

# Americans are consumed by social media history essay

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A wartime film released in 1942 called *The Flying Tigers* was about a team of American pilots who came forward to help the innocent Chinese fight off their vicious Japanese attackers. The movie characterized the Chinese as helpless and innocent civilians who were taking a stand against Japanese forces. They were heroes for withstanding the enemy for as long as they had before Americans intervened. The Chinese were portrayed as honorable people who were grateful for American assistance and were determined to join together with the American pilots to defeat the Japanese. Just a short time after that the characterization of the Chinese appeared to be the polar opposite of that in the *Flying Tigers* film. The 1962 film *The Manchurian Candidate* depicted an American POW soldier during the Korean war who had been brainwashed by the Chinese communists to carry out their evil conspiracy to kill an American presidential candidate so a member of the communist party could become president. The Chinese were now the ruthless enemy who wanted to capture the minds and souls of American POWs for their own experimentation. Within a short amount of time Hollywood's illustration of the Chinese had changed drastically from over the top hero to wicked brainwashing communists. These films were one of many government controlled sources presented to the public that helped Americans form their own opinions of the Chinese, although it may not have been known by the public exactly how much control the government had on what information was presented to them. The government consciously and quickly shaped American perception and cultural attitudes of the Chinese from the late 1940s to the Cold War through media and propaganda. In the past half century there have been many works published by historians analyzing the

Second World War and the Korean War. Most scholars focused on U. S. diplomacy and a few domestic issues in general. Works such as *How the Far East was Lost: American Policy and the Communist Creation of China 1941-1949*, *America's Failure in China 1941-1950*, and *The China Tangle: The American Effort in China from Pearl Harbor to the Marshall Mission* were published in the 1950's and 1960's, during the height of the Sino-American conflict, criticized U. S. wartime policymakers for their decisions regarding China. These books argued that the U. S. failed to recognize the severity of the threat posed by communist leader Mao Zedong and didn't provide sufficient support for nationalist leader Chiang Kai-Shek, resulting in the loss of China. The 1970's saw a slight improvement in Sino-American relations. The book *Stillwell & The American Experience* and *The U. S. Crusade in China* both harshly criticized U. S. policymakers for not dropping Chiang Kai-Chek and favoring Mao during the War. Other literary works that discuss U. S.-China relations during World War II also focused a great deal on Americas' alliance with China in effort to stop the Japanese. Wesley Bagby's book *The Eagle-Dragon Alliance: America's Relations with China in World War 2* analyzed U. S. relations with China and how China was America's "friend." Franklin Roosevelt sought to raise up China and saw China as "the Fourth Policeman" along with the Big Three. However, relations with America and China changed drastically in a short period of time as can be seen following World War II. Works such as, *The Child of Conflict: The Korean-American Relationship*, *The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941-1950* extended studies into the late 1940s and the early 1950s instead of just stopping at 1945. The focus still continued on the general theme of

diplomacy in World War II but more so as how it would lead into Cold War era policies. The books published in the 1980s and 1990s tend to focus on a broad range of topics such as communism, U. S. policy of containment, formal policies, economics, politics, and trade relations. Upon the opening of Korean documentation, there was a vast increase in the number of studies done about the war and the origin of that conflict. Books like *Origins of the Korean War*, *The Road to Confrontation: American policy towards China and Korea 1947-1950* focused largely on tracing the origins of U. S. involvement in Korea from Pearl Harbor to the 1950s. Works like *The Korean War and Korea: The War before Vietnam* described this war as a power struggle between the United States and the communist Soviet Union that simply imposed on a civil war between North and South Korea. Another general topic historians wrote about was communist coordination with a particular focus on Chinese-Soviet coordination. Books like *The Korean War an International History* and *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* argue that without soviet coordination and support there would not have been a Korean War in the first place. There is an abundant amount of literature on the U. S. diplomacy during World War II , as well as an outstanding amount of literature on the Korean War and why the U. S. decided to cross the 38th parallel. The majority of historians focused on the political and military motives of entering the wars and analyzed or criticized the big named leaders such as Roosevelt, Truman, Chiang Kai-Shek, and Mao Zedong. It is apparent through these books how the leaders felt about each other and other nations but there has been little research to how the American citizens themselves felt about the war.

