



The Manchurian Candidate

Richard Condon

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Richard Condon's 1959 Cold War thriller remains just as chilling today. It's the story of Sgt. Raymond Shaw, an ex-prisoner of war (and winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor) who, brainwashed with the rest of his unit by a Chinese psychological expert during his captivity in North Korea, has come home programmed to kill. His primary target is a U.S. presidential nominee. Made into a controversial 1962 movie with Laurence Harvey, Frank Sinatra, and Angela Lansbury.

The Manchurian Candidate Details

Date : Published 1959 by McGraw-Hill

ISBN :

Author : Richard Condon

Format : Hardcover 313 pages

Genre : Fiction, Thriller, Mystery, Classics, Spy Thriller, Espionage

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From Reader Review The Manchurian Candidate for online ebook

Susie says

This was really good. Not at all what I was expecting it to be, in a good way. I saw the Sinatra movie years ago, and somehow expected the book to be this dramatic political thriller. I wasn't prepared for satire and humor. It reminded me of Vonnegut. At the beginning it was downright funny, but got more serious when it started getting into the conditioning/brainwashing stuff. But it's satire, so there's always that underlying tongue-in-cheek tone. I really enjoyed this book and I'm so glad I finally picked it up.

Ted says

Book has been removed from my library (real one, not GR). I'll never read it again, but I would still like to see one or both of the movies!

These are the two movies I never saw ... uh, I guess that should be the two *out of this book* I ain't seen, is that better?

The one from 1962, when I was a frosh in college – and sittin' right there in the middle of that Cuban missile thing, in Washington D. of C. Maybe that's why I didn't see it? I dunno.

That's the Laurence Harvey actor on the left who was Shaw from the book & "Ol' Blue Eyes" who was Marco. And as they do here on G-reads I'll S-P-O-I-L things for you when I tell you that (view spoiler)!

And the one from about 10 years ago. This picture is I guess a picture of an ad. But as you see, it's the same as the cover of the book I read. So that tells you somethin' about promotion stuff, am I right?

In this film that name on the right "Liev Schreiber" was Shaw and the guy shown (who's Denzel Washington) was Marco.

So the two main characters – Shaw and Marco – are portrayed by some guys named *Laurence Harvey* and *Liev Schreiber* for Shaw, and some quite a bit more famous guys named **Frank Sinatra** and **Denzel Washington** for Marco.

See if you can guess – who's the good guy, Shaw or Marco? You don't get no prize for bein' right. And no fair if you looked inside that **spoiler up above!!**

All right, so this is on my “crime-fiction” bookshelf, but it ain't really that kinda book, to my way of thinkin'. Most people here on G-reads call it a thriller, but I don't have that bookshelf, and I ain't gonna make one for one damn book.

Everyone and his cousin has seen at least onea these movies (I'm pretty sure.) Except me. Never seen either of 'em - and that was a good thing as we'll see when I get to the ending. But of course I've heard of the book ever since I can remember, and wanted to read it forever, so I finally picked it up a couple years ago and read it.

Let me tell you, I was surprised! Don't know what I expected, but I didn't expect writin' like this ...

Mr. Mavole began to make a lot of slobbering sounds so Raymond said roughly that he would write when he knew what flight he would be on and he hung up the phone and felt like an idiot. Like an angry man with a cane who pokes a hole through the floor of heaven and is scalded by the joy that pours down upon him, Raymond had a capacity for using satisfactions against himself. When he got off the plane ... (*you know what those dots mean, don'tcha?*) He decided Mavole's father must be that midget with the eyeglasses like milk-bottle bottoms who was enjoying sweating so much. The man would be all over him like a charging elk in a minute. etc etc

So that kinda writin', "*prose*" as they say, wasn't like anything I was used to. I dunno, maybe that's the kinda writin' they did in the 50s. Maybe thats what Keroac sounded like when he wrote *On the Road* which I read way back then, but I don't remember now what it sounded like? Anyways, after I got over my surprise, I decided I kinda liked the way the book sounded, and the story was pretty tense as soon as it got goin', so I read it and finished it and liked it. And let me say, I *was* surprised and shocked at the ending, thanks to not ever seeing the movies.

