

HSS 4: Cold War Histories

Spring 2026 Syllabus

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The Cooper Union Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

[Please note: the final version of the syllabus will be distributed ahead of our session on Week 2]

Day/Time/Location:

- **Section E:** Thursdays 9 am – 11:50 am at 101 Astor Place in seminar room 211
- **Section F:** Tuesdays 6 pm – 8:50 pm at 41 Cooper Sq in seminar room 201

Course description:

Was the Cold War phenomenon the same in Cuba as it was in Korea? Was it the same in Algeria as it was in Vietnam? This seminar goes beyond the narrative of the Cold War as a superpower struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States to explore multiple iterations of the conflict. By approaching key geopolitical developments alongside cultural artifacts of the era (including films, political posters, photography, and poetry), we will interrogate whether it is possible to conceive of just one “Cold War”. After establishing a foundation in histories of intervention and resistance, we will examine Cold War legacies by tracing varied invocations of the era since 1989.

Along the way, we will encounter history at archives and libraries while collecting information on a topic of our own interest. We will also collaborate with the Cooper Union Archives and Special Collections Department to conduct archival digitization projects and compose processing plans. In addition to a research-based final writing assignment, we will develop creative projects that respond to our historical inquiry in real time.

Course Objectives

- To develop the skills to use historical research as a point of departure for creation rooted in your own discipline;
- To identify historical documents or images while critically engaging with and interpreting the document or the image’s content (and context);
- To familiarize ourselves with archival digitization and materials processing practices;
- To marshal a variety of secondary sources (e.g. books, journal articles, interviews) to investigate research questions and support our claims;
- To engage in collaborative activities (e.g., peer review, group presentations);
- To better understand the Cold War by exploring connections between events that occurred in disparate geographic regions.
 - To use the historical examples of the Cold War to model constructive academic dialogue and foster long-term curiosity rooted in rigorous research.

Course Outcomes¹

- To gain a greater facility in the conversational work of the college classroom. To demonstrate a capacity for active listening in responses to peers.
- To demonstrate, in writing and in speech, an increased capacity for thoughtful engagement with ambiguity, paradox, and complexity.
- To articulate the narrative of your learning over the course of the semester in terms of your own motivation to engage in the work.

Materials

- Reading materials for this course are provided as PDFs on Moodle unless otherwise noted. Print a copy of each reading for personal use—this is part of demonstrating your preparedness for class!
- Bring something to write on and something to write with (pen or pencil and a notebook/legal pad) to every class since we will often have informal in-class writing assignments.
- Maintain access to materials handed out throughout the semester, e.g., a metadata spreadsheet, an archival processing worksheet, and any assignment prompts.

Course Requirements and Grading

A: 93-100; A-: 90-92.9%; B+: 87-89%; B: 83-86.9%; B-: 80-82.9%; C+: 77-79%; C: 73-76%; C-: 70-72.9%; D+: 67-69%; D: 63-66.9%; D-: 60-62.9%; 59.9% or below: F

Participation and Attendance: 20%

Your participation grade will be a composite assessment of your attendance, your engagement with the texts and other students' ideas in discussion, and your level of preparedness each week.

- Arrive before class starts and bring physical copies of the week's readings.
 - I am tracking the amount of time you spend in class, not simply whether you arrive on time or late. If you leave class for a long time or if you are late after our break, it will be reflected in your grade.
 - Save bathroom breaks to before class, during our mid-class break, or after class—unless there is an emergency.
- This is a discussion-driven course. Attend every meeting having reflected on the assigned materials for that day.
 - Each time, consider the 1) type of material it is; 2) the creator's point or argument, along with any questions the creator poses; 3) evidence the creator/author uses to support their claims; 4) what are the strengths and weaknesses of the claims made?

¹ Drawn from early-stage HSS Core Curriculum Outcomes developed by HSS staff and faculty. Intended to build upon stated outcomes from previous courses.

- Full participation during in-class writing assignments and group work is required.
- You are allowed one unexcused absence in the semester for which you do not need to submit any makeup work.
 - You may then receive credit for one unexcused absence after that by writing a 400-word essay on the materials discussed in class the day of your absence. This will be due within one week of your absence. For each unexcused absence after that (beginning with three total or more), you will lose points off your final grade.

Lead-up assignments for final: 20%

Late assignments will be moved down one step on the ‘ladder’ (A to A-, A- to B+...) for each day the assignment is late. Late assignments will only be accepted up to one week after the due date. For most of these, you will receive more detailed instructions ahead of each due date.

- Project proposal (due Week 8).
- Annotated bibliography including a mix of five total archival sources and secondary sources (also due Week 8).
- Outline/roadmap of final written assignment, with an additional 200 words describing your vision for a related creative/constructed component (due before our Week 10 class meeting).
- Post-midterm essay development/peer editing (in-class assignment; timing to be determined).

