

American Studies 445
The Cold War and American Culture
Craig McConnell, Spring 2006

Course Description

The Cold War was a tumultuous period of anxiety, prosperity, and fabulous paradoxes. Peace was pursued through the threat of nuclear annihilation; the American way of life was protected by censoring suspected communists. This course is a multi-perspective approach to understanding American culture in the Cold War period, 1947 – 1991. We will follow the development of the following themes:

- Perceptions of a Soviet Threat and the Concepts of Containment and Détente
- Perceptions of a Communist Threat at Home
- Fear of Nuclear War
- American Family Structure

To study these themes, we will examine several different cultural artifacts from the Cold War, including film, literature, periodical literature, and both popular and academic histories.

We will strive to gain an understanding of both the Cold War experience and of the way that Americans have tried to understand the Cold War experience. For the first two-thirds of the semester, “The Cold War Experienced,” we will examine artifacts from the Cold War period. In the final third of the semester, we will turn our attention to “The Cold War Remembered,” that is, the perspectives on Cold War culture that have emerged in the post-Cold War period.

Most class meetings will be taught seminar style – you will be expected to come to class with the reading for the week done, prepared to engage each other in discussion of its meaning.

Required Reading

May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (1999).

Kuznick and Gilbert, eds., *Rethinking Cold War Culture* (2001).

Martin McCauley, *Russia, America and the Cold War* (2d. ed., 2004).

Spillane, *One Lonely Night* (1951).

DeLillo, *Underworld* (1997).

All other reading assignments are either available electronically (consult the course web site) or are on reserve at the Pollak Library Reserve Desk.

Reading assignments in brackets [] are *optional* for undergraduates, *required* for graduate students.

Films are available on Reserve in the Pollak Library Media Center (4 North) or can be rented at local video stores. Assigned films should be viewed *before* the class period when they will be discussed.

Contact Information:

Office: H-223C

Office: 714 278 3935 (24 hour voice mail)

Home: 714 223 0404 (9 a.m. to 9 p.m. *only*)

Email: cmcconnell@fullerton.edu

Web: <http://faculty.fullerton.edu/cmcconnell/445/Resources.htm>

Office Hours: MW 10-11:00; R 5:30-6:30, and by appointment.

Introductions

- Week 1: Course Policies and Classroom Expectations
(2/2) The Cold War: An Overview
Untangling Experience and Memory
- Week 2: Windows into Culture: Making Sense of Cultural Artifacts
(2/9) **Read:** McCauley, Ch. 1-2
Rethinking Cold War Culture, “Introduction”
Wasser, “Is Hollywood America?”

The Cold War Experienced

- Week 3: Containment
(2/16) **Read:** McCauley, Ch. 3
Homeward Bound, Ch. 1 and Ch. 5
Goldman, “The Postwar Takes Shape,” in *The Crucial Decade*.
Goldman, “Containment, Foreign and Domestic,” in *The Crucial Decade*.
Barson and Heller, “The Iron Curtain Descends,” in *Red Scared*.
Barson and Heller, “I’m No Communist,” in *Red Scared*.
[Filreis, “Words with ‘All the Effects of Force’” (Essay Review)]
- Week 4: Cold War Literature
(2/23) **Read:** Spillane, *One Lonely Night*.
Savage, “The Bomb,” in *Comic Books and America, 1945-1954*.
Savage, “The Red Menace,” in *Comic Books and America, 1945-1954*.
Whalen-Bridge, “Some Versions of the Cold War” (Essay Review)
[Foreman, “Ideology, Culture, and Character” (Essay Review)]
- Week 5: Nuclear Fear and Its Fallout
(3/2) **Read:** McCauley, Ch. 4
Homeward Bound, Ch. 3 and Ch. 4
Boyer, “Truman, The American People, and The Atomic Bomb” in *Fallout*
[Caputi, “Nuclear Visions” (Essay Review)]
- Week 6: Film Forum I: Films from the Deep Freeze (1947-1962)
(3/9) **Read:** Belton, “Hollywood and the Cold War”
View: *High Noon* (1952)
On The Beach (1959)
The Manchurian Candidate (1962)
Essay Number 1 Due.
- Week 7: Consumerism and American Family Life
(3/16) **Read:** *Homeward Bound*, Ch. 6, 7, 8.
Douglas, “Fractured Fairy Tales,” in *Where the Girls Are*
[Hunter, “Putting Sex in its Place,” (Essay Review)]
- Week 8: Cold War Journalism and Cold War History
(3/23) **Read:** McCauley, Ch. 5
Goldman, “Year of Shocks,” in *The Crucial Decade*.
Reports from Library Explorations (Undergraduates).

