

# James Bond & Politics

## Introduction

What is the relationship between James Bond and Politics? Few heroes boast as much cultural longevity as Bond, who debuted in 1953 with Ian Fleming's *Casino Royale*. Though this novel set the James Bond franchise in motion, it is far from his most recognizable iteration. Most think of James Bond as a film character, with movies that span from Sean Connery's 1962 introduction in *Dr. No* to Daniel Craig in 2021's *No Time To Die*. This begets questions on the nature of Bond's lasting appeal, and how a character conceived with no shortage of outdated elements has managed to uphold relevance for nearly 75 years. One crucial factor in Bond's favor is his adaptors' willingness to alter the featured countries, global conflicts, and character depictions to fit a contemporary political climate.

## Ian Fleming

Born in 1908, Ian Fleming was the son of MP (Member of Parliament) Valentine Fleming and socialite Evelyn St. Croix Fleming. Days before Ian's ninth birthday, his father was killed in action. Valentine's obituary was penned by Winston Churchill, who he counted among his close friends. In school, Fleming did not show a particular talent for academics, but excelled in sports. He was often in trouble for seeing girls, driving cars, and skipping class. He had quite a few girlfriends, and was described as "irresistible to women" ([ianfleming.com](http://ianfleming.com)). After school, he went to London to sit the Foreign Office's entrance exams, but was not hired. As a backup, he

became a journalist at Reuters. There, he was sent to Moscow to cover the Metropolitan-Vickers Trial, where 6 British employees of the Soviet firm were accused of espionage (Uldricks). For his coverage, he tried to interview Stalin. Stalin declined, but left Ian a signed letter. This got the attention of the Foreign Office, who suggested Fleming report his thoughts on the state of the Soviet Union (Ianfleming.com).



Ian Fleming. Via Encyclopedia Britannica,

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ian-Fleming#/media/1/209963/190110>

In the spring of 1939, the Foreign Office requested Fleming accompany them to Russia. He was, as far as the general populace was concerned, writing a piece on trade for *The Times*. However, the true nature of his assignment was to report on the USSR's military capacity ahead

of the impending Second World War. Later that same year, Fleming was appointed the assistant to the Director of Naval Intelligence, Rear-Admiral John Godfrey, granting him the position of Lieutenant in the Special Branch of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (a rank later held by James Bond). In 1941, he wrote a memorandum advising US Colonel Donovan on setting up the OSS, the precursor to the CIA. Through WW2, he led a number of highly successful initiatives and missions. After the war, he accepted a job with Kemsley News (owners of the *Sunday Times*) as their Foreign Manager, the person in charge of managing foreign correspondents ([IanFleming.com](http://IanFleming.com)). He served in this position from 1945 to 1949 (Britannica).

Due to extensive political involvement throughout Fleming's life, it is no surprise that his work would reflect current events. Of particular note is Russia's prominence within Bond novels, which have strong Cold War themes. Fleming's experiences working for the Foreign Office likely provided him with a clear idea of the country's structure. The films' recurring villain, SPECTRE, was written as the real-world Soviet agency SMERSH in many novels. Additionally, Ian Fleming included a number of the 1950s and '60's most pressing geopolitical issues, affirming Bond's political relevance.

## The Cold War

If a single conflict defines James Bond films, it is the Cold War. In many of Fleming's novels, SMERSH, the Soviet Union's counter-intelligence agency (Miron), serves as the chief antagonistic force. The organization is also featured in the films, most prominently in 1963's *From Russia with Love*. Despite the precedent set by Fleming's novels, SMERSH is much less threatening in *From Russia with Love*. Both MI6 (British Intelligence) and SMERSH are tricked by SPECTRE, a global terrorist organization responsible for many of the conflicts in James Bond

films. Bond teams up with SMERSH agent Tatiana Romanova in order to thwart SPECTRE's plans. SPECTRE is the true antagonist here, while SMERSH is not so much a threat as an obtuse intelligence agency. MI6, of course, is heroic. This is superficially a more collaborative depiction, but it retains a strong undercurrent of Western superiority. SMERSH is successfully infiltrated by SPECTRE. Tatiana, who saves James Bond's life, is contrasted with SMERSH's more loyal Red Grant, who is defeated by Bond. This highlights MI6's supremacy, as it remains strong in the face of SPECTRE's traps while SMERSH crumbles. To drive the point home, Tatiana ultimately aids MI6 rather than her own country (From Russia with Love).



James Bond (Sean Connery), Tatiana Romanova (Daniela Bianchi), and Red Grant (Robert Shaw) in *From Russia With Love*. Via We Minored in Film,

<https://weminoredinfilm.com/2020/05/21/de-evolution-of-james-bond-from-russia-with-love/>



A similar premise is found in the film *The Spy Who Loved Me*, when Bond must team up with Soviet Agent Anya Amasova (code named Triple X) in order to stop the hijacking of the UK and USSR's respective nuclear missiles, which have been aimed at New York and Moscow. Despite its similar skeleton, *The Spy Who Loved Me* differs ideologically from *From Russia with Love*. Rather than fighting over access to technological resources, as occurs in *From Russia with Love*, both MI6 and the KGB are primarily concerned with the danger technology each country already has poses. The film ends with M, the head of MI6 within the Bond franchise, and the KGB's General Gogol amicably allied against mutual nuclear annihilation. This is indicative of a greater cultural shift, during which perceptions of danger evolved from chiefly being foreign intelligence and ideology to the existence of unprecedented weapons of mass destruction (State of Oregon). This fear is also reflected in movies that superficially have nothing to do with the Cold War, such as *Moonraker*. In *Moonraker*, James Bond must stop spaceplane manufacturing executive Hugo Drax from gassing the earth with a network of satellite spheres, allowing it to be solely inhabited by a select group of genetically "perfect" individuals of Drax's own selection. Drax's fleet of high-tech spacecraft echoes the real-world space race, effectively a front for the nuclear arms race (National Air and Space Museum). Further, Drax's plan is reminiscent of ambitions held by the Nazi Party (Holocaust Encyclopedia). This is not only true of *Moonraker*; nearly every Bond film's conflict is rooted in political consciousness.

