

SYLLABUS

America In the Nuclear Age

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: Through open discussion of political issues and controversies, this course examines the interconnectedness of American historical and cultural development with that of nuclear energy.

INTRODUCTION: The nuclear age began with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. The exploding of a Soviet made atomic device in September 1949 triggered a superpower arms race with frightening global implications. Over the next several decades, both the United States and the Soviet Union poured billions of dollars into the development of more powerful weaponry, and devoted increasing intellectual resources to the development of foreign and domestic policies tailored to the new “nuclear age” they created. This course goes beyond the decision making process of the policy elites to look specifically at how the “nuclear age” created a unique culture. Henriksen begins (as we begin) with the premise that, “given a conjunction between revolutionary technological change and revolutionary cultural change, it seems only reasonable to expect that an invention as revolutionary as the atomic bomb wrought an accompanying cultural revolution” (xv). This course tests her hypothesis by looking at the cultural discourse and change that accompanied the development of nuclear weapons. We extend the discourse by including the breakdown of the atomic consensus, dissent of the later 1960s, “black humor,” and how the rhetoric of the cold war affected American domestic policy, from civil rights to tax cuts and the Great Society. The Reagan years, generally seen as a postscript to the nuclear age, will be recast as the nuclear age resurgent. We, at the end of the course, will ask ourselves if the nuclear danger and nuclear fear are still palpable forces in our thoughts and subconscious. Finally, in the 1996 movie *Star Trek: First Contact*, a U.S. nuclear missile left over from WW III is discovered in the distant future. The scene, though a product of popular culture, necessarily begs the question: Does a global nuclear holocaust still await (i.e. are we still in the “nuclear age,” or is it merely an exploitation of mass-culture producers?

REQUIRED TEXT: Bernhard, Nancy E. 1999. U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda 1947-1960. Cambridge University Press.

Borstelmann, Thomas. 2001. The Cold War and the Color Line. Harvard University Press.

Henriksen, Margot A. 1997. Dr. Strangelove’s America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age. University of California Press.

Medhurst, Martin J. and H.W. Brands. 2000. Critical Reflections on the Cold War: Linking Rhetoric and History. Texas A & M Press.

Rose, Kenneth D. 2001. One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture. New York University Press.

I would also recommend that you acquire a reference manual/handbook on English grammar and usage. There are many fine examples available. Additional excellent resources are Bundy, McGeorge. 1988. Danger and Survival. Random House as well as Nitze, Paul H. 1989. From Hiroshima to Glasnost. Grove

Weidenfeld Press, and Nolan, Janne E. 1989. Guardians of the Arsenal. Basic Books. The American Atom edited by Philip Cantelon et. al. is also an excellent source. Additionally, for individual research projects, I have a select library available of arms control agreements and documents.

OBJECTIVES: Besides the obvious acquisition of an appreciation and understanding of role nuclear power played in the development of American history, and arguably vice versa, this course is specifically tailored to do as Hercule Poirot so often states - "to exercise the little gray cells". Remember, nuclear power, both as an energy source and as a weapon, impacted America's historical development. The reverse is also true, America's historical development, pre-nuclear age, served as a basis for what America and its people did with such power. Our goal is to observe and evaluate that impact. This will be a seminar style class, which necessarily depends upon your high level of preparation and participation. My presumption is that you are all familiar with American History. This course looks specifically at the role of what Leo Szilard called "nucleonics" in the development of America's history.

METHOD OF EVALUATION:

- Student participation/individual contribution
- Four comparative analyses (~5 pages each).
- One short cultural analysis paper (3-5 pages).
- One longer paper (8-10 pages) – the next chapter in American nuclearism

GRADING CRITERIA: I compute your final grade as follows:

- Participation 15%
- Attendance 5%
- Analysis papers 40% (10% each)
- Short paper 15%
- Longer paper 25%

A	93-100	C	73-77
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	88-89	D+	68-70
B	83-87	D	63-67
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	78-79	F	Unsatisfactory

You should note that even though individual exams might be graded as a D-, school policy is that there is no D- as a final grade.

READINGS: I assign the readings for each session in the syllabus. To properly prepare for class sessions, I expect you to complete the readings, prepare questions on areas you do not understand, and engage in discussion with your classmates.

I've provided thought questions for each weeks readings. I strongly recommend that you prepare responses to those questions as they will be the starting points of the day's discussion.

