

# George Mason University

## Department of History & Art History

Fall 2011

History 615-009

Tuesdays, 7:20-10 pm

Arlington Campus, Founders Hall # 465

Professor Martin J. Sherwin

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Office hours; 6-7pm + appointment (Room to be arranged)

### THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS:

*A Reading/Analysis and Research Methods Seminar Focusing on the Policies of Eisenhower, Kennedy, Khrushchev and Castro that Resulted in the Causes, Resolution and Consequences of the Episode that Transformed 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 the Cuban Missile Crisis, humanities “closest brush with the ultimate man-made catastrophe: a thermonuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union that could have incinerated scores of cities and killed half a billion people,” as historian James Hershberg has accurately noted. It was this cold war moment that transformed calculations about “nuclear threat diplomacy” and the dangers inherent in any US-USSR confrontation.

**SEMINAR STRUCTURE AND GOALS:** The seminar’s intellectual structure is to view a broad range of cold war diplomatic/military issues through the prism of the Cuban Missile Crisis [CMC] and the nuclear arms race that precipitated it. The policies pursued by Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev that led to the crisis are the focus of the seminar, although we will begin at the beginning: the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The pedagogical goals of the seminar are to (1) provide a basic bibliographic foundation covering the role of nuclear weapons during the early cold war (2) further develop oral and written critical book reviewing skills (3) further develop primary source research and analysis skills (4) prepare an Organization of American Historians (OAH) type panel presentation.

The intellectual and pedagogical goals of the seminar 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 (broadly speaking) with the CMC for which you will become our class expert. [See a list of sample topics below.]

**Sample “Focus Topics”** (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 or Khrushchev)

Khrushchev’s Missile Crisis (Oct 22-28, 1962)

**USA topics:**

How Truman viewed nuclear weapons after Hiroshima (Nuclear weapons and the Korean War)

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

The administration’s role in shaping the heroic view of the CMC

Berlin and Cuba

**Cuban Topics:**

When did Fidel become a communist?

A.I. Alekseyev and Fidel (Alekseev was KGB and then Soviet Ambassador to Cuba during CMC)

Anastas Mikoyan and Fidel

Fidel during the CMC

**COURSE FORMAT AND REQUIREMENTS:**

1. Weekly discussions of the assigned readings and your reports on your **focus topics**. A short essay evaluating each week’s reading assignment. The general topic of each essay is your understanding of the argument (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 in class.
2. Your essays are to be *emailed* to professor Sherwin **no later than 6 pm on Sunday** prior to that assignment’s discussion. **All your emails to me should be identified in the SUBJECT LINE beginning with: H615F11+Your Surname.** This is the only way to assure that your submission is not overlooked in the sea of emails I receive daily.

Please **REMEMBER: H615F11+Your Surname** (eg H615F11 Smith).

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. During our penultimate class each of you will each present a formal 15 minute lecture to the class based on your focus topic. The format will simulate an OAH panel on “The Cuban Missile Crisis in Perspective.” Your presentation must be written and you are expected to read it as a formal lecture.

5. NOTE: During many of our classes the readings will be supplemented by selections from my collection of documentary films, conference presentations and news clips associated with the CMC.

6. *GRADES*: Your grades will be assigned based on the quality of your weekly essays, class participation, focus topic collection, final presentation.

**ASSIGNED BOOKS** (available in the Book Store).

*Additional readings will be provided electronically*

The books are listed in the *approximate* order in which we will read them although I reserve the option of changing the order.

**#Martin J. Sherwin, *A World Destroyed: Hiroshima and Its Legacies*** (Stanford U Press): This represents my understanding of the origins of the arms race and thus the CMC. Focus on “how the bomb was seen and valued.” I believe there is a “nuclear belief system” at the root of the arms race between the USA & USSR and all nuclear proliferation.

**#McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival*** (out of print – can be purchased thru Amazon - do this ASAP): Read from the beginning through the Cuban Missile Crisis and its immediate aftermath. Bundy has a different interpretation of why Hiroshima was bombed and how the CMC was resolved. This is one of the reasons I assign it, but it is not the only reason.