Early draft of paper: 15%

- (Due Week 11 [Friday, April 10 at noon] or sooner) Visit one physical archive/library at Cooper and locate more materials related to your topic. Submit a preliminary draft of your final written assignment (either an object biography or a research essay), 3-5 pages of text (12-point Times New Roman, 1-inch margins, double-spaced)—with that page count not including footnotes and bibliography.
 - Provide a 100-word update on your progress towards completing your creative component.

In-Class Presentations: 5%

Final assignment (Due **Sunday, May 3** at noon or sooner): 40%

- PART ONE: Submit a final written assignment, 1,750 to 2,000 words (12-point Times New Roman, 1-inch margins, double-spaced—about 7-8 pages) with the page total not including footnotes and bibliography.
 - You may either choose to write an object biography of a specific item of interest located in the Cooper archive, or an academic research essay. In either case, you will develop a claim to sustain and support throughout the essay.
 - Regardless of the format, the core of this paper should draw upon the materials encountered at the Cooper Union Archives and Special Collections while addressing a salient theme or topic related to the Cold War and its histories.

- Proof of at least one visit to the writing center to discuss this specific project is required for final submission.
- PART TWO: Using the templates provided by Archives and Special Collections and in consultation with the archivist and librarians, create a processing plan for the assigned materials (max 800 words). More instructions to follow.
 - As part of this component, digitize 10-12 items from your assigned archival materials. This is, in a sense, a curatorial project because the items chosen can also tell a story about how to proceed with processing the rest of the materials.
 - Provide brief context and explain the relationship between the items you've chosen to digitize.
 - How should the Archives and Special Collections Department go about digitizing the rest of your assigned materials? How should they be categorized, or recategorized? The goal of this assignment is to get us to reflect on the cultural and political stakes that go into record cataloguing.
- PART THREE: Coordinate with Professor Perez to decide how to submit the creative/constructed portion of this assignment.
 - NOTE: The deadline for the final assignment is fixed. Extensions will only be granted under extenuating circumstances, and must be requested at least two days in advance (this is the case for all extensions).

Additional Course Policies

Assignments and Communication

Consider this syllabus a semester-long agreement between instructor and student. The syllabus may shift given all the logistics involved in planning multiple site visits. It is your job to remain informed of the shifts in the syllabus, which means being in class for announcements and checking your emails for messages. I am most likely to respond to emails weekdays between 9 am and 5 pm. I'll aim to respond to emails received outside of this timeframe in a timely manner.

Accessibility Statement

Your success in this class is important to me. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or that form barriers to your inclusion, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we'll develop strategies that can enable you to succeed in the course. I also encourage you to visit [Disability Support Services](#). If you need official accommodations, you have a right to have these met.

Diversity Policy

I am committed to diversity and rigorous inquiry that arises from multiple perspectives. I expect to maintain a productive learning environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. I view the diversity that students bring to this class as a resource, strength, and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities

that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, ability, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, religious background, native language, and immigration status. I welcome any suggestions that further a positive and open environment in this class.

Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, you agree to abide by the academic conduct standards set by The Cooper Union. Review the [HSS Policy on Academic Dishonesty](#). Any suspected violations of this policy will be referred to the school's disciplinary system.

This includes the improper use of artificial intelligence (AI) in developing your assignments for this course—that is, direct forms of plagiarism from the AI interface. AI may be used like any other search engine, in the process of conducting research. It should be thought of as a point of departure, **not** an “end” in your research journey. Use AI alongside course materials and library tools and resources responsibly. If you do use AI as a research tool, you must cite it accordingly.

At the same time, do not outsource all your thinking for this course. Even at this stage, AI assistance often states inaccuracies as truths, **especially** in historical contexts. Continue to challenge yourselves to pursue and develop your ideas—and to sharpen your own research practice—in ways which rely on your own intellect. If you have any questions regarding this policy, send an email to Professor Perez.

Course Schedule and Assigned Materials

Please note: this roadmap is subject to change. Monitor your emails for messages from Professor Perez with the most up-to-date information.

Week 1, January 20 (F) + January 22 (E): Introduction to the Course, or, On Understanding Multiple Cold Wars

Week 2, January 27 (F) + January 29 (E): Overview: Thoughts to Keep in Mind throughout the Semester

- Mark Philip Bradley, “Decolonization, the global South, and the Cold War, 1919-1962” (2010), p. 464-485.
- Listen to *The Divided Dial* podcast, Season 2, Episode 1: “Fishing in the Night”: timestamps 4:30—~8:42 and 27:20—~37:34.
- Listen to *99% Invisible* podcast, “Bone Music” in its entirety (~11 mins).

A note on podcasts: Continue to analyze the podcasts assigned this week and beyond as research productions: what arguments are the showrunners developing, and how are they supporting these arguments?