DISABILITIES STATEMENT: If you have a hidden or visible disability which may require classroom or test-taking modifications, please see me as soon as possible.

MAKE-UP EXAMS: Are **not** given. This also holds true for written assignments. Be responsible, work with me to provide you the best education possible. I also do not accept late work. You know the scheduled due dates, plan accordingly.

PERFORMANCE: How well you perform is a combination of three factors:

- How well I present the material.
- You're personal motivation to learn. (Notice that I did not mention your capability. You are capable by the mere fact that you are sitting here.)
- You're personal discipline to prepare.

THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THIS CLASS IS TO ENJOY IT.

USCGA
America in the Nuclear Age

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T/Th 0800-0915

WEEK	READINGS	TOPIC/VIDEO
1 (1/12)	Online - nuclearfile.org Why drop the bomb? Henriksen Preface	Timeline/ <i>Bomb</i>
2/3 (1/20 1/27)	Medhurst Intro, 1-3 Rose 1,2 Borstelman Prologue, 1,2 Henriksen 1 Baruch Plan (handout) McMahon Bill (Online - nuclearfile.org) NSC-68 (online - any search engine)	1945-1950 (HST)

1st Paper Due 1/22 - Synthesize the theses and arguments of Medhurst, Rose, Borstelman and Henriksen. The synthesis must include how the "nuclear age" created a unique culture.

Q: What was the American historical context into which the bomb transitioned from the fiction of H.G. Wells to that of Szilard?

Why were scientists, with intense reservations and incredible knowledge, willing to pursue the creation of such a destructive weapon?

Was the bomb just another bullet as asserted by Truman or much more as envisioned by Groves?

How did the Manhattan Project impact American cultural/societal development?

How can the McMahon Bill and the Baruch Plan be seen as setting the stage for the Cold War?

How did domestic conditions (culture, intellectual, political) provide the impetus for the implementation of NSC 68?

As a followup to the first question, once implemented, how did NSC 68 impact America, culturally, societally, politically?

Why did it take Truman 5 months to implement NSC 68? What impacted his decision to finally give the order to effect NSC 68 (think domestically and internationally)?

Ernest May, a diplomatic historian asks if NSC 68 is "peculiar to a democratic system, perhaps peculiar to the American system"? Answer his question.

John Gaddis, another diplomatic historian, characterizes NSC 68 as a "deeply flawed document." Placing the document within the context of American history, evaluate his assertion.

4-6 (2/3-2/19)	Medhurst 4,5 Betrayed (Macdonald piece) Borstelman 3 Bernhard - All Rose - All Henriksen 2-5 Eisenhower speeches (<i>Atoms for Peace</i> 12/1953 And <i>Open Skies</i> 7/1955 - online any engine)	1950s (DDE) <i>Duck and Cover</i> <i>Red Nightmare</i>
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2nd paper due 2/5 - Comparative analysis of Bernhard & Rose.

Q: Evaluate the Eisenhower-Dulles administration both domestically and in the arena of foreign policy to arrive at the policy of deterrence through massive retaliation.

The Soviets and the Chinese had the bomb very soon after the Americans, which impacted America domestically. How did the acquisition of nuclear technology by Stalin & Mao alter the landscape of American history?

Research the role of Citizens Committee for Nuclear Information.

The basis of Cold War cultural historians is that the Cold War, and by extension nuclear power (military and peaceful) altered America's national identity. How so?

Some scholars argue that nuclear power not only altered, but also undermined American principles such as individualism, equality, and democracy. Using the material to date, weigh in on the argument.

7/8 (2/24-3/4)	Medhurst 6,7	Dissent
	Rose 6, Postscript	1960s (JFK LBJ)
	Borstelman 4,5	
	Henriksen 6-8	Missile Crisis
	Port Huron Statement (handout)	<i>Dr. Strangelove</i>
	Herman Kahn "On Thermonuclear War"	<i>Failsafe</i>
	McNamara's "No cities Doctrine"	

Paper #3 Due 3/2 - Scholars contend that public pressure helped foster the arms control treaties of the 1960s and 1970s. The 60s are known as the era of dissent. How did the dissent movement effect a change in the "nuclear age?"

How did the Kennedy administration as well as the general public change from the Eisenhower years?

How did the culture change from the 1950s to the 1960s and how did that change impact nuclear energy/weapon usage?

Robert McNamara called the missiles in Cuba "a domestic problem" primarily. How did domestic politics/culture affect Kennedy's handling of the missile crisis?

