. 6, 1941, sec. 1, p. 20; *The American Film Institute Catalog of Motion Pictures Produced in the United States* (23 vols., Berkeley, 1993–1999), F3, 564–65; F4, 92–93, 403–4, 1049–50, 1527–28, 2378–79.

monopoly. The United States embassy reported that commercial films were “particularly in demand” and that one of its Soviet employees had repeatedly been “offered bribes by various organizations desirous of borrowing pictures.” Convinced that interest had been stirred in American films and “in our country,” Ambassador Harriman lauded movies’ success in reaching the “opinion forming audience in Moscow.” After gauging the effects of *Mission to Moscow* and other productions, American diplomats praised their mass appeal. They believed that in conjunction with Washington’s broader informational program, movies had demonstrated the superior American standard of living to many Soviet viewers. Edward Ames, a junior officer assigned to the United States embassy in Moscow, claimed that because of the CPSU’s prewar regimentation of domestic cultural life, the Soviet Union had experienced almost complete cultural isolation, producing xenophobia and a populace incapable of comprehending its poor living conditions. Cinematic information had changed that, he argued, leading some to “acquire a great craving for things foreign, [to] go to the American movies, and [to] attempt to do things as they are done abroad.” American films had made “it possible for the Russians to get an idea of how people in other countries looked, dressed and acted. Admitting the inadequacies of the Hollywood film as a picture of American life, still the movie has been a great eye-opener.”⁵¹

By the latter stages of World War II, the United States had established an informational and cultural beachhead in the Soviet Union. His concerns dispelled by American displays, cinematic and otherwise, of pro-Soviet attitudes, in late 1943 Molotov had reversed course and acceded to the establishment of an OWI outpost in Moscow. Thereafter, the bureau informed “the Russian people about American life, American culture, [and] America’s part in the war” by providing Soviet news authorities with United States press reports and photographs, arranging radio contacts, distributing two specially made magazines and an official information bulletin, and maintaining a reference library open to the public. From 1942 through 1945, America’s communicative power grew as officials distributed over one hundred and fifty newsreels, around fifty official short documentaries, and approximately seventy-three feature films, two dozen of which were seen by broad Soviet audiences. While at first glance that latter figure seemed insignificant, it was a noteworthy threat to the decrepit Soviet motion picture industry, which in 1944 produced only twenty-five features and in 1945 a record low of nineteen.⁵²

⁵¹ Kennan, “Motion Picture Program for U.S.S.R.”; Harriman, “American Motion Pictures in the Postwar World”; Harriman to Secretary of State, telegram, Nov. 6, 1945, 861.4061 Motion Pictures/11-645, State Department Records; Edward Ames, “Cultural Lags in the Soviet Union,” Oct. 27, 1945, 842 Cultural Relations, Moscow, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State; Barghoorn, *Soviet Image of the United States*, 242.

⁵² Samuel Spewack for Robert Sherwood, telegram, Nov. 16, 1943, Moscow Cables File, box 829, Office of Policy Coordination, Director of Overseas Operations, Office of War Information Records; “The O.W.I. and the U.S.S.R.,” n.d., O.W.I. and the U.S.S.R. File, box 1716, Records of the Chief, Liaison Office, Overseas Operations Branch, *ibid.*; Vsesoiuznyi Gosudarstvennyi Fond Kinofil’mov, *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye filmy*, III appendices, 15–23; Kennan to Secretary of State, Dec. 14, 1945, 840.6 Motion Pictures, Moscow, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State; Drobashenko and Kenez, “Film Propaganda,” 96.

Soviet authorities, who in summer 1944 began to withdraw from cinematic contacts, were cognizant of American movies' ideological and economic powers. The retreat first manifested itself when, despite earlier assurances from Bol'shakov and Stalin, the KDK refused to include newsreel footage of the D day invasion in *Soiuzkinozhurnal*. Although earlier plans had called for the purchase of fifteen Hollywood features that year, in August 1944 the committee informed American diplomats that it was under new orders to contract only for the explicitly pro-Soviet *Song of Russia* and those portraying "American life and society in an unflattering light." According to Andrievsky, Soviet cultural authorities pulled back because in just over a year, audiences had acquired "a taste" for Hollywood movies, enabling those products to recapture a sizable share of the domestic market and imperil the native industry. More important, by demonstrating the higher American standard of living and empowering Soviet viewers to compare it with their own, Hollywood had begun to compete with the party for viewers' hearts and minds. In June 1944 the Soiuzintorgkino chief explained to an OWI representative, "films contrary to Russian ideology were not acceptable, no matter how good technically they might be." It soon became clear that Moscow's disengagement was an initial step in a much broader cultural cleansing, which was reminiscent of the earlier Stalinist cultural revolution and a direct response to the wartime influx of Allied movies and other cultural forms. By early 1946 Andrei A. Zhdanov, the party's chief ideologue and head of the UPA, directed a campaign that purged the national culture of bourgeois and alien influence, reduced Soviet contacts with the outside world, and formed an intellectual basis for the postwar extension of socialism to eastern Europe.⁵³

