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ing World War II. Such qualities, Norris writes, belied the impression of many atomic scientists of "an uneducated military martinet. . . . Many never understood that behind the bluff and bluster was a man capable of quickly grasping the essentials of most technical problems and whose experience and performance in the administration of grand engineering proposals had few equals."

Thriving in conditions of wartime urgency and secrecy, and possibly keeping, as Norris suggests in a footnote, "the entire Manhattan Project in his head," Groves was able to construct a virtual state-within-a-state. He ran "his own" construction industry, science and intelligence services, air force, state and treasury departments, and exerted such tight control over the final arrangements for Hiroshima and Nagasaki that even military historians have been unable to reconstruct the precise chain of command.

Chapters on Groves's early life, informed by family archives, help explain the source of his ambitions and convictions. His father, Leslie Richard Groves, was an army chaplain who literally sanctified the American imperialist surge of the late 1890s, accompanying troops to Cuba and the Philippines, and even to China to suppress the Boxer Rebellion. By the end of a childhood spent in a succession of military bases with his father often absent, young "Dick" Groves had already been inculcated with patriotism, perseverance, hard work, and a desire for a military career that sent him on a quest, finally fulfilled, to enter West Point. Norris also notes the emergence of his less appealing qualities, which would later land him in trouble, including brusqueness, brashness, intolerance, egotism, Anglophobia, and "some anti-Semitic and racist attitudes, quite typical of the time"—although the author notes Groves's ability to transcend prejudices in individual cases. Accounts of his work on various pre-Manhattan military engineering and construction projects foreshadow the strategies and skills he would employ when the atomic assignment dropped in his lap.

Despite Groves's fast exit from the atomic inner sanctum after World War II and his anticlimactic subsequent career in business and retirement before his death in 1970, Norris shows how his legacies of secrecy and a far-flung military nuclear establishment have persisted even beyond the Cold War.

Above all, Groves will be identified with his central role in creating the bomb, and Norris has written what will likely stand as the defining, if not definitive, narrative of that tale, contributing an essential volume to the growing collection of major studies of key actors in the birth of the nuclear age. ⚛

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Twinkle, twinkle

Sputnik: The Shock of the Century
By Paul Dickson
Walker & Company, 2001
310 pages; $28.00

Mike Moore

PAUL DICKSON IS THE SORT OF AUTHOR historians love to hate. He's not a professional historian; he's a freelance writer, a man with 42 books under his belt. Worse, his books bear titles like *Dickson's Joke Treasury*; *Waiter, There's a Fly in My Soup*; *Words: A Connoisseur's Collection of Old and New, Weird and Wonderful, Useful, and Outlandish Words*; *The Mature Person's Guide to Kites, Yo-Yos, Frisbees, and Other Childlike Diversions*; and, well, you get the idea. Frivolous books, silly books, fun books.

So how is it that Dickson has written a terrific book about Sputnik and the impact it had on American society? Maybe it's because he's a really fine writer. Listen to this passage, in which he describes the launch of the first liquid-fueled rocket, invented by the American space enthusiast, Robert H. Goddard:

"No one had ever built a successful liquid-propellant rocket before, because it was a much more difficult task than building a solid-propellant rocket. Fuel and oxygen tanks, turbines, and combustion chambers were needed. In spite of these difficulties, on March 16, 1926, he stood on a snow-covered field owned by Effie Ward, a distant relative, on a farm in Auburn, Massachusetts, and, with the aid of a blowtorch, launched the world's first liquid-fuel propelled rocket. The 10-foot-long projectile soared to 41 feet at 60 miles an hour, landing in a frozen cabbage patch 184 feet away."

For the purposes of *Sputnik*, we do not need to know much about Goddard. He's just one of several rocket

pioneers sketched briefly in a background chapter. A hundred words or so about that first "flight" seems about right. But details, spare as they are, bring the sentences to life. We do not need to know that the field was snow covered or that Goddard used a blowtorch or that the rocket landed in a "frozen cabbage patch." But it is good story telling, and that is what Dickson's book is all about.

