

THE COLD WAR AND AMERICAN POLITICAL CULTURE
PLSC 486H

TUESDAY, 1:40-4:40, DC 329

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This class will examine the impact of the Cold War on American political life. We will consider the reasons the rivalry with the Soviet Union took the form it did in the United States. We will then review its impact on American politics, society, and culture. While the Cold War was certainly important, we will also consider the possibility that some claims about its effects are overstated. The primary goal of this class is to give students a critical understanding of the impact of the Cold War. A secondary goal of the course is to provide students with an opportunity to use and develop their writing and critical thinking skills, as well as to expose them to the ways social scientists address topics like those covered in the class.

Course Materials

We will both read all (or at least large sections) of eight books during as part of this course. They have all been ordered by the Binghamton University Book Store, but you can obtain them from any source you like.

Caputo, Philip. 1977. *A Rumor of War*. New York: Holt Paperbacks.

Ehrman, John. 2005. *The Eighties*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Friedberg, Aaron L. 2000. *In the Shadow of the Garrison State*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gaddis, John Lewis. 2005. *The Cold War: A New History*. New York: Penguin Press.

Jacobs, Robert A. 2010. *The Dragon's Tail*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Schrecker, Ellen. 1998. *Many Are the Crimes*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

In addition to the books, I have assigned a number of articles and book excerpts, each of which is listed in the course outline below. You can obtain all of the readings either through the J-STOR database, which can be reached through the library's website, or the Blackboard page for this course, or the links embedded in the syllabus.

We will also be watching many movies as part of this course. These will act as a window onto how major aspects of American politics filtered into popular culture. They are listed on the course schedule under the week we will discuss them in class. You should watch them before the class meeting. There are two ways to obtain them. One is to purchase them all through Amazon or some other source. This will cost roughly \$400. A second (cheaper) method is to purchase a subscription to Netflix or another movie rental service and place these movies in your queue. Only one of the movies--"The Day After" (1983)--is currently not available in this way. A two-DVD subscription to Netflix costs \$19.98/month.

Course Requirements and Grading

Grading Scale. Your semester grade will be computed on a 100-point scale as follows: 94-100 = A; 91-93 = A-; 88-90 = B+; 84-87 = B; 81-83 = B-; 78-80 = C+; 74-77 = C; 71-73 = C-; 65-70 = D; 0-64 = F. You will receive a letter grade on your term paper and for class participation. These correspond to numeric grades as follows: A = 100; A- = 93; B+ = 89; B = 85; B- = 82; C+=79; C = 75; C- = 72; D = 67; F = 50. You will receive a numeric grade on the quizzes.

Attendance and Participation. Because this class is a seminar, we will spend nearly all our time discussing the assigned readings and the movies. There will be no lectures. Your participation is essential to the success of the class. Completing the assigned reading and watching the movies are vital. You also need to be prepared to discuss them. Make sure you know the key features of each author's argument. Think about how they relate to the movies we have watched. Be prepared to explain your position in class. The quality of your participation in class discussion will count for 30 percent of your semester grade.

This class meets only once each week, so we have relatively few sessions. For this reason, attendance is especially important. If you miss more than one class for any reason, your final grade will be lowered by one full letter grade for each additional session you do not attend. No excuses will be accepted.

Quizzes. During the semester, there will be seven unannounced quizzes. Each will consist of 3-5 multiple choice questions about the reading and the movies for that week. These questions will be designed to test your basic knowledge of the substance of the reading and the basic plot of the movies. They are not intended to be difficult. Your five highest quiz grades will account for 20 percent of your final grade. Your two lowest quiz grades will be dropped.

Term Paper. Each student will write a term paper assessing the impact of the Cold War on a social or political development in American life between 1945 and 1990. This paper should be roughly 15-25 pages in length, although the precise number of pages will not be an important determinant of your grade. A prospectus for your term paper is due no later than the October 18th class meeting. The prospectus is important. It will count for 10 percent of your final grade. The prospectus should do the following:

1. State the social or political development you will consider, explaining why it is important. You can select something we will consider in class, such as the nature of military service, changing gender roles, the Civil Rights Movement, or the "Culture Wars" of the 1980s. Many other topics are possible, however, such as the deindustrialization of the Northeastern United States, growth in the size of government, trends in public opinion, changes in immigration policy, U.S. relations with Latin America, and the like. If you are having trouble selecting a topic, please see me so we can discuss it.
2. Briefly explain why it is possible that the Cold War affected the phenomenon you want to study. This argument supporting the relationship can be derived from the work of others. You do not have to believe that the Cold War really did make a difference, but you need to show that it is at least plausible that it did.
3. Explain how you will test whether the Cold War really influenced the phenomenon you are studying. You should ask yourself this question: what could I find that would show that the

relationship did not exist, or did not work in the way I (or others) initially argued? If you are not sure how to design your test, please see me for help.

4. Provide a preliminary list of at least four sources of information you will use. In addition to giving a citation for each source, you should write one or two sentences explaining what information it will provide and how it will relate to your overall argument. For example, if you are curious about whether the Cold War reduced trust in government--a very interesting question, by the way--you might look for sources of public opinion data that cover the Cold War era.

The term paper is due no later than 4:00 p.m. on Friday, December 9th. You should submit both a hard copy and an electronic version to turnitin.com through the Blackboard page for this class. Your term paper will be worth 40% of your final grade for the semester.