Perceiving the sharply diverging responses by official and popular Soviet groups to foreign cultural stimuli, by the war's end American statesmen gained an increasing appreciation of "soft power." As Ames's analysis suggests, American culture had penetrated so deeply that some State Department experts detected a growing, and exploitable, gulf separating the Soviet people from the Kremlin. Barghoorn, calling ordinary citizens the party's "Achilles Heel," claimed that the United States had emerged as a popular, but still subterranean, symbol of opposition to authoritarian rule. Not long after the war's conclusion, George F. Kennan, who had returned to the Moscow embassy in 1944, argued in his influential "long telegram" that "never since the termination of civil war have [the] mass of Russian people been emotionally farther removed from [the] doctrines of [the] Communist Party than they are today." Rather than succumbing to CPSU propaganda, the Soviet public was "remarkably resistant in the stronghold of its innermost thoughts." In a separate

⁵³ Harriman to Secretary of State, telegram, Aug. 25, 1944, 861.4061 Motion Pictures/8-2544, State Department Records; Parks, *Culture, Conflict, and Coexistence*, 96; Melby to Ferdinand Kuhn and Robert Riskin, telegram, June 24, 1944, Foreign Relations—Russia File (reel 10), Motion Picture Association of America General Correspondence; "All-Soviet Union Communist Party Central Committee Propaganda and Agitation Administration Meeting Regarding the Film Question," minutes, April 26, 1946, fond 17, opis' 125, delo 378, listy 5–6 All-Union Communist Party Central Committee (Tsentral'nyi Komitet, VKP) (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, Moscow); Parks, *Culture, Conflict, and Coexistence*, 116–18; Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 123–25.

lengthy “cinematic telegram,” the architect of containment claimed the wartime introduction of Hollywood movies had helped expose that divide and contended that, despite the party’s renewed ban, Washington should continue sending movies to Moscow. There, they could project an ideal “exposition of American life” and counteract the growing sense, fostered by CPSU propaganda, that the Soviet people were “surrounded by enemies, that they are in the midst of a crisis, which must culminate in war with the capitalist west and that they must therefore sacrifice their personal well-being and material enjoyment for the furthering of Soviet might and power.” Such sentiments would not have been inconsistent with those of Roosevelt, who had a deep faith in liberal Americanism and throughout the war supported OWI programs that spread that ideology abroad. Confident that overseas audiences would be attracted to the high American standard of living and to the entertaining American mass media, Roosevelt proposed the creation of so-called free zones of information in Europe designed to promote United States, and to limit Soviet, influence.⁵⁴

Kennan’s recommendations, which guided policy regarding the Soviet Union for the next several years, led the State Department to incorporate Hollywood into its Cold War cultural offensive and to promote the industry’s sales in the Soviet Union. Because the Soviet movie industry continually failed to meet production quotas, by early 1947 the CPSU relented somewhat and permitted the distribution of limited numbers of Hollywood movies. During the coldest days of the Cold War, America had rare cinematic voices with which to speak to Soviet audiences. While not large, Hollywood’s sales, which during World War II totaled from \$600,000 to \$1.2 million and in the late forties equaled roughly \$1 million, would not have been possible without diplomats’ intervention. Promising to uphold his end of the corporatist bargain that had begun to coalesce eight years earlier, in 1948 Eric Johnston, then head of the MPPDA’s successor, the Motion Picture Association of America, assured foreign policy makers that no “films which could be used to portray the United States of America in an unfavorable light would be” sold to the Soviets.⁵⁵

Mission to Moscow had facilitated the reintroduction of American movies into the Soviet Union and their integration into Washington’s wartime and Cold War cultural offensives. At home, the picture was the result of an intricate and corporatist web of power relationships constructed by Roosevelt, Davies, OWI propagandists, and movie industrialists who hoped that the film would undergird American might abroad by silencing anticommunism and by cultivating a domestic consensus for the administration’s pro-Soviet policy. They failed, however, as most domestic viewers either remained unconvinced or rejected *Mission to Moscow*’s unentertaining, pro-

⁵⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946* (11 vols., Washington, 1969–1972), VI, 698, 707; Barghoorn, *Soviet Image of the United States*, xiii, 229–30. Kennan reiterated his views in George Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs*, 25 (July 1947), 577; and Kennan to Freeman Matthews, undelivered letter, 1945, Writings and Publications (1934–1949) File, box 23, George Kennan Papers (Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, N.J.); Kennan, “Motion Picture Program for U.S.S.R.”; Kimball, *Juggler*, 10, 18–19, 102, 182, 186–87, 191, 198.

⁵⁵ Moscow embassy to Secretary of State, airgram, Sept. 21, 1948, 861.4061 Motion Pictures/9-2148, State Department Records; Dean Acheson to Moscow embassy, telegram, April 11, 1947, 861.4061 Motion Pictures/4-1147, *ibid.*

Soviet, and overtly propagandistic character. But this cultural artifact had another, unprecedented application to statecraft. When FDR and Davies used it to persuade Stalin of the Grand Alliance's strength, they integrated *Mission to Moscow* into the process of diplomatic negotiation, making it an instrument for achieving geopolitical power. Once the Kremlin took the unanticipated step of releasing the film to the Soviet public, an entirely new set of forces was unleashed, some beyond Washington's control or expectations. Although in its Soviet context the picture helped legitimate the Stalinist regime, as Soviet viewers teased out its enticing imagery of the good life in the capitalist United States, *Mission to Moscow* emerged as a weapon of "soft power." More important, its public release opened the previously closed Soviet Union to legions of Hollywood movies. While generating foreign revenues and threatening the Soviet industry, those pictures augmented *Mission to Moscow's* ideological influence by championing an American prosperity that stood in stark contrast to Soviet audiences' experiences.