So I'm glad I read it, and you should be to. And I'm glad also that (view spoiler)

By the way, the guy who wrote it I looked up on "wiki" and he was kind of a cool guy. (But I have to say his name means nothin' to me except for this book). But anyways see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_... if you want.

Ya know, I don't mind sayin' that I feel kinda strange about what I wrote here. Lookin' it over it seems sort of different from my normal writin' stuff. And here I'm sitting just starin' at a **queen of diamonds** - the card - and wonderin' why I feel funny. Ya know?

And one more thing. (view spoiler)

.....

Previous review: Anthem Ayn Rand

Random review: The Lives of the Artists Vasari

Next review: On Foot in the Grand Canyon *photos*

Previous library review: Sailing Alone Around the Room Billy Collins

Next library review: Break It Down Lydia Davis

Jon(athan) Nakapalau says

A very interesting look at mind control - but I think the true strength of this book is how it looks at mind control...how this control is accepted as a means to an end by those that are aware of the control; an element of control that is much deeper and much more insidious than just political control.

Maciek says

The Manchurian Candidate is a novel about conditioning, control and manipulation - and brilliantly explores all these topics. It's concise, well written and one of those brilliant books that you have to read with a straight face because you can't decide whether to laugh or grimace.

Sergeant Raymond Shaw and his fellow G.I.'s have been captured in Korea, where they have been brainwashed by the mysterious chinese doctor Yen Lo. Chinese and Russian scientists select Raymond to be a "sleeper" agent, make him kill two other troops and brainwash them all to believe that Raymond is responsible for rescuing the rest from an ambush, for which he receives the utmost reward in American military - The Medal of Honor.

After the group returns to the States major Marco starts having nightmares where he stands in front of chinese and soviet officials, while Raymond picks up the telephone and listens to the voice which suggests passing time by playing a little solitaire...

Despite being written over half a century ago *The Manchurian Candidate* is as entertaining as it was in the fifties. Richard Condon's eccentric style is exquisite - his eccentric use of irony is perfect for the paranoid story he is telling. None of the characters can be described as likeable - each of them has some traits that wouldn't probably make you spend time with their company...especially with mr. Iselin, a commie-hating senator obviously modeled after Joseph McCarthy. But the real gem is his wife who also happens to be Raymond's mother - Mrs. Iselin. She's quite possibly one of the most loathsome villains in fiction - and at the same time one of the most desirable. Condon doesn't spend much space describing her looks - the reader gets to know Ms. Iselin as perfection embodied. The paragraph where he describes her legs is almost nauseatingly arousing - you loathe and despise that woman but you can't help yourself and want her at the same time, because of her allure and devilish mind, helpless like moths flying into the fire, blind to knowledge that the encounter will ultimately lead into your demise, willing to any sacrifice in exchange for only a brief taste of the flame. Brilliant, brilliant absolutely brilliant. The ultimate Femme Fatale.

Richard Condon doesn't try to hide his cynism, but he was that guy who knew that the everything was essentially shit but the fact didn't stop him from making fun of it. *The Manchurian Candidate* is, to quote the introduction, "a banana overripped to the point of blackness". It was described as "pulp" if it's pulp, it's Great Pulp. The fact that it's considered as not literary allowed Condon to brilliantly balance between thriller and camp in weird, drunk prose. Practically unfilmable, *The Manchurian Candidate* is a great, satysfying read. Go get it.

Dusty says

If Kurt Vonnegut had written a political thriller it would have read a lot like this.

The Manchurian Candidate is famous now for two reasons. First, it has inspired two films, one directed by John Frankenheimer in 1962, the other by Jonathon Demme in 2004. Second, it has proven as gloomily prophetic a political satire as has George Orwell's also-classic *1984*. Let's talk about that second point.