Sputnik is not history with a capital "H." A close student of the space race will not find anything dramatically new in Dickson's book. Although he conducted a few interviews and dug into some dusty archives in his research, he relied mostly on a prodigiously thorough reading of previously published sources. *Sputnik* does not contain astonishing revelations and insights; it simply tells a grand story marvelously well.

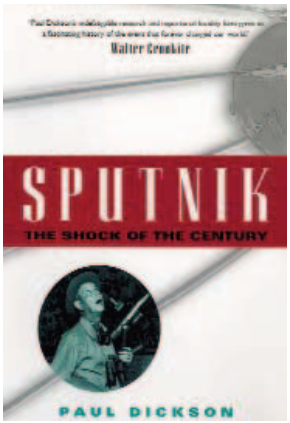
The overarching story is how the Cold War finally pushed humankind into space, decades and even centuries after space travel had been first envisioned by the human mind. (The first journey-to-the moon stories that I've seen were written in the second century A.D. by a satirist, Lucian of Samosata.)

A substory is how so many Americans, some of whom should have known better, went nuts after the launch of Sputnik on October 4, 1957. The director of the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory said, "I would not be surprised if the Russians reached the moon within a week." When asked what we might find on the moon, Edward Teller, co-inventor of the hydrogen bomb, answered, "Russians." The *New York Times* declared that the United States was "in a race for survival." The *Chicago Daily News* editorialized that "the day is not distant when they could deliver a death-dealing warhead onto a predetermined target almost anywhere on the Earth's surface." Senate Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson said, "Soon, they will be dropping bombs on us from space like kids dropping rocks onto cars from freeway overpasses."

Alas, Dickson fails to quote my favorite, a bit of doggerel from G. Mennen Williams, then governor of Michigan:

"Oh Little Sputnik, flying high/ With made-in-Moscow beep,/You tell the world it's a Commie sky,/And Uncle Sam's asleep."

Dickson, however, gets the facts straight about important matters and puts them into their Cold War context. Uncle Sam was not asleep regarding Sputnik, nor was President Eisenhower napping. Top officials, including Eisenhower, knew that the Soviets might well beat the United States into space, although they kept that knowledge to themselves. National security, not a space satellite, was the top priority.



Eisenhower came into office intent on scaling back the arms race by persuading the Soviet Union to cooperate on arms-control measures that would reduce the risk of nuclear war. But he had no illusions about Soviet leaders. He didn't trust them, and he was endlessly fearful that the Soviet Union would provoke war by intention, miscalculation, or incompetence.

Eisenhower understood that the United States had to develop the capability to obtain hard data about Soviet military preparations. The high-flying U-2 spy plane was only a stop-gap. Sooner or later, a U-2 would malfunction or be shot down, and the game would be up. U-2s, by definition, violated Soviet air space. Spy satellites were the way to go.

But how would the United States establish "freedom of space" or "freedom of passage" for satellites? International law was unsettled. Airspace was clearly subject to national sovereignty, but what about space? If the United States sent satellites over the Soviet Union, would it protest? Would it shoot them down? Would satellites inspire an anti-satellite race?

The United States had more to lose than the Soviet Union if the principle of free passage in space were not established. The United States was an open society; its military capabilities were easily ascertainable through ordinary spy techniques, mainly human intelligence. But the Soviet Union was closed; the best way to get hard data would be by technical means—intelligence satellites.

The International Geophysical Year, which would actually run from July 1, 1957, to December 31, 1958, was concocted by scientists. But it offered the Eisenhower administration a heaven-sent opportunity to accomplish its strategic objectives in space.

Both the United States and the Soviet Union said they would launch scientific satellites that year. If the United States were first into space, it would be difficult for the Soviets to protest a peaceful scientific satellite. In turn, a purely scientific satellite might set a precedent for later overflights, which would include top-secret spy satellites that carried the "scientific" label. The satellites we now know as the Corona series—the first photo reconnaissance satellites—were even then under development.

But U.S. interests would also be served—perhaps even better served—if the Soviets launched first and set the precedent. The United States would not protest the fact that a Soviet-made satellite was overflying U.S. territory. Space, it would declare, was the common heritage of mankind, and Soviet satellites were welcome, as long as they were peaceful in character. (The Eisenhower ad-

ministration, as well as subsequent administrations, regarded spy satellites as serving the cause of peace.)