# Heroes

## James Bond

Beyond global tensions, Bond films are also steeped in social politics and commentary. The figure of Bond himself, for instance, is heavily idealized. He serves Queen and Country above all else, and physically represents Western society's "perfect" man. He is white, able-bodied, heterosexual, cisgender, fit, tall, and sexy. In fact, many viewers struggle to name more than one or two out of twenty-five films where Bond doesn't have sex with one or more women (Funnell).



James Bond (Daniel Craig) in *Casino Royale*. Via Bond Suits,

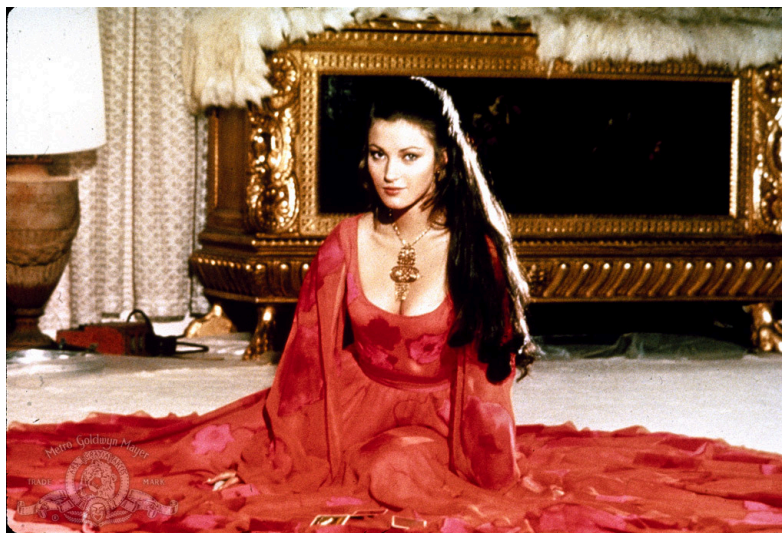
<https://www.bondsuits.com/james-bond-sex-symbol-swimming-trunks-casino-royale/>

While on assignment, he enjoys an unlimited mission budget, lending him an air of social class (regardless of his actual salary, which is much, much less). This allows him to accomplish his missions with little societal difficulty. As the epitome of an ideal, Bond serves as a near-global default. He is therefore a perfect spy, as his personal identity does not include anything society

would view as “deviant” or “conspicuous.” Additionally, the elite level of Bond’s work often demands he move in extremely high-class spheres. These groups often benefit from societal privilege, and Bond’s unobtrusive attributes allow him to blend in with greater ease than he may otherwise enjoy. Bond also serves as an aspirational figure for many men, as he embodies archetypes associated with traditional masculinity. Beyond the context of individual narratives, the attributes that grant Bond his status are strongly aligned with the ideals of Western society, and Bond’s role as a hero may be read as further glorification of the West (Funnell).

## Bond Girls

Perhaps the most notable instance of gender within the James Bond franchise comes in the form of Bond girls. If Bond defines masculinity, the Bond girls, complete with names like Pussy Galore (Goldfinger), Dr. Goodhead (Moonraker), Honey Ryder (Dr. No), Octopussy (Octopussy), and the aforementioned Triple X, define Fleming’s version of femininity. Bond girls are primarily known for their sex appeal. (German).



Solitaire (Jane Seymour), a Bond girl, in *Live and Let Die*. Via IMDB,

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0070328/characters/nm0005412>

While Bond girls are hot, that is not all they are. *Goldfinger*'s Pussy Galore, for instance, is a highly competent aerialist and pilot (Goldfinger). *Moonraker*'s Dr. Goodhead is an astrophysicist, astronaut, and CIA agent, and is arguably more competent than Bond himself (Moonraker). In *Casino Royale*, nearly all of the film's conflict is driven by Vesper Lynd, a SPECTRE operative posing as an accountant for MI6 (Casino Royale). Though Lynd does not directly appear in any films following *Casino Royale*, she haunts the narrative throughout Daniel Craig's tenure as James Bond (Quantum of Solace, Skyfall, Spectre, No Time to Die). Many viewers dismiss the Bond girls as solely being attractive or sexually appealing (German). This prompts the question; does sex appeal erase competence? In the case of Bond himself, it does not. Bond girls, however, face a more discouraging answer. This is a manifestation of sexism, though its origin remains somewhat obscure. Are the films and novels, which give many Bond girls ridiculous names and open with them close to nude, to blame? Or is this the fault of audiences, who discredit women that frequently equal or exceed Bond's own skill on the basis of superficial attributes?

## Bond's Allies

Of the Bond franchise's recurring characters, none exhibit more dynamism than the supporting cast of Bond's allies, a group comprised of M, the fictional head of MI6 and Bond's boss; Money Penny, Bond's secretary; Q, MI6's quartermaster, master of arms, and chief technological officer; and Felix Leiter, Bond's CIA counterpart. The series originated as a collection of overtly pro-British action movies plagued by pervasive racism and misogyny (Syed). As the films continued to be produced, however, things began to shift. *Live and Let Die*, while deeply problematic, saw the introduction of Bond's first Black love interest. Bond girls

were written with greater and greater nuance. However, the greatest gauge of social attitudes remains the evolving portrayal of James Bond's supporting cast. At the start of the Bond films, M, Q, Moneypenney, and Felix Leiter are all straight white people. This casting was consistent with attitudes of the time, when goodness could only exist in a narrowly defined capacity.

