

Cold War Culture

English 30593: Post-1945 American Literature | Fall 2019

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Course Overview

In 1955, publishing executive William Spaulding invited Dr. Seuss to dinner. Spaulding had heard reports that American children were falling behind Soviet children in reading comprehension because they found their primers boring and would rather spend their time watching television and reading comic books. Spaulding gave Dr. Seuss (Theodor Geisel) a list of three hundred words and asked him to write a book that a first grader could read on her own. Dr. Seuss returned a manuscript titled *The Cat in the Hat*. Spaulding worried that six-year-olds weren't pulling their weight in the Cold War, and he built a commercial market for children's literature as a weapon against the Soviet Union.

This course investigates some of the surprising connections between the Cold War and American culture. The Cold War, in which the capitalist West vied with the communist Soviet bloc for dominance in nuclear weapons and space exploration and influence in decolonizing Asia and Africa, left few things untouched in postwar America, including an illustrated cat in a hat. Some of the connections we explore will be obvious: McCarthyism in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), American imperial desire in Graham Green's *The Quiet American* (1955). Others will be more implicit: the containment of the Black left in Alice Childress's *Like One of the Family* (1956), the long shadow of the Korean War in Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker* (1995).

This course asks how Cold War politics governed the culture Americans made and consumed in the years after World War II and how culture motivated, reflected, and challenged prevailing ideas about capitalism, communism, and American power. How did the government use literature and art to advance Cold War interests? How did writers and artists respond to the second red scare? What can Cold War culture teach us about literature and art in the twenty-first century? How is the Cold War still with us? This fall, we will use novels, films, and visual art to consider how the Cold War built the incongruous cultural world—free and constrained, creative and uniform—in which we live.

Required Texts

Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. 1953. Simon and Schuster, 2012.
Childress, Alice. *Like One of the Family*. 1956. Beacon, 2017.
Greene, Graham. *The Quiet American*. 1955. Penguin, 2004.
Lee, Chang-rae. *Native Speaker*. 1995. Riverhead, 1996.

Readings on Course Website

- Belletto, Steven. "The Game Theory Narrative and the Myth of the National Security State." *No Accident, Comrade: Chance and Design in Cold War American Narratives*, Oxford UP, 2012, pp. 101–28.
- Dr. Seuss. *The Cat in the Hat*. Houghton Mifflin, 1957.
- Dudziak, Mary L. Introduction. *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, Princeton UP, 2000, pp. 3–17.
- . "What Kind of War Was the Cold War?" *War Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences*, Oxford UP, 2012, pp. 63–94.
- Engerman, David C. "Ideology and the Origins of the Cold War." *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, edited by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, Cambridge UP, 2010, pp. 20–43.
- Fukuyama, Francis. "The End of History?" *The National Interest*, no. 16, 1989, pp. 3–18.
- Klein, Christina. "Sentimental Education: Creating a Global Imaginary of Integration." *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961*, U of California P, 2003, pp. 19–49.
- May, Elaine Tyler. Introduction. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, rev. and updated ed., Basic Books, 2008, pp. 1–18.
- McCarthy, Joseph. "Speech at Wheeling, West Virginia." *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents*, by Ellen W. Schrecker, Bedford, 1994, pp. 211–16.
- Menand, Louis. "Cat People." *New Yorker*, 15 Dec. 2002, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/12/23/cat-people>.
- The Manchurian Candidate*. Directed by John Frankenheimer. United Artists, 1962.
- Schlesinger, Arthur, Jr. Foreword. *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*, Houghton Mifflin, 1949, pp. xix–xxii.
- . "Politics in an Age of Anxiety." *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*, Houghton Mifflin, 1949, pp. 1–10.
- Washington, Mary Helen. Introduction. *The Other Blacklist: The African American Literary and Cultural Left of the 1950s*, Columbia UP, 2014, pp. 1–22.
- Wiener, Jon. "Forgetting the Cold War." Introduction. *How We Forgot the Cold War: A Historical Journey across America*, U of California P, 2012, pp. 1–11.

