

For White Men Only: 1950s Science Fiction Films in Soviet Russia and the United States

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Scholars read 1950s science fiction films – particularly those including extra-terrestrial or mutated monsters – as expressions of American anxieties, whether of African American emancipation, female liberation, nuclear catastrophe, or communist invasion. However, these perspectives rarely examine the construction of whiteness and its intersection with gender and sexuality, although these films overwhelmingly portray white, heterosexual men of science, the military, or space travel as their heroes. By looking at the adaptation of Soviet science fiction films for American audiences in the 1950s, this paper aims to analyze the intersections of masculinity, sexuality, and whiteness in the period from a transnational perspective.

In my presentation, I will compare the two-hour Russian sci-fi film *Nebo Zovyot* (1959) about a Soviet space crew rescuing an overzealous U.S. spaceship from sure disaster with its heavily edited and dubbed American version *Battle Beyond the Sun* (1959). The latter, solely concerned with American astronauts, fundamentally deviates from the narrative and tone of the original; especially when, towards the end, the film shows an epic battle between two black space monsters resembling male and female genitalia not included in the original. Following Vivian Sobchack who described (American) sci-fi astronauts as virginal, bland, interchangeable, robotic, banal, and unimaginative, I examine the intersections of masculinity, sexuality, and whiteness in the two sci-fi films particularly with regards to their portrayal of space travelers, their depiction of (adventure in) space, and practices of othering. By comparing *Nebo Zovyot* and *Battle Beyond the Sun*, this paper argues that Soviet masculinity is constructed politically against an imperialist, male Other, whereas American masculinity is imagined culturally against a feminized and 2 racialized monstrous Other. By so doing, this paper situates the construction of American whiteness in 1950s sci-fi films in its cultural, historical, and political context to contribute to the attempts of third wave whiteness studies to particularize whiteness.