The first hint of change came in 1986's *Never Say Never Again*. As the film was not produced by Eon, Bond movies' typical production company, much of the supporting cast differed from the established set of actors recurrently chosen for the roles. This led to the casting of Bernie Casey, a Black man, as Felix Leiter. The reason for this had nothing to do with racial equity, and was instead motivated by a desire to make Felix Leiter more memorable to audiences (Benson). Nevertheless, it was a historic moment for a franchise that had previously only shown people of color as villains or secondary love interests. For the Eon-produced films, a Black Leiter was not introduced until *Casino Royale* in 2006. However, *Casino Royale*'s Leiter, Jeffery Wright, continued in his role through the most recent *No Time to Die*. Another moment of change occurred with the 1995 debut of Dame Judi Dench as a female M in *GoldenEye*. While there was relatively little fanfare accompanying the social implications of her casting, it was groundbreaking to see a woman occupy the highest position of authority in a series frequently associated with sexism (Sultan). Dame Judi Dench acted as M throughout Pierce Brosnan's time as Bond, and continued into Daniel Craig's era. The Craig movies also saw the introduction of a Black ex-field agent Moneypenney in *Skyfall*. Finally, Ben Whishaw's Q, who also debuted in *Skyfall*, was revealed to be gay in *No Time to Die*. Though Pussy Galore may be read as bisexual in Fleming's novel, the confirmation of Q's sexuality marked the first time a non-villain was unambiguously gay within the franchise.



James Bond (Daniel Craig), Money Penny (Naomie Harris), and Q (Ben Whishaw) in *No Time to Die*. Via Yahoo News Singapore,

<https://sg.news.yahoo.com/did-no-time-to-die-just-out-one-of-the-characters-as-gay-065647341.html>

These characters' evolution through the films demonstrates a gradual shift in attitudes towards people of color and queer people. In the 1960s, the demographics of Craig's supporting cast would have been unthinkable as anything other than a band of villains. By the late 2000s, this dynamic had shifted, and these people were finally allowed to be heroes.



# Villains

## Disability

Unlike Bond, the universe's villains frequently stray from societal norms. In particular, Bond villains are disproportionately disabled or disfigured, a trope dating back to the origins of storytelling, when physicality served as shorthand for morality. In many cases, disability goes so far as to serve as an explanation for a villain's maleficence (Page). During Raoul Silva's *Skyfall* manifesto, he explains that his only reason for living is to enact revenge on M for betraying and disabling him:

“They kept me for five months in a room with no air. They tortured me and I protected your secrets. I protected you. But they made me suffer and suffer and suffer. You betrayed me. So, I had only one thing left. My cyanide capsule in my back left molar. You remember, right? So, I broke the tooth and bit into the capsule. It... burned all my insides, but I didn't die. Life clung to me like a disease. And then I understood why I had survived. I needed to look in [sic] your eyes one last time (Skyfall).”

Though Silva's suffering is not to be understated, M's characterization makes it clear that she would not wish torture and debilitating near-death experiences on any of her agents.

Nevertheless, Silva's experience has led him to pursue vengeance with a singular focus. Had his experiences not been physically as well as mentally damaging, it is possible that his rhetoric may have been undermined. After all, Bond himself displays obvious depression, PTSD, and substance use disorders throughout *Skyfall* (Skyfall). Many of these symptoms are the direct result of Bond's experience as an MI6 agent, but these challenges seem to fade into nonexistence

whenever Bond is called to return to his standard action hero routine. Silva, on the other hand, is constantly reminding audiences that his terrorism is M's fault. This is inseparable from his disability, as he blames M for his loss of bodily functions and disfigurement. Indeed, if a single trait were to define Silva's character, a strong case could be made for his physicality. When he removes his facial prosthetics, his cheek becomes sunken, his eye rolls back, and his corroded teeth are made visible. While he only has them off for about 30 seconds in the film, this version of him accounts for around half of the image results for his character. This is partly the result of how the scene is presented, with Silva intending to shock M, but it exemplifies how rhetoric surrounding disabled people paints them as little other than a tragic spectacle.



Raoul Silva (Javier Bardem) in *Skyfall*. Via ScreenRant,

<https://screenrant.com/james-bond-movies-smartest-villain-plans/>

While Silva is notable in that there is an explicit causal relationship between his disability and villainy, he is far from the only disabled Bond villain. A fairly comprehensive list, compiled by James Irwin on Medium, includes Dr. No (*Dr No*), Oddjob (*Goldfinger*), Emilio Largo (*Thunderball*), Ernst Stavro Blofeld (*From Russia with Love*, *Thunderball*, *You Only Live Twice*,

*On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, *Diamonds are Forever*, *For Your Eyes Only*, *Never Say Never Again*, *Spectre*, *No Time to Die*), Jaws (*The Spy Who Loved Me*, *Moonraker*), Alec Trevelyan (*GoldenEye*), Tang Lin Zao (*Die Another Day*), Le Chiffre (*Casino Royale*), Silva (*Skyfall*), and even the most recent villain, Lyutsifer Safin of *No Time to Die* (Irwin); plus my own addendum of Tee-Hee from *Live and Let Die*. Given the number of films featuring Blofeld as an antagonist, whether central or from the shadows, this list accounts for 20 out of 25 Bond films. By contrast, James Bond, as well as his recurring allies (M, Money Penny, Q, Felix Leiter), have never been physically disabled. While an isolated instance of a disabled villain may easily be dismissed as a particular narrative's trait, the frequency of disabled Bond villains versus disabled non-villains (never, unless you count Bond himself in *Skyfall*, and *Never Say Never Again* at a stretch) sends the message that, at least within the Bond universe, disabled people are villainous.

## Race

Though not quite so pervasive as disability, many of the Bond canon's nonwhite villains are characterized by racist stereotypes and tropes. In the films, this is most prevalent in *Live and Let Die*. Released during the 1970s, the film was written to cash in on the popularity of the blaxploitation film genre, which Britannica's Yvonne Sims defines as "films made mainly in the early to mid-1970s that featured Black actors in a transparent effort to appeal to Black urban audiences," frequently focusing on "drug dealing, violence, and easy sex" (Sims). *Live and Let Die* divides its time between Harlem, New Orleans, and the fictional San Monique (though the island has strong parallels to Haiti, originally known as Saint Domingue). All of these locations are known for their strong Black populations, and are often viewed as centers of Black culture (National Museum of African American History and Culture). While the film could have taken

this as an opportunity to highlight Black experiences and achievements, it is cartoonishly shortsighted. Despite featuring quite a few Black cast members, the film only has one Black hero, an incompetent CIA agent that turns out to be an incompetent henchwoman for the film's villain. The other Black characters are villains from the moment they are introduced, to the point that if a *Live and Let Die* character is Black, it is safe to assume that they are a villain. *Live and Let Die*'s cohort of villains also draws on numerous racial caricatures, stereotypes and myths. They practice a bastardized form of Voodoo (Vodou) involving human sacrifice and necromancy.