**#Robert Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*** (Norton): The Kennedy administration’s (and generally accepted) view of the CMC.

**#Fursenko & Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*** (Norton): Using Soviet and USA sources, this is the most thorough scholarly analysis of the CMC from USSR+USA+Cuban views.

**#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. Read as far as the CMC and its immediate aftermath.

**#Michael Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight***: An exceptionally well researched update on Fursenko and Naftali, and a very good read. Major contribution to what was happening outside of the control of the White House and the Kremlin.

**#Sheldon Stern, *Averting ‘The Final Failure’*** (Stanford U. Press): The most accurate and thorough rendering of the EXCOMM meetings.

**#Philip Nash, *The Other Missiles of October*** (U of North Carolina Press) – The best example of a carefully researched monograph of a key aspect of the CMC.

**#Carlos Lechuga, *Cuba and the Missile Crisis*** (Ocean Press, Melbourne and New York): The Cuban view from Cuba's Ambassador to the UN during the CMC.

**#Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision*** - The political science idea of how to write history. This will definitely be the last book we read.

**#EH Carr, *What Is History*** (Oxford U.P) - A book that every history graduate student should read (again and again)

## WEEKLY READINGS:

1. 8/30  
Subj: Introduction to the course  
Film: Hiroshima: Why the Bomb Was Dropped (ABC, 1995)
2. 9/6  
Subj: The Atomic Bomb: The Debate Over Hiroshima/Nagasaki  
Readings: Sherwin: *A World Destroyed*;  
Bundy, *Danger and Survival* Hiroshima chaps I, II, III.  
Film: The Bay of Pigs
2. 9/13  
Subj: Memoir As History  
**Read:** Robert Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*  
Bundy, *Danger and Survival*, chaps IV+ V  
E.H. Carr: *What Is History?* Chap 1  
SUBMIT PRELIMINARY LIST OF 3 POSSIBLE FOCUS TOPICS  
ALONG WITH YOUR ESSAY ON RFK  
Film: TBA
3. 9/20  
Subj: A Comprehensive Historical View, I  
Read: Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of A Gamble*, chaps 1-10  
E.H. Carr: *What Is History?* Chap 2  
Bundy, *Danger and Survival*, chapters VI+VII  
SUBMIT YOUR CHOICE FOR A FOCUS TOPIC along with your essay.  
Be prepared to discuss your first few documents in class.  
Film: TBA
4. 9/27  
Subj: A Comprehensive Historical View, II  
Read: Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of A Gamble* complete  
E.H. Carr: *What Is History?* Chap 3  
Bundy, *Danger and Survival*, chap VIII  
Film: TBA

5. 10/4                      Subj: The Historical Microscope: The Monograph  
Read: Philip Nash, *The Other Missiles of October*  
Bundy, *Danger and Survival*, chap IX  
E.H. Carr: *What Is History?* Chap 4
6. 10/11                     Subj: The View From Havana  
Read: Carlos Lechuga, *Cuba and the Missile Crisis*  
E.H. Carr: *What Is History?* Chap 5
7. 10/18                     Subj: Stalin, Khrushchev and the Cold War  
Read: Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire:*  
preface thru chap 8  
E.H. Carr: *What Is History?* Chap 6
8. 10/25                     Subj: The Excomm  
Read: Sheldon Stern, *Averting 'The Final Failure'*
9. 11/1                       Subj: The CMC Beyond the White House and the Kremlin  
Read: Michael Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight*
10. 11/8                      Subj: CMC History and Decision Making Theory  
Read: Allison: *Essence of Decision*  
**ESSAY TOPIC FOR ESSENCE WILL BE DESCRIBED IN CLASS.**  
**IT IS A LONG ESSAY FINAL ESSAY AND WILL BE DUE VIA**  
**EMAIL ON Tuesday, 11/22**
11. 11/15                    Subj: NO CLASS – Devote time to Allison Essay.
12. 11/22                    Use this week and next to prepare your focus topic presentations  
Subj: THANKSGIVING WEEK – NO CLASS
13. 11/29                    PRESENTATIONS OF Focus Topic Research
14. 12/6                      TBA

**NOTE: No extensions/incompletes. Please Plan carefully.**