

**The Cold War and American Political Culture**  
**PLSC 486H**

Tuesday, 1:40-4:40, Rockefeller Center 261

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Office Hours: By appointment, via Zoom

**Course Description and Purpose**

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. In addition to considering the impact of the Cold War while it was going on, we will consider how Americans have remembered it, and how those memories have affected American politics since.

This course is a 4-credit course, which means that students are expected to do at least 12.5 hours of course-related work or activity each week during the semester. This includes scheduled class lecture/discussion meeting times as well as time spent completing assigned readings, preparing written assignments, and other course-related tasks.

This course helps fulfill the N (Social Science) and W (Writing) general education requirements. Within the political science major this course:

- Helps fulfill the requirement for 10 PLSC courses for political science majors.
- Fulfills the requirement of at least 1 course in international relations
- Helps fulfill the requirement for 6 upper-level courses (300- or 400-level)
- Helps fulfill the requirement for 2 senior seminars (400-level)

**Learning Outcomes.** At the end of this course, students will gain a critical understanding of the impact of the Cold War on American society. The course will also provide students with an opportunity to use and develop their writing and critical thinking skills.

**Course Materials**

We will both read all of three books as part of this course. The Binghamton University Book Store has ordered them all, but you can obtain them from any source you like.

- Craig, Campbell, and Fredrik Logevall. 2009. *America's Cold War*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Herr, Michael. 1977. *Dispatches*. New York: Vintage.
- Schrecker, Ellen. 1998. *Many Are the Crimes*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

In addition to the books, I have assigned a number of articles, book excerpts, podcasts, and other materials, each of which is listed in the course schedule below. You can obtain all of these materials through Brightspace.

We will also be watching two movies each week as part of this course. These will act as a window onto how the Cold War filtered into popular culture. They are listed on the course schedule under the week when we will discuss them in class. You should watch them before the class meeting. All are available either through Amazon's streaming video service or YouTube. If you have trouble finding any of them, please contact me.

### **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.

**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. Each week's discussion will have two parts.

1. During the week before each class meeting, there will be a discussion board devoted to that week's readings. I will post at least two questions on the week's reading and movies. Each student should post an answer to at least two of these questions. Your responses are due no later than 11:59 p.m. on the day before our class meeting. After you post your response, you will be able to read other students' posts. It is worth considering how others answered the same question. You may respond to their posts online if you choose, but it is generally best to do so in class.
2. We will discuss the assigned readings and the movies for each week during our Wednesday meeting. Every student should be ready to explain and elaborate on the questions or answers he or she posted on the discussion board. The discussion questions are intended to get us started but the conversation can ultimately go in any direction your thoughts about the class material dictate.

We have just one class meeting per week, so attendance is especially important. Please contact me in advance if you will not be present. Overall, attendance and participation will be worth 60% of your grade for the semester.

**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, either during the Cold War or in the years since it ended. This paper should be roughly 10-20 double-spaced 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 March 30th class meeting. The prospectus is important. It will count for 10% 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 about various issues, changes in immigration policy, U.S. relations with Latin America, the interventions in

the Middle East after 2001, and the like. If you have trouble selecting a topic, please contact me so that I can help you find something that fits your interests.

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 initially argued? If you are not sure how to design your test, please contact 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 finished term paper is due no later than 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, May 15th. You should submit it through Brightspace. Your term paper will be worth 30% of your final grade for the semester.

### **Other Course Policies**

**COVID-19.** Binghamton University follows the recommendations of public health experts to protect the health of students, faculty, staff, and the community at large. Safeguarding public health depends on each of us strictly following requirements as they are instituted and for as long as they remain in force. Health and safety standards will be enforced in this course.

