

# George Mason University

## Department of History & Art History

**Professor Martin J. Sherwin**

**History 615-002 FALL 2015**

**Wednesdays 7:20 -10 pm, Founders Hall # 324**

**Office hours; by appointment\***

**\* (I do not have an office on the Arlington Campus)**

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**Arlington Campus**

### **THE “LONG” CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS: FROM HIROSHIMA TO HAVANA**

*A reading, analysis and research methods seminar focusing on how nuclear weapons shaped USA and USSR policies during the formative years of the Cold War.*

*THE ROLE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS:* Soon after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear weapons began to shape the military and diplomatic policies of the United States and the Soviet Union. Both superpowers rationalized their burgeoning nuclear arsenals as stabilizing deterrent forces, necessitated by the policies and nuclear arsenal of the other. Yet it was the existence of these weapons that precipitated humanity’s closest brush with global disaster, the Cuban Missile Crisis. It was this cold war moment that transformed calculations about “nuclear threat diplomacy” and the dangers inherent in any US-USSR confrontation. The remainder of the Cold War was a post Cuban Missile Crisis environment, both literally and militarily.

*SEMINAR STRUCTURE AND GOALS:* The seminar’s intellectual structure is designed to analyze early Cold War issues (political, cultural, diplomatic, military, etc.) to the Cuban Missile Crisis through the prism of the nuclear arms race. We will begin at the beginning: the development of nuclear weapons and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The pedagogical goals of the seminar are (1) to provide a basic bibliographic foundation of the Cuban Missile Crisis, its origins and its consequences (2) to further develop oral and written critical book reviewing skills (3) to hone primary source research and analysis skills (4) to prepare an Organization of American Historians (OAH) type panel presentation.

These goals will be met through weekly discussions and written reviews of the assigned readings, “**focus topics**” (explanation follows) and a final simulated OAH panel presentation. Each of you will select a “focus topic” associated with the “Long” Cuban Missile Crisis for which you will become our class expert. [See the list of sample topics below.]

**“Focus Topics” Samples** (We will begin to discuss possible topics during the first class.)

**Soviet topics:**

The influence of Hiroshima/Nagasaki on Stalin  
Soviet scientists and the Soviet nuclear weapons program  
Khrushchev’s View of nuclear weapons  
The Soviet military and nuclear weapons (under Stalin and/or Khrushchev)  
Khrushchev’s Cuban Missile Crisis  
Khrushchev and Berlin  
Oleg Penkovsky (Soviet who spied for USA)  
Georgi Bolshakov (Soviet GRU agent who befriended RFK)  
Aleksandr Alekseev (Soviet Ambassador to Cuba)

**USA topics:**

How Truman viewed nuclear weapons after Hiroshima  
Nuclear weapons and the Korean War  
The Superbomb decisions - USA and Soviet in comparison  
John Foster Dulles and USA nuclear weapons policy (His influence on DDE)  
Eisenhower [DDE] and USA nuclear weapons policy  
The Jupiter deployment decision  
Eisenhower administration and the Cuban revolution  
JFK/McNamara and nuclear weapons buildup  
Berlin and Cuba  
Khrushchev and Berlin  
NATO’s nuclear weapons policies  
Operation Mongoose

*[Note: The above are samples only. You are welcome to devise your own topics. Anyone who can read a FOREIGN LANGUAGE should consider a topic that can be researched in that language.]*

**COURSE FORMAT AND REQUIREMENTS:**

1. Weekly discussions of the assigned readings and your reports on your **focus topic**. A short essay evaluating each week’s reading assignment. The general topic of each essay is your understanding of the argument (the point of view) of the assignment and an evaluation of the evidence in support of that argument. After the first several assignments you will also be expected to note how each reading relates to previous readings. Further specific instructions for following week’s essays will be given each week in class.
2. Your essays are to be *emailed* to professor Sherwin **no later than 6 pm on Monday** prior to that assignment’s discussion. **All your emails to me should be identified in the SUBJECT LINE beginning with: H615F15+Your Surname.** This is the only way to assure that your submission is not

overlooked in the sea of emails I receive daily. Also, be sure to put your name on your weekly assignments and tag them as H615F15 + your name.

**Please REMEMBER: H615F15+Your Surname. For example: H615F15 Smith Week 1).**

3. Each week, over the course of the semester, you will collect documents related to your **focus topic** and present a summary of the most interesting ones to the class. Think about this collection as material for an edited book of documents on your topic. Your final product will contain a brief introduction and short annotations explaining the relevance of each document. I will ask to review your collection once or twice during the semester. (Think of me as the General Editor for this documentary collection. More details about this in class.)

4. On DECEMBER 2nd each of you will present a formal 10 minute lecture to the class based on your focus topic. The format will simulate an OAH panel on “New Views of the Cuban Missile Crisis.” Your presentation must be written and you are expected to read it as a formal lecture. (About 5 double spaced pages.)

5. NOTE: During many of our classes the readings will be supplemented by a relevant documentary or feature film.

6. *GRADES:* Your grades will be assigned based on the quality of your weekly essays, class participation, focus topic collection, final presentation. Your work associated with your focus topic will count about 75%.