Voodoo as it is presented in *Live and Let Die*, featuring Jane Seymour as Solitaire and Michael Ebbin. Via IMDB,

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0247957/>

The principal villain, Mr. Big, works chiefly in drug smuggling. The villains are heavily superstitious. The combination of poor writing and a lack of Black heroes results in a film that broadly portrays Black people as wicked buffoons. While subsequent films do a much better job writing Black characters, *Live and Let Die*'s depiction of Black people is severely demeaning.

While *Live and Let Die* is the single most racially charged film, it is not the only racially significant aspect of the Bond villain canon. Another notable feature is the disproportionate rate at which Bond villains are East Asian. Throughout the films, East Asians are the most frequently vilified group. This likely originates with Fleming's upbringing in a time when anti-Asian sentiment exploded (Wu), contrasting the previous two centuries' near-fetishistic fascination with "Chinoiserie" and "Japonisme" (Hass). The Twentieth Century saw Great Britain and the United States, the nations most positively represented in the Bond corpus, in frequent conflict with East Asia (History on the Net). As current events and British societal opinion largely informed both Fleming's novels and the Bond films, the proliferation of East Asian villains in the Bond universe mirrored a steady increase in real-world racism (Wu). Most damning is the fact that the franchise's three most prominent Asian villains, Dr. No, Oddjob, and Tang Lin Zao, all hail from communist countries (China and Korea), eliminating any doubts surrounding political subtext (Dr. No, Goldfinger, Die Another Day).

## Sexuality

Another interesting facet of Bond villains' portrayal is their relationship to sexuality and desirability. Many of the films' early villains, from Dr. No to Dr. Kananga from *Live and Let Die*, are portrayed asexually (Funnell). The only exception is *From Russia with Love*'s Rosa Klebb, though this is only in the form of her queer-coding. At no point is she written to be sexually appealing. This is consistent with many of Bond's villains. Blofeld, for instance, is about as distant from conventional sexuality as possible.





Donald Pleasance as Ernst Stavro Blofeld. Via From Sweden With Love,

[https://jamesbond007.se/eng/memorial/donald\\_pleasence\\_ernst\\_stavro\\_blofeld](https://jamesbond007.se/eng/memorial/donald_pleasence_ernst_stavro_blofeld)

This establishes a barrier between Bond himself, the Bond girls, and the villains. While Bond is going to bed with as many girls as he can, Bond villains rarely get in on the action. This, especially when taken in concert with the frequency of disabled Bond villains, has interesting implications regarding desirability. Just as Bond films have a precedent for equating able-bodiedness to goodness, attractiveness serves as similar moral shorthand. Of the disabled



Bond villains, quite a few are facially disfigured and therefore “ugly.” They almost never have sex, and for the films’ early villains, even the suggestion of sex would have been unthinkable. Bond, on the other hand, is always extremely attractive, not to mention sexually prolific. Through this lens, Bond’s promiscuity may be read as shorthand for his goodness; he would never have had such experiences if he were evil and therefore undesirable.

On the rare occasion that Bond villains are allowed to be sexual, it is always one of three cases. If the villain is a Bond girl, such as Pussy Galore (*Goldfinger*), Octopussy (*Octopussy*), or Solitaire (*Live and Let Die*); her villainy will either be sidelined to make room for her romance with Bond, or she will have a change of heart as a result of knowing Bond, and defect to aid him in his mission.

If the villain is male, his sex appeal is countercultural or subversive. In the case of Le Chiffre (*Casino Royale*), he kidnaps Bond towards the end of the film with the intention of torturing him for information. He opts for whipping James Bond’s genitals, resulting in a sexually charged scene (*Casino Royale*). While the scene’s sensuality remains firmly subtextual, the ties to queerness and BDSM render it at odds with the sexual mainstream. Similarly, Raoul Silva flirts with and caresses the chest and thighs of a tied up James Bond in *Skyfall* (*Skyfall*). These portrayals rely on the cultural narrative that queerness is predatory, a characterization exacerbated by each situation’s power dynamic. Both of these scenes were also created with cinematography designed to make the viewer uncomfortable. As these are the only scenes where male Bond villains act sexually, their ties to socially unacceptable forms of sexual expression further demonize them, cementing their status as villains. Beyond sexual expression, the only time male Bond villains exhibit desire (excluding instances when they do this towards Bond) is

in competition with James Bond. Naturally, each of these instances ends in Bond winning the woman's affections, demonstrating his sexual superiority.

The third case is the most rare: a Bond villain who is also a Bond girl. This case is distinct from the previously discussed Bond girl who is also a villain, as the character's status as a Bond girl is trumped by her villainy. However, each time this happens, the characters' efficacy as a villain is directly tied to her sexuality. In the case of *Never Say Never Again*'s Fatima Blush, her mission to manipulate Captain Jack Petachi is accomplished largely through seduction (Never Say Never Again). In *GoldenEye*, Xenia Onatopp works as an assassin because she finds the practice sexually arousing (GoldenEye). In *The World is Not Enough*, Renard holds no reservations in sacrificing himself for Elektra King as a result of his love for her. King also uses her sexuality to mislead Bond at the start of the film, leading him to believe that she is simply a ditzy and somewhat reckless rich girl (as opposed to a criminal mastermind) (The World is Not Enough). In this way, the villain Bond girls are defined by their sexuality as much as their standard-issue Bond girl peers, despite posing a more significant threat. Villain Bond girls are also notably the only Bond villains that express conventional sexuality, differentiating them from the other villains as a result of their dual roles within the film.

