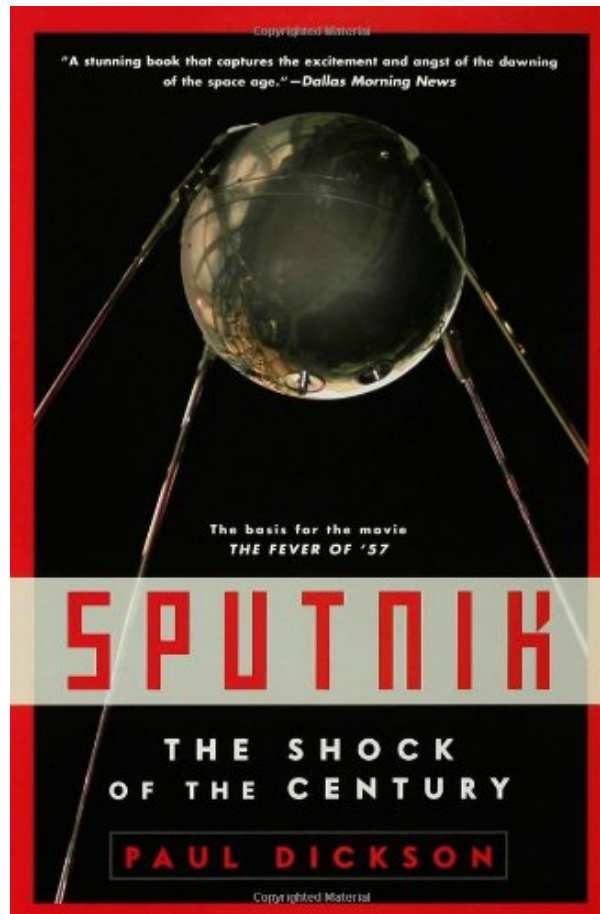


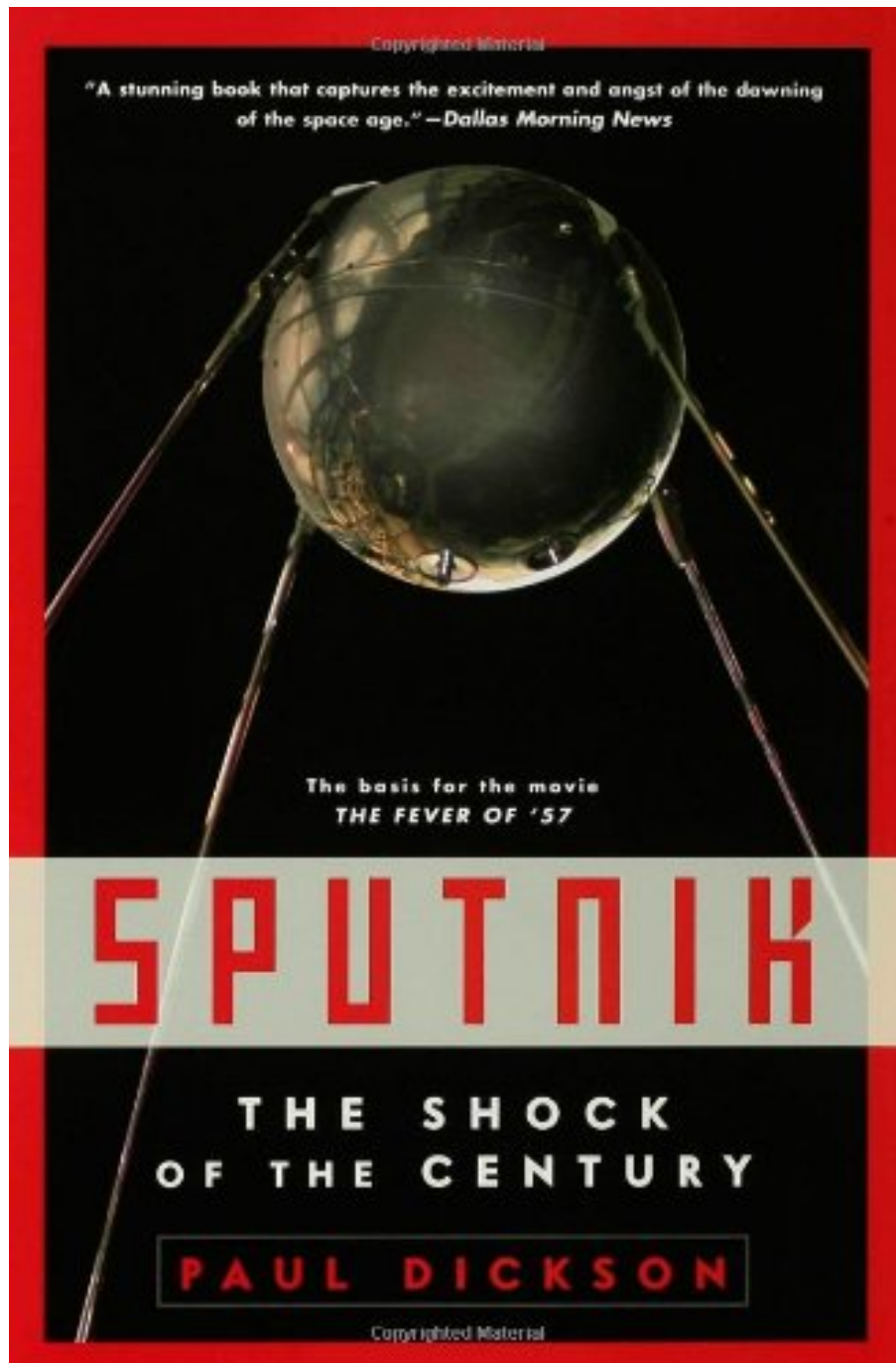
SPUTNIK: THE SHOCK OF THE CENTURY

BY PAUL DICKSON



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On October 4, 1957, as *Leave It to Beaver* premiered on American television, the Soviet Union launched the space age. Sputnik, all of 184 pounds with only a radio transmitter inside its highly polished shell, became the first man-made object in space; while it immediately shocked the world, its long-term impact was even greater, for it profoundly changed the shape of the twentieth century.

In his upcoming book, Washington journalist Paul Dickson chronicles the dramatic events and developments leading up to and emanating from Sputnik's launch. Supported by groundbreaking, original research and many recently declassified documents, *Sputnik* offers a fascinating profile of the early American and Soviet space programs and a strikingly revised picture of the politics and personalities behind the facade of America's fledgling efforts to get into space.

Although Sputnik was unmanned, its story is intensely human. Sputnik owed its success to many people, from the earlier visionary, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, whose theories were ahead of their time, to the Soviet spokesmen strategically positioned around the world on the day the satellite was launched, who created one of the greatest public-relations events of all time. Its chief designer, however?the brilliant Sergei Korolev?remained a Soviet state secret until after his death.

Equally hidden from view was the political intrigue dominating America's early space program, as the military services jockeyed for control and identity in a peacetime world. For years, former Nazi Wernher von Braun, who ran the U.S. Army's missile program, lobbied incessantly that his Rocket Team should be handed responsibility for the first Earth-orbiting satellite. He was outraged that Sputnik beat him and America into space. For his part, President Eisenhower was secretly pleased that the Russians had launched first, because by orbiting over the United States Sputnik established the principle of "freedom of space" that could justify the spy satellites he thought essential to monitor Soviet missile buildup. As Dickson reveals, Eisenhower was, in fact, much more a master of the Sputnik crisis than he appeared to be at the time and in subsequent accounts.