Assignments and Grading

Assignments:

Reading Quizzes	15%
Participation and Preparedness	15%
Presentation	20%
Midterm Paper	25%
Final Paper	25%

Grading Scale:

A	93–100%	C	73–76%
A-	90–92%	C-	70–72%
B+	87–89%	D+	67–69%
B	83–86%	D	63–66%
B-	80–82%	D-	60–62%
C+	77–79%	F	0–59%

Reading Schedule and Deadlines

Date	Readings	Deadlines
Week 1	The Cultural Front	
Monday, August 26	Syllabus Dr. Seuss, <i>The Cat in the Hat</i> Menand, “Cat People”	
Wednesday, August 28	Engerman, “Ideology and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917–1962”	Presentation assigned
Week 2	Red Scares	
Monday, September 2	No class (Labor Day)	
Wednesday, September 4	McCarthy, “Speech at Wheeling, West Virginia” May, Introduction to <i>Homeward Bound</i>	
Week 3		
Monday, September 9	Bradbury, <i>Fahrenheit 451</i> (“The Hearth and the Salamander”)	
Thursday, September 11	Bradbury, <i>Fahrenheit 451</i> (“The Sieve and the Sand”)	
Week 4		
Monday, September 16	Bradbury, <i>Fahrenheit 451</i> (“Burning Bright”)	Midterm paper assigned
Wednesday, September 18	<i>The Manchurian Candidate</i>	Midterm paper proposal due Sunday, September 22 at 5 p.m.
Week 5		
Monday, September 23	Conferences	
Wednesday, September 25	Conferences	
Week 6	Three Worlds	
Monday, September 30	Schlesinger, Foreword to <i>The Vital Center</i> and “Politics in an Age of Anxiety”	

Wednesday, October 2	Klein, "Sentimental Education" (website)	
Week 7		
Monday, October 7	Greene, <i>The Quiet American</i> (part 1)	
Wednesday, October 9	Greene, <i>The Quiet American</i> (part 2)	Midterm paper due Friday, October 11 at 5 p.m.
Week 8		
Monday, October 14	No class (fall break)	
Wednesday, October 16	Greene, <i>The Quiet American</i> (part 3)	
Week 9		
Monday, October 21	Greene, <i>The Quiet American</i> (part 4)	
Wednesday, October 23	Belletto, "The Game Theory Narrative and the Myth of the National Security State"	
Week 10	Cold War Civil Rights	
Monday, October 28	Dudziak, Introduction to <i>Cold War Civil Rights</i> (website)	
Wednesday, October 30	Washington, Introduction to <i>The Other Blacklist</i>	
Week 11		
Monday, November 4	Childress, <i>Like One of the Family</i> 1–59	
Wednesday, November 6	Childress, <i>Like One of the Family</i> 60– 110	
Week 12		
Monday, November 11	Childress, <i>Like One of the Family</i> 111– 69	
Wednesday, November 13	Childress, <i>Like One of the Family</i> 170– 221	
Week 13	The End of History	
Monday, November 18	Fukuyama, "The End of History?"	Final paper assigned
Wednesday, November 20	Dudziak, "What Kind of War Was the Cold War?"	
Week 14		
Monday, November 25	Lee, <i>Native Speaker</i> 1–81	
Wednesday, November 27	No class (Thanksgiving break)	
Week 15		
Monday, December 2	Lee, <i>Native Speaker</i> 82–171	
Wednesday, December 4	Lee, <i>Native Speaker</i> 172–258	
Week 16		
Monday, December 9	Lee, <i>Native Speaker</i> 259–349	

	SPOTs	
Wednesday, December 11	Wiener, "Forgetting the Cold War"	Final paper due Sunday, December 15 at 5 p.m.