## Bond and Doctrine

In James Bond films, British Intelligence is mostly uncomplicated and good. Its greatest complexity is reflected in Daniel Craig's era, particularly in *Skyfall* and *No Time to Die*, which reflect on the damaging nature of Bond's work. With the exception of these outliers, MI6, and Britain in general, is a benevolent yet powerful force in the world. The real-life British empire's legacy is drenched in blood, with plenty of regrettable wars and exploitative imperial holdings,

though its moral purity probably peaked around World War Two. At this time, its primary interest was dismantling a genocidal fascist regime (Chaney et al.). This was the same time that Ian Fleming worked for British Naval Intelligence. Fleming's experience informed a significant amount of MI6's portrayal (IanFleming.com), and working for Naval Intelligence against an enemy that is clearly bad likely subconsciously influenced Fleming's view of Britain.

While the real-world MI6 has endured many scandals throughout its time as an institution, MI6 scandals do not appear until *Skyfall* in the Bond universe. Similarly, Bond movies' nature as action films results in their glamorization of intelligence work and violence, particularly with Bond's iconic 00 status, which grants him a "license to kill." In the real world, MI6 agents almost never even carry weapons (MI6), and former head of MI6 Alex Younger has stated publicly that Bond's propensity for violence, recklessness, promiscuity, and lack of discretion would mean "he'd have a tough time getting a job in MI6 today" (Feinstein).

Additionally, many portrayals of foreign countries and nationalities reflect events that weighed heavily on society at the time of the films' creation. Asian villains hail from communist countries, expressing racism characteristic of the Cold War (Wu). In recent films' depictions of Asia, the subtext has shifted from conflicts over communist ideology to fears over Asian technology and perceived technological superiority, a phenomenon known as Techno-orientalism (Funnell). Additionally, China's absence from recent films such as *Spectre* and *No Time to Die* reflects mounting fears in the West about China's potential competition with the US and Great Britain (Douthat). The films' shift indicates the movable yet pervasive nature of anti-Asian racism within the Bond canon. Though Asian countries are consistently portrayed in a mostly negative manner, the underlying issues shift to mirror whatever global issues are contemporary when the film is being written.

Queer characters are also contentious. When the films began, queer characters such as Rosa Klebb and Mr. Wint and Mr. Kidd were only written as villains, with their sexuality emphasizing or confirming their villainy. Despite originating in the 2010s, Raoul Silva in *Skyfall* continues this tradition. When *Skyfall* was released, there was significant controversy over both his and Bond's sexuality, as Silva asks Bond "What's the regulation to cover this? Well, first time for everything, I guess" while running his hands across Bond's thighs. Bond replies with "What makes you think it's my first time?" According to Barbara Broccoli, who oversaw the franchise at the time, the studio originally pushed her to cut the scene due to its homoerotic themes (Milmo). In the later *No Time to Die*, Q was confirmed to be gay, stating that "he'll be here in twenty minutes" in reference to his date (No Time to Die). At a time when queer people were feared, every queer character in the Bond franchise posed a threat. For a time, queer characters were wholly absent, but they began to reappear as both villains and heroes during Daniel Craig's time as Bond. This correlated with a vast increase in pro-queer legislation and sentiment during the 2010s (Fitzsimons), demonstrating both a shift in Bond's ideology and each film's desire to remain current.

In Bond films that feature both MI6 and SMERSH or the KGB, MI6 is written as the more competent of the organizations. This characterization may serve as Cold War propaganda, as the Cold War was primarily an ideological conflict between the USSR and Western powers like the US and Great Britain (State of Oregon). While Russia is rarely an enemy outright, it is often subordinate to the CIA and MI6, casting it as the West's weak rival. When shown in technological competition, MI6 winds up possessing a clear edge over SMERSH and the KGB, further emphasizing the merits of the West and capitalism.



Sean Connery as James Bond. Via CinemaBlend,

<https://www.cinemablend.com/news/2563911/the-james-bond-franchise-celebrates-a-crucial-anniversary-for-sean-connerys-007>

Many locations used in filming Bond movies reflect real-world British imperial power. Nearly all of the Bond movies' foreign scenes were shot on-location, demonstrating the British government's real-world power and dominance (Funnell). Had a weaker government overseen the films' production, it is unlikely that such a feat would have been possible. Additionally, the films' willingness to collaborate with luxury brands glamorizes consumerism and capitalism. For the films released during the Cold War, this served as direct promotion of governmental ideals. As time progressed, the phenomenon became more emblematic of general Western culture.

Even something as innocuous as Bond's own character serves an ideological purpose, as he represents the ideal figure within Western society. He is dedicated to his government beyond any other force, and possesses all of Western culture's most desirable qualities (Funnell). This conglomeration of messaging across all 25 Bond films serves the ideological undercurrent that

Western society, particularly Great Britain, is good. Its ideals are good. Its enemies are your enemies.

## **Conclusion**

James Bond movies are inseparable from politics. While not every issue is reflected, many of the films' narratives broadcast specific ideology and mirror real events. The omission of China from recent films, for instance, reflects growing political tensions between it and the West, particularly the United States. The elegance with which Bond films present capitalism highlight the franchise's ties to the Cold War, as does the inclusion of concerns such as counterintelligence and nuclear annihilation. The manner in which Bond films write their heroes and their villains is strongly related to social and global politics, and various characters' portrayal has evolved to reflect general societal attitudes. While some may argue that James Bond is simply an action hero, this characterization ignores vital aspects of the Bond canon. Bond movies are, by nature, political. As a result, Bond has been able to maintain his appeal for almost 75 years. Older films serve as time capsules of sorts, while more recent films express collective concerns and attitudes. Politics define and inform characters, locations, and conflicts throughout the James Bond franchise. In other words, politics make James Bond who he is.



# Annotated Bibliography

**Note that not every film has an annotation, per the permission of the teacher whose class this piece was written for.**

“20th Century Timeline.” *History on the Net*, 2 May 2022,  
[www.historyonthenet.com/20th-century-timeline](http://www.historyonthenet.com/20th-century-timeline).

A timeline of events in the 20th Century, designed to provide an overview of the 20th Century’s most significant occurrences.