**ASSIGNED BOOKS** (available in the Arlington Book Store).  
*Additional readings may be provided electronically*

**#Martin J. Sherwin, *A World Destroyed: Hiroshima and Its Legacies*** (Stanford U Press): This represents my understanding of the intellectual and political origins of the nuclear arms race. Focus on “how the bomb was seen and valued.” Think about the possibility of a “nuclear belief system” at the root of the arms race and all nuclear proliferation.

**#Robert Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*** (Norton): The book that established the heroic-orthodox view of the CMC. A memoir written for both posterity and a political campaign. Does this memoir have any value for historians?

**#Sheldon Stern. *The Cuban Missile Crisis in American Memory*** (Stanford Univ Press): The historian as both detective and Inspector General. Stern was the archivist at the JFKL who oversaw the Excomm tapes. He not only corrected the many transcription errors in the volume by E. May and P. Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes* (and on the UVA Miller Center web site), but here demolishes the most prominent erroneous assertions in *Thirteen Days*.

**#Fursenko & Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*** (Norton): Using Soviet and USA sources, this is the most thorough scholarly analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis. It covers the view from USSR+USA+Cuba. What does the comparative structure of this study tell us about the CMC that could not be learned from independent national studies?

**#Fursenko & Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*** (Norton); Using Soviet sources this is (again) the most thorough analysis of Khrushchev's foreign policy. What do we learn about the root causes of the CMC from Khrushchev's point of view? How does this in-depth study of Khrushchev add to our understanding of the CMC beyond *One Hell of a Gamble*?

**#Michael Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight*** (Vintage); A detailed study of the events beyond the control of Kennedy and Khrushchev during the final days of the CMC. Does this perspective offer a different interpretation of the crisis?

**#Philip Nash, *The Other Missiles of October*** (UNC); An in depth analysis of the deployment of the Jupiter missiles to Turkey. This is a classic academic monograph focusing on a well defined issue that is part of a larger event. What does it reveal that was not clear from more general readings about the CMC?

**#Ronald Powaski, *March to Armageddon*** (Oxford); A survey of the nuclear arms race from 1945 to 1980. We will concentrate on the years from Hiroshima thru the Kennedy administration. Does this overview offer any insights into the CMC that the more focused studies miss?

**#Melvin Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind***: A reinterpretation of the dynamics of the Cold War. What new insights does Leffler offer about the origins of the CMC? How would you compare his interpretation of the Cold War with the interpretation offered in *Khrushchev's Cold War*.

**#Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War From Stalin to Gorbachev*** (Chapel Hill): An excellent overview of Soviet government decision making from Stalin to Gorbachev. Compare Zubok's view of Khrushchev's foreign policy decisions with Fursenko and Naftali. What was Stalin's influence on Khrushchev? Compare Leffler and Zubok's views on Soviet foreign policy 1945 to 1963.

**NOTE: THE SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS BELOW ARE A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE SEMESTER RATHER THAN A RIGID STRUCTURE. EXPECT SOME CHANGES AS THE SEMESTER PROCEEDS.**

**WEEKLY READINGS:**

**PART I. IN THE BEGINNING...**

1. 9/2            **Subj: Introduction to the course and the Debate over Hiroshima**  
 Reading: Sherwin, *A World Destroyed*  
 Film:
2. 9/9            **Subj: Hiroshima + the Origins of the Cold War**  
**Read:** *A World Destroyed*, read Appendices B/C/D/E/I/J/L/O/S/U/V/W  
 Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, prefaces + Chapters 1 - 3  
 Powaski, *March to Armageddon*, Chapters 1-4  
 Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, Chapter 1  
 Film:

**PART II. IKE, NIK AND JACK: HOW THEY LEARNED TO WORRY AND LOVE THE BOMB**

3. 9/16            **Subj: Setting the Nuclear Agenda: From Truman to Eisenhower**  
 Read: Powaski, *March to Armageddon*, chapters 5 -6  
 Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, chapter 2  
 Fursenko & Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*, chapters 1-7  
 Film:
4. 9/23            **Subj: Khrushchev and Eisenhower's "New Look"**  
 Read: Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*, chapters 8-14  
 Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, chapters 4 -5 (to p. 142)  
 Nash, *The Other Missiles of October*, chapters 1 - 3
5. 9/30            **Subj: The "Caribbean and October Crises," I**  
 Read: Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, (complete)
6. 10/7            **Subj: The "Caribbean and October Crises", II**  
 Read: Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*, chapters 15 - 21  
 Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, chapter 3  
 Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, pp. 142-153  
 Nash, *The Other Missiles of October*, 4 - 6 + conclusion
7. 10/14           **Subj: The Kennedy Cuban Missile Crisis Examined**  
 Read: Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days (complete)*  
 Sheldon Stern, *The Cuban Missile Crisis in American Memory (complete)*
8. 10/21           **Subj: TBA**  
 Read:
9. 10/28           **Subj: The "Other" Cuban Missile Crisis**

Read: Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight* (complete)

- 10. 11/4                    Subj: TBA  
                              Read:
  
- 11. 11/11                   Subj: Focus Topics - Individual meetings with Sherwin
- 12. 11/18                   Subj: Focus Topics - Individual meetings with Sherwin
- 13. 11/25                   Research focus topics    THANKSGIVING week

14. 12/2                    Focus topic presentations

15. 12/9                    Focus papers due

**NOTE: No extensions or in-completes. Please Plan carefully.**