Current rules require everyone to wear a face covering that completely covers both the nose and mouth while indoors. A face shield is not an acceptable substitute. If these requirements change, a campus-wide announcement will be made to inform the University. If you forget your face covering or it does not meet the requirements, you will be asked to leave the room immediately. You may not return until you meet the requirement. If a student does not comply with the requirement or my request to leave the classroom, I will immediately cancel the remainder of the class session and inform the dean's office, which will work with the Student Records office to issue a failing grade ("F") for the course regardless of when in the semester the incident occurs. The Dean's office will also inform the Office of Student Conduct. If a student's refusal to comply is a second offense, the Office of Student Conduct may recommend dismissal from the University.

Even with these precautions, breakthrough cases of COVID-19 are still possible. If you develop symptoms (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>), your top priorities should be getting medical treatment and avoiding further spread of the virus. Do not come to class. If you are on campus, call the Student Health Service for instructions at 607-777-2221. Once you are able, let me know about your situation. There is no need to ask the Student Health Service or your doctor for a note confirming your illness. I will take steps to help you make up the work you miss. I will do the same for other personal and family emergencies

that may arise this semester. Please let me know about these issues as soon as you can. It is much easier for me to help you if I know about your situation before it critically affects your academic performance. I will not pry into the details any more than is necessary to assist you.

**Office hours.** I will hold office hours through Zoom, at least for the beginning of this semester. If you would like to meet with me, we will set up a time and I'll provide you with a Zoom link. If conditions change and I am able to hold office hours in person, I will establish regular times.

**Technology.** Although this is an in-person class, we will still use Brightspace, our new learning management system, for some purposes. I am new to this system, just as most of you are, so I may not be able to resolve technical issues you encounter. I encourage you to turn to the technical support the system provides:

<https://community.brightspace.com/support/s/contactsupport>.

**E-mail.** I will use your university e-mail address for course announcements and other official purposes. Check this account at least once a day. I recommend setting your university e-mail account to forward messages to whatever e-mail address you use most often. I will respond to student messages in a timely manner but do not count on receiving an answer in less than 24 hours.

**Grade Appeals.** All grade appeals must be made in writing. If you believe a grade I assigned you is incorrect, you should write a brief memo explaining your concerns. I will review your memo and respond to you in writing.

**Cheating and Plagiarism.** All work submitted as part of this course, including comments posted on discussion boards, must be original, with your sources cited. It is fine for you to introduce and use outside material that you think is relevant but you should credit the original authors. You may use any citation system you like for this purpose. Violations of this rule will result in a failing grade for the course and will be submitted to the Harpur College Academic Honesty Committee for further disciplinary action.

**Decorum.** I encourage you to express your views on the course material both in class and on the discussion boards. You are free to disagree with me or with your fellow students, just as others are free to disagree with you. In doing so, however, please refrain from personal insults or inflammatory rhetoric. Be respectful of one another and always remember that there is a real person on the other end of your comments.

## Course Schedule and Assigned Materials

**26 January    Introductory Meeting**

**2 February    The United States after World War II**

Patterson, James T. 1996. *Grand Expectations*. New York: Oxford University Press. Prologue, chapters 1 and 3.

Craig, Campbell, and Fredrik Logevall. 2009. *America's Cold War*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapters 1-3.

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

Movies:

"Pickup on South Street" (1953)

"The Best Years of Our Lives" (1946)

**9 February    Military Service and 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:

"Strategic Air Command" (1955)

"The Caine Mutiny" (1954)

**16 February    McCarthyism**

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

Glenn Frankel, "High Noon's Secret Backstory," *Vanity Fair*, February 22, 2017.