<<<MODULE 1: Asia>>>

Week 3, February 3 (F) + February 5 (E): Cold War Asia, I

- Brendan James and Noah Kulwin, *Blowback* podcast: Listen to Season 3 (Korea), Episode 3 “The Blue House” (this episode is just over an hour long!).
- Jie Li, “Revolutionary Echoes: Radios and Loudspeakers in the Mao Era” (2020), p. 25-45.

Week 4, February 10 (F) + February 12 (E): Cold War Asia, II

- Christina Klein, “Cold War Cosmopolitanism: The Asia Foundation and 1950s Korean Cinema” (2017), p. 281-307.
- Lien-Hang Nguyen, “Revolutionary Circuits” (2015), p. 411-422.
- In class we will view several clips, including from the film adaptation of *The Ugly American*, dir. George Englund (1963).

We will meet in our classroom for the first part of class and then we will head to the Foundation Building for a session with the Archives and Special Collections Department [Session 1].

<<<MODULE 2: Latin America>>>

Week 5 February 18 [TUESDAY CLASSES MEET ON WEDNESDAY] (F) + February 19 (E):
Cold War Latin America, I

- Jennifer Lambe, “Drug Wars: Revolution, Embargo, and the Politics of Scarcity in Cuba, 1959-1964” (2016), p. 489-515.

Week 6, February 24 (F) + February 26 (E): Cold War Latin America, II

- Stephen Hart, “*La batalla de Chile (The Battle of Chile, 1975-1979)*, dir. Patricio Guzman” *A Companion to Latin American Film*, p. 77-82.
- We will watch portions of the film *La Batalla de Chile* (The Battle of Chile) Part I, dir. Patricio Guzmán (1975) in class.

We will meet in our seminar room first and then we will head to the Archives and Special Collections Department [Session 2].
[Signups for digitization sessions all throughout Weeks 7 + 8.]

<<<MODULE 3: Archival Digitization as Practice>>>

Week 7, March 3 (F) + March 5 (E)

[Once the Archives Department shares the scheduling sheet, schedule at least two one-hour digitization sessions (or one two-hour session) throughout this week and next week, at your own convenience]

Begin Processing Plan Assignment: visit the Cooper Union Archives and Special Collections Department. Document the materials by noting the source/publication date as well as the object's/document's place in the library/archive catalogue. Provide proof of your visit to the library/archive with your submission of the documents you gathered, and a 100-word summary of your visit by Friday, March 13.

Week 8, March 10 (F) + March 12 (E)

[Project Proposals + Annotated Bibliographies due this week by Sunday, March 15 at noon as an email attachment sent to the instructor.

- **Proposal:** compose 500 words describing your final project topic, and one or two preliminary claims you will seek to support in this project.
- **Annotated Bibliography:** collect and describe five sources that help you better understand your topic, and a plan for obtaining more sources.]

[SPRING RECESS: March 16 to March 20]

<<<MODULE 4: Africa>>>

Week 9, March 24 (F) + March 26 (E): Cold War Africa, I

- Watch *Soundtrack to a Coup d'état* (2024), dir. Johan Grimonprez
- *In class:* Selected scenes from *Lumumba: Death of a Prophet* (1991)

We will meet in our classroom and after a lecture we will head to the Archive and Special Collections [Session 3].

Week 10, March 31 (F) + April 2 (E): Cold War Africa, II

- Matthew Connelly, “Taking Off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War for Independence” (2000).
- *In class:* selected scenes from the film *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), dir. Gillo Pontecorvo.

[Outline/roadmap of final written assignment due before this class meeting. Include an additional 200 words describing your vision for a related creative/constructed component.]

<<<Module 5: Across Geographies>>>

Week 11, April 7 (F) + April 9 (E): Thinking Across Geographies, I

- Su Lin Lewis & Carolien Stolte, “Other Bandungs: Afro-Asian Internationalisms in the Early Cold War” (2019).
- Jessica Stites Mor, “Rendering Armed Struggle: OSPAAAL, Cuban Poster Art, and South-South Solidarity at United Nations” (2019).

By Friday, April 10 at noon, submit the first version of your final writing project in 3-5 pages of text as an email attachment to the instructor. More instructions to follow.

Week 12, April 14 (F) + April 16 (E): Thinking Across Geographies, II

- Marilyn Yaquinto, “Cinema as Political Activism: Contemporary Meanings in *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*” (2014).
- *In class:* we will view scenes from *The Spook Who Sat by The Door*, dir. Ivan Dixon (1973).

Week 13, April 21 (F) + April 23 (E): Project Presentations

Week 14, April 28 (F) + April 30 (E): Cold War Legacies

ALL ASSIGNMENTS DUE BY SUNDAY, MAY 3 at noon as a PDF attachment (not links!) to eilin.perez@cooper.edu. If there is a physical component to your final project, coordinate with Professor Perez on either scheduling a viewing or dropping your creation off.