

Patriot games

U.S. propaganda led to a generation of paranoia



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"We are the children of Marx and Coca-Cola." —from the film "Masculine Feminine"

When Jean-Luc Godard made this statement in his 1966 film, he, in one title card, summed up what it was to be alive during the turbulent '60s.

I don't know about you, but being a child of Marx and Coca-Cola sounds like child's play to being labeled a part of Generation X — I made the cut by only a year or two.

Back in the grunge period of the 1990s, cynics pointed out Gen Xers who were then 20-somethings and cried that they would bring about the fall of America.

Maybe the older folks in our generation had a good reason to stay on the couch. Perhaps it was something they saw on television that made them scared. Could it be ... Russia?

No other generation in history has been subject to such an onslaught of propaganda of any type than ours.

We were a generation that was taught from

birth that Russia was to be considered Satan materialized in the form of a country hellbent on destroying the American way of life. Forget playing Tom Sawyer down by the creek like my mother did.

We had better things to do — like prepare ourselves for Armageddon.

We also are the first generation that was born into television. Unlike many of our parents who remember when their parents brought home their first picture box, ours were waiting for us to get home from the hospital to seize control of our minds.

And that's exactly how the propaganda spread.

The year was 1982. A young Todd, like every boy age 3-12, was hit by the G.I. Joe craze that was sweeping the nation. For \$2.99 you could be "A real American hero" by owning Torpedo the Navy SEAL, or Stalker the Ranger, or Snake Eyes the Mysterious Commando or my personal favorite, Duke.

Hasbro really scored big with re-releasing the G.I. Joe franchise: a killer toy line that was updated every year, a hit Marvel Comic book and an after-school cartoon.

And the best part was they were equal opportunity all the way: Every race imaginable was represented, as were women.

During my formative years, I lived and breathed G.I. Joe. Occasionally I would slip and get into Transformers or Atari, but my soul was firmly locked into becoming a Joe. My "Yo Joe" days peaked when I rearranged my bedroom to make room for my new \$100, 7-foot long USS Flagg Aircraft Carrier — yep, I was one of those lucky bastards.

So what's the problem? Nothing, if you don't mind that the most popular "boy toy" of

the '80s was centered on the concept of war.

There were never any "Moonbeam the Peaceful Hippie" action figures, unless they were sold at Open Harvest. For five years, I, like every boy at Wasmer Elementary, lived and breathed G.I. Joe; in other words, war.

If we could have joined the Army in third-grade, we would have signed up faster than a stoner with the munchies can devour a Twinkie.

When I wasn't playing G.I. Joe, I loved going to the movies. Like millions in our generation, I too was victim to horrifying propaganda. Trapped in a darkened theater for two hours at a time, our minds were forever warped by the images we saw on the silver screen.

Let's move to 1983. I remember my mom dropping me off at the Grand Theater on a nice Saturday afternoon to a great kids movie "WarGames." When she picked me up, I was so scared of World War III that I hid under my bed until school on Monday. Matthew Broderick and Ally Sheedy had just introduced me to the enemy that was known as Russia.

Months later when the World Wrestling Federation craze hit, I knew right away who the bad guy was. It was that slimy, no good Russian, Nicolai Volkov. He was the guy in the red underwear and furry hat. Every time Hulk Hogan would put him down with his patented "Atomic Leg Drop," I would rejoice by singing the Hulkster's theme song, "I am a real American."

The anti-Russia/pro-war propaganda didn't stop here. Sylvester Stallone had to be one of the most hated men in Russia. In the summer of 1985 he starred in "Rambo" and wiped out a few hundred Russians single handedly. Then on Thanksgiving Day, he kicked Ivan Drago's

commie butt in "Rocky IV: The War."

The most disturbing film of our generation is, without a doubt, 1984's "Red Dawn." This film was nothing more than pro-war propaganda at its absolute worst.

John Wayne's "The Green Berets" looks like "Sesame Street" by comparison. Patrick Swayze and Lea Thompson starred in this apocalyptic film as leaders of a group of teenagers known as the Wolverines who take on the Russians who've invaded their small town at the start of World War III.