Though not the most academic or thorough, this source was perfect for providing general information on the 20th Century. Throughout my paper, I make a number of general statements on historical events, and being able to trace these back to a concrete source is immensely helpful.

Apted, Michael., Pierce Brosnan, Sophie Marceau, and Robert Carlyle. *The World Is Not Enough* Ultimate ed., MGM Home Entertainment, 2006.

Begg, Morgan. “The Politics of James Bond.” *The Institute of Public Affairs*, The Institute of Public Affairs, Apr. 2016, pp. 1–4,  
[ipa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Begg-Politics-of-James-Bond.pdf](http://ipa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Begg-Politics-of-James-Bond.pdf). Accessed 21 Apr. 2025.

An article by Morgan Begg published in the *IPA Review*, this publication highlights the relationship between Bond’s world and the politics of our own. The author writes from what appears to be a libertarian perspective, particularly about the merits of an individualist society.

I found this article interesting and relevant, as it offered a unique perspective on Bond's relationship to politics. It took a much more favorable view of Bond than many of my other sources, which I found useful as it allowed me to engage with novel analyses.

Benson, Raymond (1988). *The James Bond Bedside Companion*. London: Boxtree Ltd. ISBN 978-1-85283-233-9.

A non-fiction compilation of facts pertaining to James Bond compiled by official Bond author Raymond Benson. It was nominated for the Edgar Allan Poe Award for Best Biographical/Critical Work. The book includes a detailed portrait of Ian Fleming, James Bond, and production details from the films.

For my section on Bond's allies, I wanted more information on the casting of Bernie Casey as Felix Leiter. Specifically, the *James Bond Bedside Companion* explained that Casey's casting was largely borne of a desire to make Leiter less forgettable.

Broccoli, Albert R., et al. *Dr. No* Ultimate ed., Metro Goldwyn Mayer Home Entertainment : 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006.

Brosnan, Pierce., et al. *GoldenEye* MGM/UA Home Video, 1997/1995.

Campbell, Martin., et al. *Casino Royale* Blu-ray + DVD [edition]., Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2012.

Douthat, Ross. "Opinion | James Bond Has No Time for China." *The New York Times*, 16 Oct. 2021, [www.nytimes.com/2021/10/16/opinion/james-bond-china.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/16/opinion/james-bond-china.html).

This is an article by recurring New York Times opinion columnist Ross Douthat on China's absence from recent Bond films. Douthat states that while Bond films have a

precedent for including politically relevant locations, this has not been upheld in recent years due to China's exclusion (despite its strong influence on global politics).

As I spend some time discussing Asia in relation to James Bond and politics, I found this article to be a very useful perspective on current events. A large number of my sources were written prior to the releases of *Spectre* and *No Time To Die*, meaning that this lent a useful contemporary perspective.

Fitzsimons, Tim. "A Very LGBTQ Decade: Gay Marriage, Trans Rights, "Rainbow Wave.""

*NBC News*, 29 Dec. 2019,

[www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/very-lgbtq-decade-gay-marriage-trans-rights-rainbow-wave-n1107901](https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/very-lgbtq-decade-gay-marriage-trans-rights-rainbow-wave-n1107901).

Tim Fitzsimons of NBC has created a popular news article that acts as a chronicle of LGBTQ+ developments through the 2010s. It was written to be a retrospective, as it was published in December of 2019. It includes landmark legislation and social issues.

Because I wanted to state that queer rights had expanded within the 2010s, I required a source that would simply confirm this assertion. This offers credible and factual verification.

"From Harlem to Haiti." *National Museum of African American History and Culture*,

[nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/harlem-haiti](https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/harlem-haiti).

A special piece published by the National Museum of African American History and Culture detailing the relationship between Haiti and Harlem, as well as the history of the respective locations.

Used to support my contextualization of the locations featured in *Live and Let Die* in the Villains: Race section.

*From Russia With Love*. Young, Terence, et al. Blu-ray format. MGM Home Entertainment Inc, 2012.

Feinstein, PJ. "Why James Bond Would Make a Terrible Spy in Real Life." *Reader's Digest Australia*, 4 Dec. 2023, [www.readersdigest.com.au/culture/why-james-bond-would-make-a-terrible-spy-in-real-life](http://www.readersdigest.com.au/culture/why-james-bond-would-make-a-terrible-spy-in-real-life). Accessed 23 May 2025.

A popular article written for the Australian branch of Reader's Digest on how James Bond would fare as a real-world spy. It features segments from an interview with Alex Younger, the former head of MI6 ("C"), in which Younger states that Bond would not be a very good spy.

In my Bond and Doctrine section, I compare and contrast James Bond's fictional employment with the real-world MI6. Having a real C's opinion on James Bond was incredibly helpful for this.

Fukunaga, Cary Joji, et al. *No Time to Die* Collector's edition., SDS, 2021.

Funnell, Lisa, et al. *Geographies, Genders and Geopolitics of James Bond*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

An academic book analyzing James Bond in the context of social and political geography. There is a focus on Bond's identity, and on how the locations presented in the films pertain to political events.

This source is extremely relevant to my project, as it presents in-depth scholarly research on topics I am eager to explore, and is full of information that is useful for my project.

German, Monica. *Bond Girls: Body, Fashion and Gender*. 1st edition, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474204057>.

An academic book published by Monica German on how Bond girls are presented, regarded, and written, with a particular focus on feminism and fashion. Discusses Bond girls as sex symbols, rivals, and love interests in relation to Bond.

Useful in my research of how Bond girls are perceived and the shortcomings of public perception surrounding Bond girls. I found the analysis of Bond girls' sexuality especially useful.

Gilbert, Lewis, et al. *Moonraker* Widescreen edition., Metro-Goldway-Mayer, 2015.

*Goldfinger*. Saltzman, Harry, et al. Ultimate edition. Metro Goldwyn Mayer Home Entertainment, 20061964.

Hass, Nancy. "How Japonisme Forever Changed the Course of Western Design." *The New York Times*, 11 Feb. 2021, [www.nytimes.com/2021/02/11/t-magazine/japonisme-paris-western-design.html?smid=ur-l-share](http://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/11/t-magazine/japonisme-paris-western-design.html?smid=ur-l-share).

