The Cold War: What Was It and Why Does It Matter?

The Cold War occupies a central, but contested place in the contemporary political imagination. Some say we are in a new Cold War, while others argue that the Cold War is a relic of a bygone age. Despite these disagreements, such proclamations operate on the shared assumption that we know what the Cold War was and why it mattered. This course seeks to challenge such assumptions. Rather than study a stock textbook version of the Cold War, we will examine interpretations and framings of the conflict that interrogate the very concept, framing, and stakes of the Cold War, as well its relationship to other organizing principles in U.S. and global history. What changes, for example, if we re-frame the Cold War not as an existential battle between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, but rather as part of a shared Western history of colonial/imperial conquest? What might both Puritans and the U.S. Civil War have to do with the Cold War? How did the Cold War shape twentieth-century literary and cultural theory? What is gained by shifting the framework away from geopolitics to study the role of race, class, and gender in the conflict? How do these alternative frameworks revise our understanding of the Cold War in contemporary politics? Students will write 2 shorter close-reading essays and a longer research paper in which they will delve into a specific aspect of the historiographical and theoretical debate that interests them.

Assignments: (more specific guidelines for essays will be distributed in class)

- Essay 1: Close Reading: Grappling with Grand Narratives (4-6 pages): 25%
- Essay 3: Research Essay (8-10 pages): 30%
- Participation: 20%: See below for details

Participation Requirements:

Participation is key for your success in this course. In addition to coming to class regularly and on time, you must:

1) Complete all reading assignments

2) Post 2 discussion questions before each class. Please post your questions to the Forum section of NYU Classes at least 1 hour before class on the day we are scheduled to discuss the reading.

3) Contribute Regularly and Thoughtfully to Class Discussion

4) Engage Others With Respect
Books: Please purchase the following books at the NYU bookstore (726 Broadway).

- optional: Diana Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual*

Other Readings: Readings marked with an asterisk (*) can be found in the Resources Folder of the course website in NYU Classes. You must print and bring a hard copy of the reading to class.

Schedule of Readings: Readings and assignments are due on the date they are listed.

Phone/Computer Policy: Please turn your cell phones off during class. Please do not use laptops during class discussion. You are permitted to use your laptops for in-class writing exercises and workshops.

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**Unit 1: Grand Narratives of the Cold War and Alternative Frameworks**

January 26: Introduction: What was the Cold War? Why study it? How to study it?


February 2: McMahon, *The Cold War* (pages 78-121)


February 9: - William Appleman Williams, “Empire as a Way of Life”*
- C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (pages 350-356 on “The Higher Immorality” and “crackpot realism”)
- Assign Essay 1

February 11: - Geoffrey Smith, “National Security and Personal Isolation: Sex, Gender, and Disease in the Cold-War United States”*

**Unit 2: Gender, Race, and Colonialism in the Cold War**

February 16: NO CLASS

February 18: Workshop Drafts: 1 as a class; partner work
Assignment: Search the internet for archival material (film clips, magazines, commercials, books related to the politics of sex and gender in Cold War culture)
February 23:  **Essay 1 Due**
In class: Show and Tell: Share research findings
Assignment for Feb. 26: Watch *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and read Rogin

Michael Rogin, “Communism, Motherhood, and Cold War Movies”*
-Assign Essay 2

March 1:  -Chapter 6 of *Rethinking the Cold War*: Brenda Gayle Plummer, “Castro in Harlem: A Cold War Watershed”
-Brief for the United States as Amicus Curiae, Brown v. Education, 347 U.S. 483(1952) (no. 8)*


March 8:  Workshop Drafts: 1 as a class; then work with partners

March 10:  **Essay 2 Due**
Class Visit: Tamiment Library: 10th floor of Bobst

March 15:  **No class: Spring Break**

March 17:  **No class: Spring Break**

**Unit 3: The 1960s: Literature as Politics and the End of the Cold War Consensus**

March 22:  -*The Craft of Research*: “Narrowing Your Topic”; “From Topics to Questions” (page 43)
-In-Class: Assign Essay 2: Review Guidelines

March 24:  Due: Two possible topics: Brainstorm Questions for Each Topic
In-Class: Refining Your Questions

March 29:  -Norman Mailer, *The Armies of the Night* (pages 1-80)
-Steven Belletto, “Inventing Other Realities: What the Cold War Means for Literary Studies”*

March 31:  -Mailer, *The Armies of the Night* (pages 81-132)

April 5:  **Research Proposals Due**
Mailer, *The Armies of the Night* (pages 133-216)

April 7:  Mailer, *The Armies of the Night* (pages 217-288)

April 12:  Sean McCann, “Do You Believe in Magic? Literary Thinking After the New Left”*
Unit 4: Debating the End and Legacy of the Cold War

April 14: **Annotated Bibliography Due**
- Charles S. Maier, “The Cold War as an Era of Imperial Rivalry”*
- Odd Arne Westad, “Beginning of the End: How the Cold War Crumbled”*
  [ch. 1 and ch. 5 of *Reinterpreting the End of the Cold War*, edited by Pons and Romero]

April 19: Andrew O’Hehir, “Strange Bedfellows, Putin the Chomskyite Left, and the Ghosts of the Cold War”*

April 21: Workshop Outlines/Drafts

April 26: Workshop Drafts

April 28: **Research Essay Drafts Due**
- Workshop #3
- Sign up for Individual Meetings via Google Calendar

May 3: Individual Student Meetings to Discuss Drafts:
From 9 A.M. to 2 P.M.

May 5: Last Day of Class: Reflections and Food
- Student Meetings to Discuss Drafts:
  From 9 A.M. to 11 A.M. and 12:30 to 2

May 10: **Final Research Essay Due**
Post by Sunday at midnight