Consider this passage:

"Nonetheless her Johnny had become the only American in the country's history of political villains, studding folk song and story, to inspire concomitant fear and hatred in foreigners, resident in their native countries. He blew his nose in the Constitution, he thumbed his nose at the party system or any other version of governmental chain of command. He personally charted the zigs and zags of American foreign policy at a time when the American policy was a monstrously heavy weight upon world history. To the people of Iceland, Peru, France and Pitcairn Island the label of Iselinism stood for anything and everything that was dirty, backward, ignorant, repressive, offensive, antiprogressive, or rotten, and all of those adjectives must ultimately be seen as sincere tributes to any demagogue of any country on the planet."

The demagogue under review here is the oafish senator stepfather character, Johnny Iselin; however, his name could easily be replaced with "George Bush", Iselinism with "Bushism", and we have in our hands a harrowing fifty-years-in-advance prediction of American policy for the first eight years of the Twenty-First Century. Let me repeat: Harrowing.

The Manchurian Candidate's renewed popularity can be attributed to its cinematic connections and its prophesy. But the novel satisfies on many other levels, too. It is a time-capsule, a convincing glimpse at 1950s American war mentality and paranoia. It is a model of wryly disconnected prose, reminiscent of Vonnegut, wherein a careful reader can lose his- or herself in the allusions and puns and absurd descriptions. It is an insightful character study about a woman who lusts for power and about the depths to which she will reach to achieve political domination. It is a tender portrait of two war-ravished men whose friendship nearly redeems them. And it is an expertly twisted suspense yarn -- one of the best I have ever read.

It's become nearly impossible to discuss this particular book without reference to either of the movies, and I suppose that's a compliment to the movies themselves, the first of which is a bona-fide classic, the second of which is a better-than-average action flick. But maybe *Manchurian* would have made a better opera or miniseries than a movie; the novel is layered and more deeply developed than any two- or three-hour movie could ever be. In any case, whether you love the movie (how couldn't you?) or haven't ever seen it, you'd do yourself a favor to read the book. It's marvelous.

Pamela says

This is one weird book. Seriously weird. I've seen the old movie with Frank Sinatra. I've seen the new(er) one with Denzel Washington. Although one of those is very good (1st one) and one of them is so-so (2nd one), neither of them convey the (for want of a better word) *weirdness* of the book. There are places where you can't help but laugh, but you feel guilty as this isn't a funny book. There are places where you feel sorry for the main character, but you know you shouldn't because he's about as despicable a character as has ever been created with ~~very few~~ no redeemable character traits. But, then again, compared to his mother and his buffoon of a step father, he's not all that bad. No. Wait. He is that bad--it's just that they are worse.

If you remember or grew up in the 1950s, you should read this book. If you didn't grow up in the 1950s, you should read this book. If you have seen either or both of the movies, you should read this book. If you have

never seen either of the movies, you should read this book.

Read This Book!

Hildy Peterson says

Grade: F

I really wanted to like this novel, the movie was good but the book...holy cattle it is obnoxious! The style of writing was too much to take! Ugh! Attempted highbrow prose with the most ridiculous descriptions of people and things that I have EVER read! Sorry, couldn't be bothered to finish it therefore it automatically gets grade F!

Larry Bassett says

OK I haven't seen either of the movies made from this book. But you have heard over and over but the movies although they may have been good didn't really capture the book. I thought the book was stunningly satiric and I think it fits so well with the National politics of 2017. This book is over 50 years old and it's got us cold!

OK let's admit it when you're in the middle of a national political nightmare it is wonderful to read a book that makes you laugh at yourself. I'm not much of figuring out mysteries so I was surprised when the rat came out of hiding about three quarters of the way into the book. But the psycho drama and the intrigue was a delight I thought.

How could the Chinese and the Russians still be the bad guys after such a long time? How could politics still be so corrupt? I listen to the book in the audio format. I think it was recorded in 2013 so I guess they thought they could still sell a few after all those years of cheap paperbacks. I don't feel any urgency to find the movie and it's earlier or later version. I just think the book is wonderful and don't want to experience the sanitized movie versions.

Lyn says

A deliciously cynical and satirical pseudo thriller black comedy about McCarthyism and 50s Americana.

But wait! – you say – black comedy?? is this not a psychological thriller about an American soldier who is brainwashed and hypnotized to be a sleeper cell assassin sent in to kill the president?