*You Must Remember This* Podcast, Episode 83, The Blacklist Part 13: On the Waterfront: Elia Kazan

Movies:

"High Noon" (1952)

"On the Waterfront" (1954)

**23 February    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.

*You Must Remember This* Podcast, Episode 83, The Blacklist Part 14: After the Fall: Arthur Miller

Movies:

"The Way We Were" (1973)

"The Crucible" (1996)

- 2 March**      **Fears of Nuclear War in the 1950s and 1960s**  
 Craig, Campbell, and Fredrik Logevall. 2009. *America's Cold War*.  
 Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapters 4-5.  
 Ellsberg, Daniel. 2017. *The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear  
 War Planner*. New York: Bloomsbury USA. 41-144.  
 Movies:  
 "Fail-Safe" (1964)  
 "Dr. Strangelove" (1964)
- 9 March**      **Broader Changes in American Society: Race and Gender**  
 Von Eschen, Penny M. 2000. "Who's the Real Ambassador? Exploding Cold  
 War Racial Ideology." In Christian G. Appy, ed., *Cold War Constructions*  
 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press), 110-31.  
 Johnson, David K. 2004. *The Lavender Scare*. Chicago: University of Chicago  
 Press. Introduction, chapters 1 and 7.  
 May, Elaine Tyler. 1988. *Homeward Bound*. New York: Basic Books.  
 Introduction and chapter 1.  
 Movies:  
 "South Pacific" (1958)  
 "Advise and Consent" (1962)
- 16 March**      **No class meeting -- Spring Break**
- 23 March**      **No class meeting -- International Studies Association annual meeting**  
 This is a good time to work on your paper prospectus, which is due at the next  
 class meeting.
- 30 March**      **The Vietnam War I: Contemporary Views**  
 \* Paper prospectus due at this class meeting. \*  
 Craig, Campbell, and Fredrik Logevall. 2009. *America's Cold War*.  
 Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapters 6-7.  
 Herr, Michael. 1977. *Dispatches*. New York: Vintage.  
 Movies:  
 "M\*A\*S\*H" (1970)  
 "The Green Berets" (1968)

- 6 April**      **The Vietnam War II: Retrospective Views**  
 Appy, Christian G. 2015. *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity*. New York: Penguin Books. Chapter 11.  
 Schulzinger, Robert D. 2006. *A Time For Peace*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapters 4, 8.  
 Young, Marilyn. 2004. "Still Stuck in the Big Muddy." In Ellen Schrecker, ed., *Cold War Triumphalism* (New York: the New Press), pp. 262-73.  
 Movies:  
 "Apocalypse Now" (1979)  
 "Rambo: First Blood, Part II" (1985)
- 13 April**      **No class meeting -- Friday classes meet on this day**
- 20 April**      **Fears of Nuclear War in the 1980s**  
 Hoffman, David E. 2009. *The Dead Hand*. New York: Anchor Books. Chapters 1-3.  
 Movies:  
 "War Games" (1983)  
 "The Day After" (1983)
- 27 April**      **The Cold War Intensifies, then Ends**  
 Craig, Campbell, and Fredrik Logevall. 2009. *America's Cold War*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapters 8-9.  
 Fischer, Beth. 2010. "US Foreign Policy Under Reagan and Bush," in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), 267-88.  
 Movies:  
 "Top Gun" (1986)  
 "Rocky IV" (1985)
- 4 May**      **Retrospective Views of the Cold War**  
 Bacevich, Andrew. 2019. "The Berlin Wall fell and the U.S. learned the wrong lessons. It got us Donald Trump." *Los Angeles Times*, 8 November 2019.  
 Brands, Hal, and John Lewis Gaddis. 2021. "The New Cold War: America, China, and the Echoes of History." *Foreign Affairs* 100(6): 10-20.  
 Nye Joseph S. 2021. "With China a 'Cold War' Analogy is Lazy and Dangerous." *New York Times*, 2 November 2021.  
 Porter, Patrick. 2015. "Twilight Struggle: The Cold War Was Not Stable or Simple."  
 Movies:  
 "The Hunt for Red October" (1990)  
 "Bridge of Spies" (2016)

**11 May**

**Retrospective Views from the Other Side of the Cold War**

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

Movies:

"Goodbye Lenin" (2003)

"The Lives of Others" (2006)