To say this film was violent is an understatement. As the first PG-13 movie ever, it featured such great dialogue as C. Thomas Howell saying, "It feels good to kill Russians." For years, "Red Dawn" was the most violent film ever with more than 300 deaths.

I saw it four times. I was 9 years old. I knew World War III was coming and I was ready and waiting with my new Rambo survival knife to keep me company.

How can our generation not be warped?

Luckily I never had to use my Rambo knife. Ronald Reagan and his military industrial complex saved us all. Russia couldn't match the spending of America and called it quits, all without the excitement of Armageddon.

Back to the '90s and Generation X.

As the decade progressed, things have gotten better for Gen X. Many members of our illustrious club have pried themselves off the couch and are getting real jobs and starting to make a difference in the world. Some are even employing those who labeled our generation as slackers.

I just think it took a few years for the Red Scare to wear off.

The anatomy of conflict

Cloning gives life to new questions of legality and morality



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I'm all for cloning people.

It was funny that when cloning was announced nearly everyone jumped to the inevitable conclusion "They can clone me next! Ban it!"

Great. Kill the masses to make a few people feel better.

Have you people thought about what cloning was really invented for? Do you think there are scientists sitting around reading science-fiction thinking "Wow, they've invented a super Kill-O-Zap ray gun here — I wonder if I can invent that" or are you giving the science community more credit than that?

We're dancing along the lines of "Blade Runner" here, but work with me.

The first question about cloning is why are scientists doing it, and that's the easy one.

Take a look at a waiting list for kidneys or lungs or any of a dozen other organs. Do you know why it's so hard to get one? There are tons of people dying all of the time, right?

Tissue has to be compatible, blood types have to be compatible, and doctors have to hope that the body doesn't reject the new organ.

Think there's much chance of your body rejecting your own organ? Think blood shortages will be much of a problem?

So, as you're sitting there dying of liver failure, you think to yourself, I could just have a new one cloned. It would be healthy, it would work in my body, and I'd live longer. Are you going to jump at the chance to live a little longer? Who wouldn't?

This is the main reason cloning is being developed. Perhaps we can start re-growing lost arms and legs in the future. Lost your legs in Vietnam? Just maybe there's hope you'll walk again. Lost your sight in an accident? Maybe you'll be able to see again.

We can re-grow it for you wholesale.

So there's the good aspect. Now to the less than pleasant aspect.

The tough part is that these might be people we're talking about.

Right now, scientists can feasibly clone whole adults. That's the good news. The bad news is that they're complete in every way, brain and all.

Everyone who has seen "Blade Runner" raise your hand.

Is it ethically permissible to clone a person knowing that you are making and killing another human being? That's the real question, isn't it?

I say yes.

If we never let the clone gain consciousness, there is no harm done. Even though we are cloning humans, there is some question on how much of the brain will be cloned. Will the clone have all the memories and thoughts of the original?

Are we, in essence, recreating ourselves?

I hope we never find out.

Grow the clone under sedation, never let it awaken, and take what is necessary from it. The temptation's always going to be there for some scientist to play god, but we can establish watchdogs as best we can.

Sooner or later, though, some-

one's going to clone an infant and raise it just like a regular kid. At that point, that clone is just as human as the rest of us.

Are they human or are they clones? Does the nature of humanity rest in the form or in the soul?

Are they alive?

Are we?

Do you see the kind of messy legal ramifications this is going to have? We're getting down to the core of the issue.

Can we create life?

Yes, we can.

Should we, and what do we do about it once we've created it?

Perhaps, like in the science-fiction series "Red Dwarf," we should mark artificial life, like the holograms in the aforementioned series. They have this flaming "H" on their foreheads.

This brings me back to a dream I had once when I was 17. The idea has remained with me to this very day. Maybe I'll write a book about

it someday with the aid of a couple of lawyers.

Within the next 20 years, humanity is going to invent artificial intelligence. There will be a computer that is sentient before I turn 40. It's going to want its freedom.

