

COLD WAR CULTURE AND RELIGION

Ira Chernus

INTRODUCTION

Typically, the term "cold war" is used to describe a massive struggle conducted from 1945 to 1989 between the political, economic, and military systems of the United States and the Soviet Union. The potential consequences of a conflict between "superpowers" armed with nuclear weapons, and the pervasive lingering effects of this conflict, have made the cold war a popular object of academic study. Frequently, courses on the cold war emphasize only the topics of foreign policy and military strategy. This focus can make the cold war seem like a grand but abstract drama conducted between the elite authorities of international government. Students may ultimately come to feel that the cold war happened "out there" and is not very relevant to our lives.

In this course, we will adopt a different focus. We will emphasize the cultural processes through which people in the United States participated in, and came to understand, the cold war as a way of life. (This course deals with cold war culture and religion only in the U.S.) During the cold war, American citizens struggled to construct a "story" about their national identity that was adequate to explain its often paradoxical and frightening aspects. We will see how different groups of people told that story in different ways, and how they struggled with each other to control the national story.

This perspective emphasizes the mundane but vital elements of everyday life in the cold war. It shows how international politics ultimately pervade -- and are supported by -- activities occurring in a nation's cultural spheres, especially (for our purposes) its religion. We will emphasize the religious processes by which American citizens and their leaders drew upon their traditional beliefs and symbols to make sense of the cold war. These religious processes helped Americans both to rationalize the cold war as a costly but legitimate crusade and to oppose it as a great evil. We will also look at the interaction between changing patterns of religion and changing patterns of culture throughout the cold war period. Although we will occasionally look at institutional religion, we will define religion more broadly to encompass people's worldview, their understanding of "ultimate" realities, and their most fundamental values.

Throughout the course, we will ask to what extent, and in what ways, cold war culture and religion are still influencing us in the U.S., particularly in shaping the "war on terrorism" and public attitudes about it.

OFFICE HOURS:

I will have office hours in Humanities 284 on Monday 12 – 1:30, or by appointment:

If you need any special accommodations to enhance your learning in this course, I would be glad to discuss that with you.

REQUIRED READING

David CAMPBELL, *Writing Security*

Tom ENGELHARDT, *The End of Victory Culture*

Robert WUTHNOW, *After Heaven*

A. J. Mojtabai, *Blessed Assurance*

These books are available at the Lefthand Bookstore, 1200 Pearl Street (just east of Broadway, south side of mall, lower level). They are usually open noon-9 weekdays; call 443-8252 to check exact hours. They take cash or check; no credit cards. The readings are also on reserve in Norlin Library.

readings: There will also be some photocopied readings. Some of these will be available in folders in the filing cabinet in HUMN 218. Some will be available online on the course home page: <http://www.colorado.edu/ReligiousStudies/chernus/4820-ColdWarCulture/index.html>, or accessed from the syllabus online.

SCHEDULE OF READING ASSIGNMENTS:

(All assignments are by PAGE number)

I. BEFORE THE COLD WAR

Jan. 23: CAMPBELL, 1-13, 35-51, 73-90, 191-205; READINGS: Robert H. Johnson, *Improbable Dangers*, "Toward Understanding the Psychological Basis of Threats and the U.S. Tendency to Exaggerate Them"

Jan. 30: CAMPBELL, 91-132; ENGELHARDT, 1-53; READINGS: E. Augelli and C. Murphy, *America's quest for supremacy and the Third World*, "Ideology: Common Sense in America" and "Ideology and Foreign Policy"

II. 1945 TO THE EARLY '60s

Feb. 6: EB: *The peak Cold War years, 1945–60* READINGS: Godfrey Hodgson,

"The ideology of the Liberal Consensus" (from *America in Our Time*); Harry S. Truman, "The Truman Doctrine": <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/trudoc.htm> CAMPBELL, 15-33, 133-168; ENGELHARDT, 54-89

Feb. 13: WUTHNOW, 1-51; READINGS: Stephen Whitfield, Cold War Culture, "Praying: God Bless America"; Martin Marty, Modern American Religion, vol. 3, "The Vital Center" and "A Civic Religion of the American Way of Life"; Mark Stoll, "Crusaders Against Communism"

