Anti-Communist Trading Cards, 1951

Introduction

On June 25, 1950, war broke out on the Korean peninsula when the Soviet-backed Communist forces in North Korea invaded the recently founded democratic republic of South Korea. Following a unanimous UN resolution condemning the invasion, President Harry S. Truman committed US troops to the conflict. During the 1950s, the United States took the lead in fighting against North Korea to combat the spread of Communism. The events in Korea contributed to the escalation of the Cold War, a decades-long rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union. Active combat on the Korean peninsula ended in a cease-fire in 1953, but no peace treaty has ever been signed. The legacy of the Korean War continues to shape relations between the United States, South Korea, and North Korea.

This set of 48 trading cards entitled Fight the Red Menace: Children’s Crusade against Communism was designed to teach American children about the threatened spread of Communism. They were part of the propaganda initiative to gain the support of Americans for the war by creating fear and demonizing the enemy. Each card features a dramatic, colorful depiction of American military heroes and victories, or Communist villains and their atrocities. The text on the reverse uses strong language to focus on the threat posed by Communism, building on fears of infiltration at home and military attacks from abroad. The cards were officially marketed to children. However, the inclusion of a note encouraging children to tell their parents to read the Department of State Bulletin “if they want to learn more about the brutal conditions of life under communism” is a clear indication the cards were intended for an adult audience as well.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the mood and tone of the five images?
2. Read the text that was printed on the back of the cards. What is the most powerful phrase in each text? Describe why each one is powerful.
3. Based on the images and texts on the cards, list three values that the creators believe are important or central to the American democratic way of life. Use examples from the text to support your answer.
4. List three Communist activities that, according to the creators of the cards, threaten American democratic values.
5. Look at the faces and colors in the cards. How does the artist use colors and depictions of people to support his point of view?
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Images

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Bowman Gum Company, Philadelphia, PA, 1951. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC09627.03)
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