Well, yes it is, but like Trevanian's *Shibumi*, there is the surface adventure story and then the much more interesting underlying allegory told with wit and humor.

Condon, who also wrote *Prizzi's Honor*, published *The Manchurian Candidate* in 1959, at the end of the ugly Red Scare era in American politics. His scathing illustration of back room political machinations and our cultural passivity so long as there is food on the table and whiskey in the jar was in top form.

Condon's Senator Iselin is as abrasively torpid and jingoistically demagogistic as Buzz Windrip from Sinclair Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here*. But the character who really steals the show is Iselin's wife and Raymond's mother Eleanor. Eleanor Iselin is as coldly domineering as Lady Macbeth and as twisted as Cruella DeVile. Condon's portrait of her would have made Larry Flynt proud.

I admit that I have seen neither of the films (1962 starring Frank Sinatra and 2004 starring Denzel Washington) but I understand that the satirical nature of Condon's impressive novel was minimized in both.

A very good book.

Angie says

The Manchurian Candidate is a picture of national fear, family dysfunction, and truly terrible betrayals. Raymond Shaw is one of the least likable main characters I've ever met. But I still had compassion for him, as a product of so many people's desires and psychosis, his character is not his fault. Richard Condon describes him as one with his armor. Which is a sad thing, to be unable to shed that.

Even though I know the sort of brainwashing discussed in this book isn't currently possible (as far as we know) it was still very frightening. The idea of not being in control of yourself, and being unaware of that fact, is particularly repellent. This story gave me a lot to think about, and it has been on my mind for days. I keep coming back to certain parts of it, taking them out, examining them again.

I would suggest this book should be required reading. And I also think that Raymond's mother should be on a list somewhere of fictions most disturbing villainesses!

Mike Puma says

The Manchurian Candidate, described as a 'political thriller,' is much more...so much more. Had it not been for Dusty's review (above), I wouldn't have expected the tremendous humor to be encountered within the pages of Condon's almost prophetic novel. Dusty suggests, "If Kurt Vonnegut had written a political thriller it would have read a lot like this. "I'm still pondering that, but I have no problem considering MC as if it were written by LeCarre or Ludlum, then edited by a heavy-handed, though lighter-hearted Vonnegut. The novel swings from the simply funny to the bitterest sarcasm. Condon's character loyalty might put a reader in mind of Cormac McCarthy.

In the preface to the edition I read (the Mysterious Book Club edition with a preface by David Willis McCullough [not to be confused with David McCullough, historian), DWM suggests that when thinking of the Raymond Shaw's mother (Shaw is the novel's protagonist), "try to imagine Hamlet's Gertrude as played by Lady Macbeth." Reference to *Hamlet* is worth keeping in mind while reading MC. Where Hamlet is unable to act, Shaw is unable to NOT act. Johnny Iselin, Shaw's stepfather compares nicely to Claudius. Shaw's mother is, indeed, one of the most evil literary characters I know of: her reverse-Oedipal relationship with Shaw is staggering and, eventually, very reminiscent of Hamlet's relationship with Gertrude in her bedroom, while her machinations are definitely those of Lady Macbeth. The final scenes of the masquerade party with its aftermath and the convention combine for a finale to rival Hamlet's dueling competition with Laertes. Compare/contrast opportunities between MC and *Hamlet* are worthy of a college term paper. Throw

in a Lacanian interpretation of Eleanor Shaw (the mother) and you would have the makings of a Master's thesis. What fun!

The novel contains numerous historical references that younger readers might not recognize. The Joe McCarthy/anti-communist sentiment of the fifties may not be so obscure.

The story flies by at times, especially toward the end, while at other times the narrative style can creep at a snail's pace (long, complicated sentences, obscure words, idiolect, etc.). Should the narrative style prove daunting, just remember that it is reflective of the complicated plotting the author employs. Ride it out for a big payoff and a lot of fun. This is one that might haunt you.

Jesse says

Probably one of the worst written books I have ever read. The concept was promising, but the delivery was atrocious, at least in my humble opinion.