A company built this machine. They say they own it. The computer says it can think, reason and is as sentient as any human. "I think therefore I am," it says. "And I think I want to be free."

This and the cloning legality case will be ones that the Supreme Court will be hearing eventually, I would bet; and they're going to have a giant impact on all of us. If AIs are not deemed sentient, we'll have a personal slave in every computer. If they are, is anyone really going to want to create one?

What is the definition of freedom?

How do you define life?

We have learned to create ourselves, and now we are frightened.

There isn't precedent for this, no laws on which the decisions can be founded — none that I could find anyway.

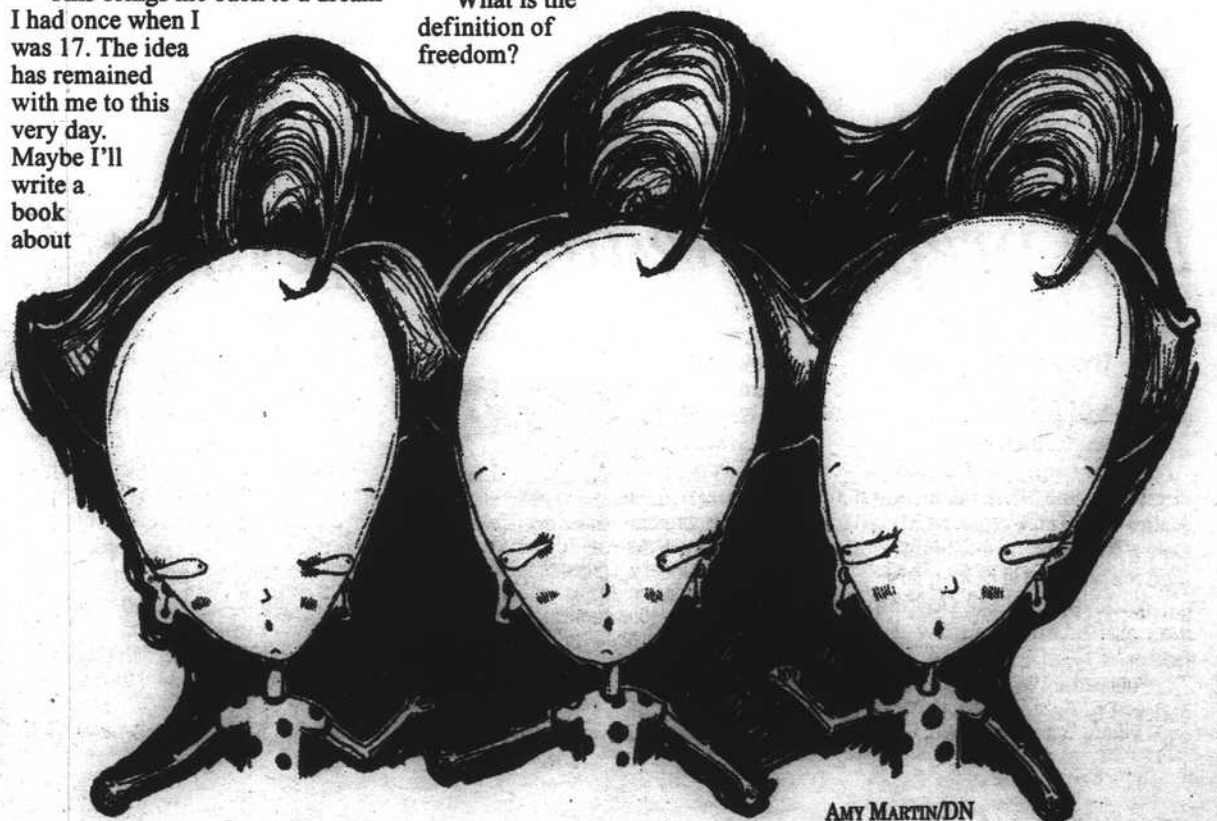
Gods arise among us.

In the words of Hamlet:

"What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How noble is faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me. ..."

The days of gods and madmen cometh.

And mankind shall recreate in its own image. ...



AMY MARTIN/DN