Assuming that the international environment impacts what happens within borders, how did the Cuban Missile Crisis alter America's perspective of themselves (think from the Monroe Doctrine of 1823)?

What role did the nuclear danger have during the Cuban Missile Crisis?

Were nuclear weapons, as political scientist John Mueller asserts, irrelevant to the outcome of the Cuban Missile Crisis?

Why did the U.S. government fail to recognize the Soviet threat until it was nearly an accomplished fact?

Why did Castro agree to emplacement of Soviet missiles in Cuba?

How does the video *Dr. Strangelove* portray America as a socio-cultural entity?

**March 4 is billet night, good luck in your assignments.
Spring Break 3/6-3/14**

9-11 (3/16-4/8)	Medhurst 7	Controlling the Beast
	Borstelman 6	1970s (Nixon/Ford Carter)

Henriksen 9
Bracken (handout)
Rose 6, postscript
Treaties of the 1970s

Paper #4 Due 4/6 - TBD

How did "arms control" provide the compromise between disarmament and nuclear war?

Use the library/internet to evaluate the impact of arms control agreements on American historical development. Provide your response with the knowledge that arms control is now a central/continuing concern (e.g. U.S. ACDA, not an intermittent enterprise).

Bernard Baruch, in 1946, recommended placing all atomic resources under the ownership or control of an independent international authority. Would this plan be consistent/inconsistent with American historical development? Explain.

One of the pillars of the Nixon Doctrine was the extension of a "nuclear umbrella" to those nations vital to our national interest. Research and describe the implications of a "nuclear umbrella."

12/13 (4/13-4/22)	Medhurst 8	Nuclearism resurgent?
	Borstelman 6	1980s (Reagan Bush)
		Atomic Café video

Short Cultural Analysis paper due 4/20 - Student choice - See me early.

How did Ronald Reagan's vision (SDI), essentially rendering "nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete" both culminate the ideals of Eisenhower and change the rules both domestically and internationally?

14 (4/27)	Medhurst 10, Afterword	Cold War regrouping?
	Borstelman Epilogue	1990s+ (Clinton Bush)
	Bracken (handout)	

If the atomic revolution was not really revolutionary, hence not altering of American historical development, then why did such technological development have such a socio-cultural impact?

Final paper Due 4/29:

America's continuing policy, perpetuated by the incoming administration despite assertions to the contrary, is "to try to stop proliferation while simultaneously continuing to hold on to its own nuclear arsenal indefinitely." Jonathan Schell argues that arms control is a fabric "woven of four main strands." I would add that nuclear weapons and arms control is also woven into the fabric of America. How then can we remove the strands of nuclearism without unraveling the fabric of America?

Papers and Examination Information

I will constantly evaluate your writing skills as the course develops.

EXAMS Examinations will be of the "mixed type" combining true/false, multiple choice, short answer (less than a paragraph), longer answer (paragraph), and essay (page to page and a half). Responses other than multiple choice require supporting evidence in the form of citation/quotation using either MLA/APA/Chicago Manual of Style format.

NOTE: Grading on examinations consists of 50% for the correct answer and 50% for germane supporting evidence.

PAPERS All written material must be typed double-spaced and with 1 ½" left margin, 1" margins top/bottom/right. The writing must comply with MLA standards. I most strongly recommend you acquire a writing guide/handbook. I evaluate the papers for content, grammar, and historical accuracy. The best way to ensure you have a presentable paper is to conduct both spell and grammar check and have at least one peer read your paper, preferably aloud so you can hear your errors. The quality of your papers falls into and between three categories: Superior, Excellent, and Good.

Superior: Paper is historically accurate with main ideas supported by facts. The paper has a clear thesis, original/thoughtful interpretation and demonstrates significant knowledge of the topic. This paper also exhibits creative use of wide ranging sources that advance the thesis and analysis. Finally, this paper exhibits a balance between interpretations.

Excellent: The main ideas have factual support but can be improved with more evidence. The thesis is present, but not clearly stated. This paper presents more description than analysis. The author uses a variety of sources to support the thesis but provides little analysis of the supporting material. Finally, this paper inordinately selects one position over another with little convincing evidence or analysis.

Good: Little evidentiary material to support thesis. The paper has a focus but no clear thesis. The work is essentially non-specific in that there is little analysis and factual material to support a position. Source material is not diverse, too much emphasis on one type of resource. The paper only presents one point of view when it is obvious that others exist.