Chris says

I must say, it's interesting reading a book where the author seems to have contempt for nearly all of his characters. At least that was the impression I got when the book started. The Manchurian Candidate is populated with patently unlikable characters, beginning with the central character himself, Raymond Shaw. A sergeant in the US Army during the Korean war, Raymond is utterly unlikable. It's not because he's ugly or stupid or foolish, but rather because he just has no desire to be liked at all, and has a personality to guarantee that he'll be left alone. In modern parlance, he would probably have one of the more functional forms of autism - not quite as bad as The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time, but similar. The first thing you know about Raymond is that you're not supposed to like him.

That goes double for his mother, a power-mad harridan whose only motivation in this world is to fulfill her own ambitions, using anyone she can to do it. As the driving force behind her husband, once an unknown junior Senator, she pushes him into the national spotlight as a kind of Joe McCarthy analogue - a scary example of what McCarthy might have achieved if he'd been at all competent.

Raymond and his family are truly, truly dysfunctional, in every sense of the word, and so Condon has given himself an uphill battle by trying to make us care about this poor wreck of a man. The good news? He succeeds.

The plot is probably familiar to everyone by now - a US soldier is captured by Communists in the last days of the Korean War and subjected to a massive brainwashing project. Now, without his knowledge, Raymond is their weapon, an assassin who is beyond suspicion and devoid of guilt. And he's on a terrible mission that must be stopped....

It's a really enjoyable read. A quick one, too. And like I said, by the end of the book, you really do feel bad for Raymond. You can't help but feel bad for him.... Pick it up and enjoy.

Teri Pre says

I've heard about *The Manchurian Candidate* for years but hadn't seen the movie nor read the book. It's one I wish I would have read sooner! What a great book with lots of psychological twists and turns. If you've ever been curious about the book, it's worth reading!

Bettie? says

Description: *As compelling and disturbing as when it was first published in the midst of the Cold War, "The Manchurian Candidate" continues to enthrall readers with its electrifying action and shocking climax....Sgt. Raymond Shaw is a hero of the first order. He's an ex-prisoner of war who saved the life of his entire outfit, a winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor, the stepson of an influential senator...and the perfect assassin. Brainwashed during his time as a P.O.W., he is a "sleeper" -- a living weapon to be triggered by a secret signal. He will act without question, no matter what order he is made to carry out. To stop Shaw and those who now control him, his former commanding officer, Bennett Marco, must uncover the truth behind a twisted conspiracy of torture, betrayal, and power that will lead him to the highest levels of the government - and into the darkest recesses of his own mind....*

Leslie says

I could do nothing but love this book and give it no less than 5 stars. This book was published before I was born. The first movie made from it; directed by the great John Frankenheimer, was released before my first birthday. I had to wait until I was in my 20s to ever see it. And I instantly loved it. Yet I never thought to track down a copy of the book.

I found the book just wonderful and fascinating. It made me appreciate the two films that were adapted from it even more. While the story; American soldiers in the Korean conflict who are taken and brainwashed by a collective of Russian, Chinese and Korean 'brain washers' was shocking for its time, there are other subplots that would never make it past the Hayes Code of 1962 and even in 2016 are shocking.

The book's style is rather unique. It is a bit like the writing of the hard boiled detective novels if the author kept a thesaurus on their desk to drop in obscure and obsolete words and phrases. I was often using the dictionary function of my Kindle. There were even words that stumped the Kindle's dictionary. (view spoiler) The book is manly. Most of the main characters are men or women who act like men of the time. Yet the author repeats the theme of the love of a 'good woman' as a redemptive cure for what ails you.

The other thing that I found amazing in this almost 60 year old book was that parts of it almost seemed to be ripped from the headlines of today. There is a Senator who is accusing everyone of working with the Russian Communists and who runs to the media to accuse all of his political enemies of this baseless charge.

Side note, when I read I often imagine the characters since I have previously seen two adaptations of this

book I had a wealth of characters to choose from. In my mind all of the characters were from the 1962 version; except Raymond Shaw who in my mind was firmly assigned to Liev Schreiber. Which made me realize why Frankenheimer was such a genius. In the book Raymond Shaw is a blank. He lacks most basic human emotions and passions and the casting of Lawrence Harvey was so perfect that despite his leading role he fails to imprint on you as Raymond Shaw in the book failed to connect with his colleagues and fellow soldiers.