The U.S. public reaction to Sputnik was monumental. In a single weekend, Americans were wrenched out of a mood of national smugness and post-war material comfort. Initial shock at and fear of the Soviets' intentions galvanized the country and swiftly prompted innovative developments that define our world today. Sputnik directly or indirectly influenced nearly every aspect of American life, from the demise of the suddenly superfluous tail fin and an immediate shift towards science in the classroom to the arms race that defined the cold war, the competition to reach the Moon, and the birth of the Internet.

By shedding new light on a pivotal era, Paul Dickson expands our knowledge of the world we now inhabit, and reminds us that the story of Sputnik goes far beyond technology and the beginning of the space age, and that its implications are still being felt today.

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History that's fun, engaging and readable.

By M. Strong

In Sputnik, Paul Dickson takes a single historic event and uses it as a spot from which to take a look around and see what can be learned. When applied cleverly, that writing strategy leads to some great books. This is one of them.

Dickson covers the history of rocketry and missiles, taking a look at the science and the scientists that led up to the launch of Sputnik. He captures the mood of the Cold War and gives you a sense of the rude awakening the United States experienced when the USSR beat it into space. Then the book ranges into the responses of the US and the USSR to Sputnik, covering the space race to its end on the moon.

All of the material is carefully brought together and conveyed in such a way that you keep reading long after you needed to put the book down and do something else.

Highly recommended for anyone who enjoys history. This one is very well done.

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

Oprah forget Jonathan Franzen.. put your stamp on this book!

By Bonnie West

I was 11 years old when Sputnik beeped across the sky and I stood with my father in our back yard, night after night, staring at the stars. It was a time full of wonder. Sputnik: The Shock of the Century, took me right back to that little girl staring at the sky, to the awe and excitement I'd felt but had forgotten. But even more than that Paul Dickson's book has given me the facts: The information I didn't understand as a child and didn't bother to learn as an adult. This isn't a book just for space 'nuts' ...although mind you, every Space-nik (!) will be thrilled... it's a book for every man woman and child who wants to know just how we came to be where we are not only in space, but on earth. Sputnik put us on a wonderful path that changed the world forever. Buy this book for your mom... then read it yourself.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Government!

By Steve Marson

I vividly remember the Sputnik announcement when I was 6 years old. Gradually, I became part of the cohort of the concerned. By my seventh birthday, I worriedly discuss the possibility of a Soviet bomb hurtling down from a satellite to kill all Americans. My cousin, Mark (older and wiser), reassured me that bombs from satellites were not possible. On a piece of paper he drew a picture of an object falling from outer space. "They burn up before they hit the ground," he explained. This seven year old's analysis was reassuring and I became less panicky. Later, of course, I learned that my cousin was wrong -- things could fall from space without burning up.

Frankly, I am glad that I (and other Americans) didn't know the content of Dickson's work when Sputnik was beeping. The Sputnik "freak out" would have been far worse! Dickson demonstrates a history of lack of vision. It should come to no surprise that the US government and military were unable create a policy that would maintain technological advances. If the Soviets wanted to stifle our process toward outer space, they couldn't have done a better job than our governmental incompetence. If it weren't governmental meddling, I am sure we would have a colony on Mars now.

The eerie aspect to understanding the historical circumstances of Sputnik involves two dimensions. First, I see a continuation of gross incompetent government leadership. Things haven't changed. We can't seem to construct a coherent immigration policy. Our military lacks an effective strategy to combat guerilla warfare (we call it "insurgency"). Our governmental leaders are only recently admitting that global warming might be a problem. It is Sputnik all over again. Second, one can quickly recognize our weak educational system. At the beginning of the space race, we used our brains and the slide rule. With the technological advances

associated with micro chip, Dickson demonstrates that we have an increasing proportion of engineering disasters like bridge collapses. We seem to be witnessing an increase proportion of senility. Perhaps, we need to surrender our computers and return to the slide rule!

Dickson is a crafty writer. Although Sputnik is well-documented piece of nonfiction (great footnotes), it reads like fiction. If one enjoys reading about history, technology or incompetent governmental officials, I highly recommend SPUTNIK.

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