It is no wonder that the Eisenhower administration gave a vanishingly low priority to its scientific satellite program. Establishing freedom of passage was the goal, and in the end, a Soviet satellite might do that better than an American bird. The White House concentrated on developing intercontinental ballistic missiles for deterrence and spy satellites for information.

But it was caught flat-footed by the public outcry that Sputnik generated. It had sharply miscalculated the political impact that a Soviet satellite would have in the United States and abroad. Indeed, Sputnik ensured the election of John F. Kennedy, who said in his campaign that the Eisenhower administration had let the Soviet Union outstrip the United States in rocket and missile technology.

As we know today (and as Eisenhower knew then), that was not the case. The United States was far ahead of the Soviets in missile technology, its intelligence-gathering satellite program was moving apace, and the foundation for a sophisticated civilian space program had been laid. But Eisenhower could not say precisely why and how the United States was in good shape without revealing a host of secrets, including the fact that the United States was about to base its future security—in large part—on data collected by satellites.

With the benefit of hindsight, Eisenhower's foreign policy appears more sophisticated than it seemed at the time, his search for peace more ardent than many believed, and his space program more advanced. As for the value of the spy satellite program, Dickson cites Lyndon B. Johnson, one of Eisenhower's harshest critics, who later said of Corona:

"I wouldn't want to be quoted on this, but we've spent a billion dollars on the space program. And if nothing else had come out of it except the knowledge we've gained from space photography, it would be worth 10 times what the whole program has cost. Because tonight we know how many missiles the enemy has and, it turned out, our guesses were way off. We were doing things we didn't need to do. We were building things we didn't need to build. We were harboring fears we didn't need to harbor."

Dickson's book is a concise guide to Sputnik and its aftermath, and it helps explain why Americans were "harboring fears we didn't need to harbor." To be sure, this reviewer doesn't have a clue as to how an author best noted for books with titles like *Too Much Saxon Violence and Other Important Issues for Punsters* wrote such a fine book on such a complex topic. But I'm glad he did. ⚛

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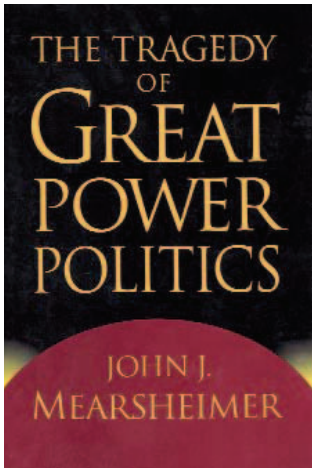
Hegemons can't help it

The Tragedy of Great Power Politics
John J. Mearsheimer
W. W. Norton & Company, 2001
555 pages; $26.95

Bruce Cumings

If you thought the twentieth century was cruel, with upwards of 100 million people killed in warfare, wait until the twenty-first: "This cycle of violence will continue far into the new millennium," writes John J. Mearsheimer, the R. Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago. "Hopes for peace will probably not be realized" because great power competition is the natural state of affairs—making for a world of sharp conflict that is nasty, brutish, and eternal.



Mearsheimer offers his theory of "offensive realism" in "a handful of simple propositions" that come at the reader like staccato machine-gun fire. Great powers are those that can field a conventional army capable of conducting all-out war, and that have a survivable nuclear deterrent; they perpetually seek to maximize their share of world power in a zero-sum struggle with other powers doing the same thing; and their ultimate aim is to be the hegemon—"the only great power in the system." This state of affairs is tragic, according to Mearsheimer, precisely because it is unavoidable and ineluctable; it is neither designed nor intended by human beings, yet we are all caught up in it, inescapably and forever.

This book does not have a tragic tone, however, because Mearsheimer is having too much fun explaining why we're all going to hell in a hand basket of our own (unconscious) design. This treatise is a milestone in the literature of *realpolitik* for its simplicity and directness, its unswerving commitment to a single handful of pithy, tried-