A New York Times article on how the cultural phenomenon of Japonisme influenced design in the late 1800s, and how its effects are still seen in contemporary design.

As I mention Chinoiserie and Japonisme in my paper, I wanted to have a source that explains both phenomena in detail. This was useful in contextualizing the West's relationship to Asia prior to the 20th Century, and the evolution of societal attitudes surrounding Asian culture.

Hamilton, Guy, et al. *Live and Let Die* Ultimate 007 ed., MGM Home Entertainment ;

Distributed by Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2008.

“Intelligence Officer FAQs | SIS.” *SIS*, 2025,

[www.sis.gov.uk/careers/intelligence-officers/intelligence-officer-faqs](http://www.sis.gov.uk/careers/intelligence-officers/intelligence-officer-faqs). Accessed 23 May 2025.

A list published by MI6 of frequently asked questions and misconceptions surrounding careers as an MI6 Intelligence Officer.

As I compare and contrast real-life intelligence work to intelligence work as it is portrayed in James Bond films, I found MI6’s explanation of the nature of intelligence work very illuminating. I especially appreciated how they specifically addressed James Bond-esque characterizations of intelligence work and contrasted them with reality.

Irwin, James. “The Dumbest James Bond Trope - James Irwin - Medium.” *Medium*, 28 Nov. 2023, [medium.com/@james.irwin/the-dumbest-james-bond-trope-b10d99a97bdd](https://medium.com/@james.irwin/the-dumbest-james-bond-trope-b10d99a97bdd).

An informal opinion article by James Irwin on Medium criticizing James Bond’s frequent reliance on disabled villains. Irwin states that this trope is outdated and ableist, and complains that it is ridiculously frequent throughout Bond films.

I primarily used this source to obtain a comprehensive list of disabled villains in Bond films, as I did not trust my own memory and did not have the time to watch all 25 Bond films within the scope of this project.

Lewis, Noah Jacoby (2018) "Shaken Not Stirred: The Cold War Politics of James Bond, From Novel to Film," *Liberated Arts: a journal for undergraduate research*: Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 3.



A journal article specifically focused on how James Bond films are adapted from their source novels to reflect current events, with a particular focus on the evolution of Bond's relationship with the Cold War.

Though there are multiple sources analyzing Bond from a political perspective, each offers a different point of view. In the case of this article, it views Bond in an extremely historical context (rather than one centering identity or ideology, as the others do respectively). This rounds out the Bond and politics articles, and offers important insight on the specific political climate that precipitated the release of three of the most iconic James Bond films (*Dr. No*, *Goldfinger*, and *Casino Royale*).

Mendes, Sam,, et al. *Skyfall* 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment :, 2013.

Milmo, Dan. "James Bond's Gay Hint Was Almost Cut from Skyfall, Says Producer." *The Guardian*, The Guardian, 8 Sept. 2021, [www.theguardian.com/film/2021/sep/08/james-bonds-gay-hint-was-almost-cut-from-skyfall-says-producer](http://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/sep/08/james-bonds-gay-hint-was-almost-cut-from-skyfall-says-producer). Accessed 23 May 2025.

A popular article on how the studio pressured Bond filmmakers to cut the scene in *Skyfall* where Silva flirts with Bond, and how Barbara Broccoli (shockingly) fought to keep the scene in the film.

I used this source to inform my writing on external perceptions and politics surrounding the queer characters in Daniel Craig's era as Bond. It explains how the studio and the general public felt about the scene, which I discuss multiple times in my paper.

Miron, Marina, and Rod Thornton. "Smersh: Why Putin Has Reinstated Stalin's Notorious and Much-Feared Anti-Spy Unit." *The Conversation*, 12 Jan. 2024,

[theconversation.com/smersh-why-putin-has-reinstated-stalins-notorious-and-much-feared-anti-spy-unit-220627](https://theconversation.com/smersh-why-putin-has-reinstated-stalins-notorious-and-much-feared-anti-spy-unit-220627).

An article on the history of SMERSH and the implications of Putin's restoration of the agency.

As I mention SMERSH quite a bit throughout my paper, I found it very useful to find an article that provided such comprehensive information on the topic. It was a bit more detailed than I needed it to be, but I would rather be well-informed than not.

National Air and Space Museum. "What Was the Space Race?" *National Air and Space Museum*, Smithsonian, 23 Aug. 2023, [airandspace.si.edu/stories/editorial/what-was-space-race](https://airandspace.si.edu/stories/editorial/what-was-space-race).

An article from the National Air and Space Museum explaining the history and ideologies surrounding the Space Race.

The nuclear arms race (and the space race by extension) features fairly prominently in a number of Bond films. As a result, I wanted to be certain that all of my claims on the historical side of the space race were correct.

*Never Say Never Again*. Kershner, Irvin., et al. Widescreen. [NSNA Co.], 2000.

*Octopussy*. Broccoli, Albert R., et al. Ultimate ed. Metro Goldwyn Mayer Home Entertainment, 2006.

Page, Patrick. *All The Devils Are Here*. Directed by Simon Goodwin, 30 October 2024, Guthrie Theater, Minneapolis.

Patrick Page of *Hadestown*'s one-man show in which he dissects Shakespearean villains. He delves into the history of villains in media altogether, the evolution of villains throughout Shakespeare's body of work as he matured as a writer, and how villains reflect society.

Sims, Yvonne. "blaxploitation movies". Encyclopedia Britannica, 28 Mar. 2025,  
<https://www.britannica.com/art/blaxploitation-movie>. Accessed 21 May 2025.

A fairly extensive nonfiction encyclopedia-style article on the blaxploitation film genre. It discusses the genre's origins, themes, and definitive works within the blaxploitation canon.

As *Live and Let Die* is modeled after blaxploitation movies, I wanted to research the genre. I wound up using this to inform my description of blaxploitation, which in turn describes many of *Live and Let Die*'s definitive traits.

*Spectre*. Mendes, Sam, et al. DVD; Widescreen, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2016.