— Spring Recess —

Week 9: Film Forum II: Films from the Long Thaw (1962-1991)
(4/6) **Read:** Boyer, “*Dr. Strangelove: Stanley Kubrick Presents the Apocalypse*,” in *Fallout*
View: *Fail-Safe* (1964)
Dr. Strangelove (1964)
Reports from Library Explorations (Graduate Students).

Week 10: Looking Back from Within: Cold War Efforts to Understand the Cold War
(4/13) **Read:** McCauley, Ch. 6, 7
View: *Atomic Café* (1982)
Essay Number 2 Due.

The Cold War Remembered

Week 11: The Dissolution of the Soviet Union
(4/20) The Transition to a Post-Cold War America
Containment, Détente, and Beyond
Read: McCauley, Ch. 8
Rethinking Cold War Culture, Ch. 1, 2, 3.
Gaddis, “The New Cold War History,” in *We Now Know*.
Schoenfeld, “Twenty-four Lies about the Cold War”
Boyle, “The Cold War Revisited” (Essay Review)

Week 12: Literary Reexaminations of The Cold War
(4/27) **Read:** *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, Ch. 8.
DeLillo, *Underworld*, 9-366.
[Schaub, “Without Fanfare or Foucault: The Cold War and the Loss of a
Defining Narrative” (Essay Review)]

Week 13: Literary Reexaminations of The Cold War
(5/4) **Read:** DeLillo, *Underworld*, 367-827.

Week 14: The Cold War in American Studies
(5/11) The Cold War in Cultural Studies
Read: *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, 5, 6, 7.
Kuisel, “Yankee Go Home,” in *Seducing the French*.
Pells, “American Studies in Europe,” in *Not Like Us*.
Gaddis, “The Cuban Missile Crisis,” in *We Now Know*.

Week 15: Film Forum III: Cold War Nostalgia and Cold War Accountability
(5/18) Closing Remarks, Course Evaluation
Read: Boyer and Idsvoog, “Nuclear Menace in the Mass Culture of the Late Cold War
Era and Beyond” in *Fallout*
Rethinking Cold War Culture, Ch. 4.
Schlesinger, Jr., “Some Lessons from the Cold War”
View: *Matinee* (1993)
October Sky (1999)

Week 16: [Final Exam Period]
(5/25) **Essay Number 3 Due Thursday May 25 at 7:30 pm.**

Course Requirements

Your final grade will be calculated based on two components of the course:

- Your support of an active learning community in our in-class discussion of shared readings. All students will be expected to come to each session prepared to discuss the week's assignments. Starting in the second week, you will be required to email a set of lead-off questions to me (at cmccConnell@fullerton.edu) no later than 10pm two days before class (that is, 10 pm Tuesday night). In addition, I strongly urge you to prepare reading notes for each of the major reading assignments (reminders of your reactions and insights that will allow you to take an active part in discussion.) Your participation grade will include occasional in-class writing assignments and one out-of-class library exercise. Participation will account for 40% of your final grade. Consistent attendance and active engagement of the course material are both necessary for a good grade in this component of the course.
- Your production of three 4-6 page essays, each of which will draw connections between ideas and themes that emerge from the assigned readings and the assigned films. The essays are due in Weeks 6, 10, and 16. You will receive guiding questions one week before the essays are due. Each essay will account for 20% of your final grade.

There will be no extra credit options. Students will be assessed with +/- grades.

Graduate Student Requirements

Graduate students will be assessed on a more rigorous standard than undergraduates, and will be expected to explicitly address theory, method, and sources when preparing their essays. Graduate student essays will be 6-8 pages in length. Graduate student library exercises will require contact with and evaluation of primary sources. Reading assignments marked optional for undergraduates are required reading for graduate students.

Academic Integrity

It is your responsibility to review the CSUF policy on academic dishonesty, which is printed on page 558 of the 2005-2007 Catalog and available on the web at the following site:

<http://www.fullerton.edu/senate/PDF/300/UPS300-021.pdf>

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you are unsure of how to avoid plagiarism, come talk to me or refer to the following web site:

<http://www.fullerton.edu/deanofstudents/Judicial/Plagiarism.htm>