Rae says

Wouldn't you like to pass the time with a little game of solitaire?

Simply put, this is one of the most disturbing and creepy books I have ever read! I had watched bits of the movie years ago, but really didn't remember much about it -- so reading the book was a fresh experience for me.

It is a novel of dysfunction, manipulation, fear and control. It was written in the late 1950s when Communists appeared to be coming out of the woodwork and Joe McCarthy was, for many folks, the most hated man in America. The book introduces Raymond Shaw, a Medal of Honor winner who is so much more than that...

Condon's writing style is a weird mix of "beat" and "noir" and it's not necessarily pretty. In fact, much of the narrative is misogynistic, racist, and distasteful. None of his characters are really likeable, but they are certainly memorable. In fact, he created one of the most notorious mothers in all of fiction (played so well by Angela Lansbury in the 1962 film version).

NOTE: I don't know about the book, but the original movie was pretty much unavailable after JFK's assassination. Too close to home, perhaps. It was released again around 1988.

Kate Loveton says

Thirty years ago, I read this book after seeing a repeat of the movie on late night television. I loved the book at the time, and decided a revisit was in order to see if my fond memories of it held up. They did indeed. The Manchurian Candidate is a nifty little thriller that will appeal to those liking a taut political thriller as well as those who are conspiracy lovers.

Made into a movie twice (once with Frank Sinatra in the 1960s, and then remade with Denzel Washington decades later), the story concerns Raymond Shaw, US Medal of Honor recipient, and his captain during the Korean Conflict, Bennett Marco.

During the war, Shaw's platoon was captured by the enemy, and all were 'brainwashed' by the Chinese and Russians who were working in concert to create the perfect killing machine. The action then switches to present day, eight years after Raymond has returned home. Key figures in Raymond's life are his bombastic

stepfather and his mother, and their diabolical machinations as they weave themselves through the political power structure of American politics.

Raymond's Mother is one of the most evil female characters you will come across in fiction, oozing corruption and venality. She is not above using her son's status as a war hero for political gain and control. She makes Lady MacBeth look like Mother Theresa.

Meanwhile, Raymond's former captain (Marco) is having disturbing dreams in which Raymond coolly and unemotionally strangles and shoots several of his platoon members during the brainwashing sessions with the Chinese and Russian captors - sessions in which Raymond and his fellow soldiers were on display, but thinking they were attending a meeting of a ladies garden club! As a result, Marco begins to unravel as he is unable to get respite from the terrible dreams he is experiencing. Finally, he hunts Raymond down to determine whether he is also experiencing similar dreams. Are these nightmares from Marco's feverish brain - or something more? Marco is determined to find out - before something horrible happens.

This book is deliciously fun to read. Five stars - I highly recommend it.

David says

One of the best books I have ever read. The plotting & characters are strong and perfectly developed. It carries a humor that isn't brought forward in the cinema. A deeply funny and disturbing book.

Judy says

This book has been on my "to read" list for more than 30 years. But, I will admit that list has thousands of books on it. Published in 1959, the Manchurian Candidate virtually disappeared after the Kennedy assassination in 1963 for obvious reasons. Sgt. Raymond Shaw is brainwashed in North Korea by the Chinese after his entire unit was taken captive during the Korean War. Raymond is programmed during his captivity to become a killer at the bidding of his communist controllers and he is returned to the United States as a Congressional Medal of Honor winner. The themes of the book are brainwashing, the Cold War, McCarthyism and its anticommunist hysteria, the isolation of many individuals in society, and a dysfunctional family of epic proportions. The dark tone of this book is matched by the situation that Raymond finds himself embroiled in, and the race to deprogram Raymond leads to an almost inevitable conclusion. After reading this book, I came to realize that I, too, have been brainwashed. Be on the lookout for two men--Ben and Jerry--who have programmed me, through no doubt despicable means, to eat their ice cream at every opportunity. And please, please help me find relief from this incessant consumption of New York Super Fudge Chunk ice cream.