"State of Oregon: World War II - Threats from Abroad and Enemies at Home: The Cold War."

*Sos.oregon.gov*, [sos.oregon.gov/archives/exhibits/ww2/Pages/after-cold.aspx](https://sos.oregon.gov/archives/exhibits/ww2/Pages/after-cold.aspx).

An article published on the official website of the State of Oregon on the Cold War. It provides an overview of the Cold War's most important and definitive events.

I wrote an entire section on the Cold War. While I have a strong knowledge base on the subject, much of my knowledge comes from a large area of study and cultural experience. As a result, I realized that many of my claims would need a specific source to anchor them. This article was perfect, as it provided a concrete overview of everything I discussed.

Sultan, Maria. "'It's Not a Man Putting Another Man to Do It': Judi Dench Felt Casting a Female for 'M' with James Bond Actors like Daniel Craig and Pierce Brosnan Was a Gamechanger for the Franchise." *Fandomwire.com*, 26 Sept. 2023,  
[fandomwire.com/its-not-a-man-putting-another-man-to-do-it-judi-dench-felt-casting-a-fe](https://fandomwire.com/its-not-a-man-putting-another-man-to-do-it-judi-dench-felt-casting-a-fe)

[male-for-m-with-james-bond-actors-like-daniel-craig-and-pierce-brosnan-was-a-gamechanger-for-the-franchise/](#).

A popular article on how the casting of Judi Dench as M in James Bond changed precedents within the Bond franchise and made way for a more feminist canon. Several quotations from interviews with Dench on her casting are featured, granting the article greater credibility.

In the Bond's Allies section, the chief focus is how the casting of Bond's allies has evolved over time with respect to politics. Since this article highlights the groundbreaking nature of Judi Dench's casting, I found it invaluable for the section (especially given the difficulty of sourcing a pop culture claim like that).

Syed, Armani. "The Trouble with the Rewrites to the James Bond Books." *Time*, 27 Feb. 2023, [time.com/6258547/james-bond-books-rewritten/](https://time.com/6258547/james-bond-books-rewritten/).

A Time Magazine article on the shortcomings of rewritten editions of Ian Fleming's James Bond novels. Its main point is that while racist characterizations have been rewritten, many sexist and homophobic aspects of the narratives remain.

While I do not agree with Armani (I am against rewriting any books or media at all), I found this article useful in legitimizing my claims about the racism and sexism in the Bond canon, as it is a phenomenon that many are shockingly reluctant to acknowledge.

Chaney, William A., Joyce, Patrick, Barr, Nicholas A., Briggs, Asa, Spencer, Ulric M., Prestwich, Michael Charles, Atkins, Ralph Charles, Gilbert, Bentley Brinkerhoff, Whitelock, Dorothy, Kishlansky, Mark A., Colley, Linda J., Hastings, Margaret, Ravenhill, William, Kellner, Peter, Josephson, Paul R., Frere, Sheppard Sunderland,

Smith, Lacey Baldwin, Morrill, John S.. "United Kingdom". Encyclopedia Britannica, 22 May. 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom>. Accessed 23 May 2025..

An encyclopedia-style article on the United Kingdom. Sections include land, people, economy, government and society, cultural life, and history.

Provides an excellent overview of the history of politics within the UK. I found this helpful in making broad historical claims on Britain's legacy and involvement in global politics.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Ian Fleming". Encyclopedia Britannica, 14 May. 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ian-Fleming>. Accessed 19 May 2025.

An encyclopedia-style article on the life of Ian Fleming.

While less detailed than the official Ian Fleming website, I found this source helpful for cross referencing claims made on the Fleming site and filling in a few gaps in Fleming's biography.

*The Spy Who Loved Me*. Broccoli, Albert R., et al. MGM Home Entertainment, 2012.

James Bond is tasked with stopping an international shipping magnate (Karl Stromberg) intent on triggering global nuclear war via nuking New York City and Moscow and rebuilding civilization underwater with his ship, *Atlantis*. In order to stop him, Bond teams up with Soviet agent Anya Amasova (code name Triple X). In this unlikely partnership, they intercept the missiles' trajectory, making them crash into each other, and take down Stromberg's *Atlantis*.

This source is particularly interesting to analyze, as it depicts many aspects of the Cold War and global fears surrounding it in a relatively light manner. It showcases the

relationship between James Bond and real-world politics, and is also regarded as one of the best and most representative Bond films.

Uldricks, Teddy J. *The International History Review*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1997, pp. 414–16. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40107813>. Accessed 20 May 2025.

An scholarly article providing a detailed historical account of the Metropolitan-Vickers Trial.

As neither the Britannica nor official website Ian Fleming biography explained in detail what the Metropolitan-Vickers Trial was, I thought it important to seek out a third source. This was for the explicit purpose of clarifying the Trial in my own paper, for which this article was more than sufficient.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. “Eugenics.” *Encyclopedia.ushmm.org*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 23 Oct. 2020, [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/eugenics](https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/eugenics).

An article explaining the Nazis’ use of eugenics during the Holocaust. It defines the practice in a broad context, then explains how it was perceived and implemented by the Nazi Party.

As I make claims about how Hugo Drax’s plans in *Moonraker* are highly reminiscent of Nazi-era eugenics practices, I thought it important to cite an article detailing the Nazis’ use of eugenics in order to verify my assertions about Drax.

Wilson, Michael G., et al. *Die Another Day* Special ed. ; Full screen ed., MGM Home Entertainment, 20032002.

Wu, L., & Nguyen, N. (2022). From Yellow Peril to Model Minority and Back to Yellow Peril. *AERA Open*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584211067796> (Original work published 2022)

A scholarly article on the evolution of Anti-Asian racism in the West, with a focus on how geopolitics informs racial sentiment.

As anti-Asian racism is highly prevalent in Bond films, I wanted to investigate the political side of these racist attitudes. I found this article immensely helpful for contextualizing many of the depictions found in Bond films. I also found it helpful in explaining the evolution of Bond films' portrayals of Asia in relation to cultural sentiment.