American perception and cultural attitudes during wartime is an area of research often neglected by historians. While still analyzing government policy during World War II and the Cold War this research is geared towards the government's role in media and its effects it had on public opinion. During wartime government officials had to find a way to rally up support and influence American perception of the war and they did so mainly through controlling information that was presented to the public through media and propaganda. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor launched the U. S. into a war against Japan. In the early morning hours of December 7, 1941 American soldiers were abruptly woken to explosions and horrifying screams. The Japanese had launched an attack on what was thought to be America's safest military spot, Pearl Harbor. The attack devastated the United States and left Americans extremely hostile towards the Japanese. The following day on December 8, the United States declared war against Japan. The United States having been previously under a policy of isolationism found herself in the middle a world war yet again. America's primary objective was to seek revenge against the Japanese and contain communism but officials knew that in order to do so they needed to befriend an unlikely candidate, the Chinese. The Chinese were an important ally and the key to defeating Japan and containing the spread of communism. China was extremely vulnerable at that time and were too weak to resist invasion because of her own domestic tensions caused by a civil war. The Japanese occupied certain parts of China and President Franklin Roosevelt wanted to help the free China from Japanese occupation for he knew that "...that the defense of China was vital to the defense of America and shipped \$26 million in lend-

lease arms in 1941." President Roosevelt was determined to keep China open to American trade and maintain the balance of power in Asia which meant protecting China's independence and stopping Japan from taking control of all of Asia. The suspended Chinese civil war had left with two leaders communist leader Mao Zedong and nationalist Chiang Kai-Shek. Roosevelt struggled with the idea of dealing with communists at time but the communist Chinese made many offers to help the United States in the war against Japan. Roosevelt sent forces to China in order to help train and advise their military because the cooperation between the communist and nationalist Chinese was "...considered essential to directing China's full military strength against the Japanese." China hoped that American aide "... would bring food, clothing, medicine, weapons, and ammunitions for the Chinese armies, trucks and oil to carry them into battle." After Japanese surrender in 1945 the Chinese civil war became unsuspected between nationalist leader Chiang Kai-Shek and communist leader Mao Zedong. Following Japanese surrender armed communist Chinese forces pushed their way into previously occupied areas and expanded communist control over China. The United States found itself caught in the middle of a Chinese civil war. " If China collapsed the whole goal of American policy in the far east would be lost." Although the U. S. urged mediation between the two America ultimately had no choice but to choose a side "...the choice for the United States was between Chiang's government, which was friendly, and Mao Zedong's Red Revolutionary army, which was a puppet of Stalin." By late 1945 the United States made it their official policy to only support Chiang Kai-Shek's nationalist government. Although Chiang's administration was

plagued with corruption Roosevelt felt that he was the only leader strong enough to hold the Chinese people together. The United States continued "... to reject aid to Chinese communist and exclusively support Chiang, and quickly saw each other as becoming the enemy." In 1949 China ultimately fell to Mao Zedong's communist forces. " Events, Personalities, and misconceptions combined to produce mutual hostility tied America to the losing side of the civil war, and set course that put China into the camp of America's enemies." Mao and his party now had total over China and declared China a communist state. The Nationalist Chinese blamed Americans for losing the mainland to communism so "...the anti-American feeling began to spread and deepen." President Truman caught most of the criticism for having lost China to communism many critics felt he didn't do as much as he could have any gave up way too easily. Confrontation began to developed between the United States and Communist China which lead to issues in Korea, Indochina, and Formosa. The United States' focus of concerns was now drifting from mainland China to problems concerning civil war in Korea and Vietnam. Korea became an area of confrontation between the United States and Communist China. Mao and the Chinese communist party began to take a particular interest in the Korean peninsula. Pre-war boundaries established that North Korea would be communist and South Korea would be nationalist. North Korean communist were happy to gain support from communist China. The United States officials felt that "... abandoning Korea to Communism seemed politically hazardous." U. S. officials decided their "...response to this challenge would be governed by a firm resolve to contain any further expansion of Communist China's power

and to safeguard American interest at all costs." By the 1950s the United States had failed to enforce an effective strategy to deter communism in Korea and the Chinese had progressed into parts of North Korea. The United States saw China's entrance into the Korean War as a well-organized communist plot to achieve global expansion. President Truman then made the executive decision to send U. S. forces to South Korea in order to help contain the spread of communism. South Korea now had America's full support and the United States geared up to fight a global Cold War.