Plagiarism. All work submitted as part of this course must be original, with your sources properly cited. You may use any citation system you like for this purpose. You may not receive assistance of any sort during quizzes, nor can you use notes or other materials. I take violations of these rules very seriously. Anyone found to be cheating on a quiz, or who submits a plagiarized essay, will receive a failing grade for the course. These cases will also be submitted to the Harpur College Academic Honesty Committee for possible further disciplinary action.

Classroom Decorum. I encourage you to express your views on the course material. You are free to disagree with me or with your fellow students, just as others are free to disagree with you. Any opinion is welcome but you must treat your fellow students with respect. Please refrain from personal insults or inflammatory remarks that may disrupt the class. Those who do not follow this rule will be asked to leave the class.

Laptop Computers. Students may use laptop computers to take notes or refer to reading material in class. Computers may not be used for other purposes during class time. I reserve the right to ban all laptops, or those of specific students, from the classroom if their use becomes a problem during the semester.

Tentative Schedule

The dates and reading assignments may change during the semester. If so, an announcement will be made in class.

Date:	Topic and Assigned Materials:
August 30	Introductory Meeting
September 6	What Was the Cold War? Gaddis, John Lewis. 2005. <i>The Cold War: A New History</i> . New York: Penguin Press. Entire book. Movies: "The Manchurian Candidate" (1962) "High Noon" (1952)

September 13 American Political Culture after 1945

Friedberg, Aaron L. 2000. *In the Shadow of the Garrison State*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapters 1-3.

Brinkley, Alan. 2001. "The Illusion of Unity in Cold War Culture." In Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert, eds., *Rethinking Cold War Culture*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press. 61-73.

Whitfield, Stephen J. 1996. *The Culture of the Cold War*, second edition. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. Chapter 1.

Movies:

"The Atomic Café" (1982)

"The Best Years of Our Lives" (1946)

September 20 Military Service during the Early Cold War Era

Friedberg, Aaron L. 2000. *In the Shadow of the Garrison State*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 5.

Appy, Christian G. 2001. "We'll Follow the Old Man": The Strains of Sentimental Militarism in Popular Films of the Fifties. In Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert, eds., *Rethinking Cold War Culture*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press. 74-105.

Movies:

"The Caine Mutiny" (1954)

"The Hunters" (1958)

September 27 McCarthyism

Schrecker, Ellen. 1998. *Many Are the Crimes*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. Parts 1-2.

Movies:

"On the Waterfront" (1954)

"The Crucible" (1996)

October 4 McCarthyism in Retrospect

Schrecker, Ellen. 1998. *Many Are the Crimes*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. Parts 3-4.

[Schrecker, Ellen, and Maurice Isserman. 2000. "The Right's Cold War Revision." *The Nation* 274 \(4\): 22.](#)

Response to Schrecker and Isserman by John Earl Haynes:

<http://www.johnearlhaynes.org/page47.html>.

Movies:

"The Front" (1976)

"Point of Order" (1964)

- October 11 Nuclear War**
 Jacobs, Robert A. 2010. *The Dragon's Tail*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
 Movies:
 "Fail-Safe" (1964)
 "Dr. Strangelove" (1964)
- October 18 The Vietnam War I: Contemporary Views**
 Caputo, Philip. 1977. *A Rumor of War*. New York: Holt Paperbacks.
 Movies:
 "MASH" (1970)
 "The Green Berets" (1968)
- October 25 The Vietnam War II: Retrospective Views**
 Clark, Michael. 1991. Remembering Vietnam. In Joe Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg, eds., *The Vietnam War and American Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press. 177-207.
 Movies:
 "Apocalypse Now" (1979)
 "Platoon" (1986)
- November 1 Race and Civil Rights**
[Korstad, Robert, and Nelson Lichtenstein. 1988. Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement. *Journal of American History* 75 \(3\): 786-811.](#)
[Skrentny, John David. 1998. The effect of the Cold War on African-American civil rights: America and the world audience, 1945-1968. *Theory and Society* 27: 237-285.](#)
 Movie:
 "The Bedford Incident" (1965)
- November 8 Gender**
[Cohn, Carol. 1987. Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals. *Signs* 12 \(4\): 687-702.](#)
 Johnson, David K. 2004. *The Lavender Scare*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Introduction, chapter 1 and chapter 7.
[May, Elaine Tyler. 1988. *Homeward Bound*. New York: Basic Books. Introduction and chapter 1.](#) (E-book available through BU Library.)
 Movies:
 "Advise and Consent" (1962)
 "Some Like It Hot" (1959)

November 15 The 1980s: The Cold War Intensifies, then Ends

Ehrman, John. 2005. *The Eighties: America in the Age of Reagan*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

[Suri, Jeremi. 2002. "Explaining the End of the Cold War: A New Historical Consensus?" *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4\(4\): 60-92.](#)

Movies:

"Red Dawn" (1984)

"Top Gun" (1986)

November 22 Views from the Other Side

This is an extra credit day. There will be no quiz, but those who come to discuss the movies will have two extra points added to their final grade for the semester.

Movies:

"Goodbye Lenin" (2003)

"The Lives of Others" (2006)

November 29 Nuclear War and the 1980s

[DiCicco, Jonathan. 2011. *Fear, Loathing, and Cracks in Reagan's Mirror Images: Able Archer 83 and an American First Step toward Rapprochement in the Cold War. *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7, 253-74.*](#)

Movies:

"War Games" (1983)

"The Day After" (1983)

December 6 Retrospective Views of the Cold War

No reading assignment. Work on your final paper due at the end of this week!

Movies:

"Thirteen Days" (2000)

"Good Night, and Good Luck" (2005)