Feb. 20: ENGELHARDT, 90-171; READINGS: Dwight D. Eisenhower, First Inaugural Address: <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres54.html> John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address: <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres56.html> I. Chernus, "The Word 'Peace' as a Weapon of (Cold) War," I. Chernus, "Eisenhower: Faith and Fear in the Fifties"

Feb. 27: READINGS: I. Chernus, "Nuclear Images in the Popular Press: The Age of Apocalypse"; G. Clarke Chapman, "Facing the Nuclear Heresy"; Susan Thistlethwaite, "God and Her Survival in a Nuclear Age"; Joel Kovel, "Against the State of Nuclear Terror"

THE VIETNAM WAR ERA

Mar. 6: EB: The Kennedy and Johnson administrations and "The 1970s: The Nixon Administration"; ENGELHARDT, 175-259

Mar. 13:; WUTHNOW, 52-84; Readings: Howard Zinn, A People's History of the United States,

"The Impossible Victory: Vietnam"; Robert Jay Lifton, "Home From the War"; W. Richard Comstock,

"After the War"; C.D.B. Bryan, from Friendly Fire; Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Time to Break Silence": <http://www.indiana.edu/~iviewweb/mlktime.html> ; Daniel Berrigan, SJ (interview)

IV. THE REAGAN ERA

Mar. 20: EB: "The 1970s: Ford and Carter administrations", and "The late 20th century: The Reagan administration"; ENGELHARDT, 263-285; WUTHNOW, 85-113; READINGS: Gary Wills, Reagan's America, "Original Sinlessness"; Ronald Reagan, "Evil Empire" Speech: http://www.ronaldreagan.com/sp_6.html; E. Linenthal, "War and Sacrifice in the Nuclear Age"; I. Chernus, "Nuclear Images in the Popular Press: From Apocalypse to Static Balance"

Apr. 3: Start reading MOJTABAI; in class we will view and discuss The Day After

Apr. 10: Finish reading MOJTABAI

AFTER THE COLD WAR

Apr. 17: ENGELHARDT, 285-303; CAMPBELL, 169-189; WUTHNOW, 114-167

Apr. 24: READINGS: Robert Bellah, "75 Years"; I. Chernus, "The War on Terrorism and Sin"; I. Chernus, "Fighting Terror in the National Insecurity State"; George W. Bush, Inaugural Address: <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres66.html>

May 1: REVIEW

ASSIGNMENTS:

You are expected to attend class. Remember: missing one class in this course means missing a whole week's work, the same as two or three classes in other courses. You are expected to do the reading, think about it, and come to class prepared to discuss it and ask questions. If you don't take this responsibility, class will be deadly dull.

In addition to participation in class, your grade will be based on one writing project. For this project, you are to select one issue of current public interest in the United States and study how that issue, and public discourse about it, is influenced by the cold war as we study it in this course. The issue can be anything that is receiving significant attention in the media today. Your assignment is to understand how the factors involved in your issue are affected by what happened during the cold war era and how the public discussion of the issue today reflects cold war language and attitudes.

Schedule of due dates:

Feb. 20: Turn in journal-style notes, showing the reading you have done on the issue and ideas you have about cold war influences, based on our reading and class discussion so far. (You should also include influences from pre-cold war material we study in first two weeks.)

March 20: Turn in more journal-style notes and a short essay (3-5 pages) indicating what you think the main ideas in your final paper will be, and why.

April 17: First draft of a paper synthesizing your study of your issue, based on everything we have studied so far.

May 2: Final paper due in Religious Studies office, HUMN 240, by 4:30 PM.

Extra Reading for Grad Students

Everyone will read:

Stephanson, Manifest Destiny (by Jan. 30)

Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*

(follow along chronologically throughout the course)

Everyone will pick two (2) of the following:

Sherry, *In the Shadow of War* (a big book; counts as 2)

Whitfield, *Cold War Culture*

Chernus, *Dr. Strangegod*

Capps, ed., *Vietnam Reader*

Gibson, *Warrior Dreams*

Hunter, *Culture Wars*

Writing Assignments for Grad Students:

Four papers during the semester, 7-8 pages each, discussing your most original interpretations of the reading and class material. You will present summaries of these papers in class and lead discussions on them. Two will be presented to the full class on Thursday afternoons; two will be presented to the weekly grad student meeting. A research paper. You must have the topic approved by me, no later than February 27. After that, changes in topic MUST be approved by me , and are not likely to be.