

RETHINKING COLD WAR CULTURE

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U.S. Culture and the Cold War

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In the 1954 film *Strategic Air Command*, Dutch (Jimmy Stewart), a star pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals, tells his wife, Sally (Doris Day), that he has decided to forsake his lucrative baseball career and stay in the Air Force. Sally, not understanding, protests this decision on the grounds that there is no war going on. Dutch corrects her: "But there is a kind of war. We've got to stay ready to fight without fighting. That's even tougher. That's why I made this decision." Sally blurts out: "You made it. We didn't."¹

But Dutch was right, as Sally eventually came to appreciate. The United States was engaged in a new kind of war—a war that required constant vigilance and readiness to fight on a moment's notice. Labeled the "Cold War" in 1946 by Bernard Baruch, this war was unlike any other the United States had ever fought. For one thing, it lasted a lot longer than any previous war. Historians debate the date of its inception but, for our purposes, August 6, 1945, the day the United States dropped the first atomic bomb on Japan and introduced nuclear terror to the world, is as good a starting point as any. Though many features of Cold War culture were given their most heightened expression in the 1950s, the developments we are discussing were in no way confined to that decade or the peculiar patterns of thought and behavior commonly associated with it. While the Cold War lasted until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, much of what is usually thought of as Cold War culture outlasted the Cold War itself and likely will be with us for a long time.

Although the Cold War shaped and distorted virtually every aspect of American life, broadly speaking there is very little fundamentally new about American culture in the Cold War era. Most of the characteristics by which we define it are the results of long-term social trends and political habits of mind, revived and refurbished from the past.

Yet interacting with long-term trends, which we will discuss, four new elements, unique to the Cold War era, dramatically transformed aspects of American politics and culture. These new elements—threat of nuclear annihilation, replacement of direct military confrontation with surrogate and covert warfare, opposition to an enemy officially espousing socialism and supporting Third World revolution, and the rise of the military-industrial complex—were very closely related though not identical.

More than anything else, nuclear weapons changed the world, introducing an element of vulnerability that had not previously existed. Although Harry Truman responded to the atomic obliteration of Hiroshima by exulting, "This is the greatest thing in history,"² many Americans were not so sure. In first reporting the bomb, popular radio news commentator H. V. Kaltenborn sounded a much more cautionary note, warning, "For all we know we have created a Frankenstein! We must assume that with the passage of only a little time, an improved form of the new weapon we use today can be turned against us."³ When the Japanese surrendered the following week, Edward R. Murrow observed that "seldom, if ever, has a war ended leaving the victors with such a sense of uncertainty and fear, with such a realization that the future is obscure and that survival is not assured."⁴

The intensity of nuclear fear ebbed and flowed during the course of the Cold War, but the threat of annihilation was never far from the public mind. Broad-based concern burst forth in the immediate postwar years as the campaign for international control of nuclear weapons floundered. The nuclear stakes escalated over the next decade, marked by the first Soviet atomic bomb test in August 1949, the United States and Soviet hydrogen bomb tests in 1952 and 1953, the heightened mid-1950s concern about nuclear radiation and fallout, and the apocryphal missile gap warnings that followed the Soviet launching of Sputnik in October 1957. Nuclear terror peaked in October 1962 when the United States and the Soviet Union came within a hair's breadth of war during the Cuban missile crisis.

Nuclear fear abated somewhat between 1963 and 1980, a period historian Paul Boyer has labeled the "Era of the Big Sleep,"⁵ but was rekindled dramatically by the 1980s missile-rattling of Ronald Reagan. Reagan's bellicose rhetoric and Star Wars proposals aroused dormant nuclear anxieties. Hollywood responded with a spate of nuclear war movies. The 1983 ABC television production *The Day Af-*

ter, the second most-watched television event ever, sparked an unprecedented national debate. Scientists warned that even limited nuclear war could trigger nuclear winter and end all life on the planet, a view echoed in widely read books like Jonathan Schell's powerful best-seller *The Fate of the Earth*.

This possibility of a nuclear holocaust that would spare no one—not even its perpetrators—provided impetus for a second new element in this period: surrogate and covert warfare. Over forty-five years the United States fought two bloody surrogate wars against the Soviet Union and China, one to a draw and one ending in defeat. In the Korean War (1950–1953), U.S. forces, under cover of the United Nations, battled against the North Koreans and the communist Chinese. The war legitimized a tremendous increase in defense spending and the further militarization of science and technology. The war also reinforced American willingness to intervene internationally against governments and political movements, both democratic and undemocratic, that were deemed a threat to American interests. While one could trace the United States becoming an antirevolutionary force on the global stage to the 1890s, U.S. opposition to radical movements in the Third World reached unprecedented heights during the Cold War era. Beginning with U.S.-backed overthrows of popular governments in Iran in 1953 and Guatemala in 1954, the United States and the Soviet Union became involved in dozens of covert and not-so-covert wars over the next four decades, with both sides providing weapons, advisors, and financing.

In 1954, on the heels of the stalemate in Korea, the United States replaced the defeated French colonial forces in Indochina. American troop commitment escalated rapidly in the mid-1960s. By the time the Americans were forced to evacuate in 1973, a total of 2.7 million American men and women had been sent to Vietnam. Fifty-eight thousand Americans and nearly four million Vietnamese were killed. Although some Americans would cling to the fantastic notion that the United States fought with one hand tied behind its back, records show that the U.S. dropped more tons of bombs on tiny impoverished Vietnam than had been dropped by all sides combined in all of history's previous wars.

America's nuclear buildup, global mobilization, and interventionism during the Cold War were justified in the name of stopping Soviet communism, a foe policymakers deemed so diabolical that its defeat warranted the risk of destroying civilization itself. The fact that the Soviet Union was not just a military, economic, and geopolitical but an ideological foe, committed in theory, though clearly not in practice, to social and economic equality and the socialization of the means of production, posed a unique kind of challenge to a resolutely capitalist nation. This ideological antagonism between socialism and capitalism polarized the world along new lines. In the Third World this often

created a situation in which the Soviet Union was supporting revolutionary forces against U.S.-armed and backed military dictatorships. In the United States political debate often became skewed and distorted, as conservatives easily discredited social democratic or left-wing solutions to societal problems by identifying their proponents with the brutal and repressive Soviet system—a system that most liberals and leftists themselves deplored. Saddled with the Soviet albatross around its neck, a once-vibrant American left was effectively marginalized, narrowing and transforming the terms of debate for much of the Cold War era and leading—except for a brief, though profound, moment in the 1960s—to the loss of idealism and the virtual death of Utopianism. It is thus remarkable how thoroughly the United States had repudiated the values underlying the liberal construction of World War II as the democratic war against racism, fascism, and colonialism. In fact, between the late 1940s and mid-1960s, those who still stubbornly clung to such “subversive” values risked being ostracized or more seriously persecuted.

To summarize, there were several cycles of military, ideological, and psychological warfare that sometimes overlapped but did not always converge. During the period from the late 1940s through 1963, all three of the forces propelling Cold War culture exerted influence. For the next decade, dominated by surrogate warfare in Vietnam, anticommunism remained high, but nuclear fear abated somewhat. After a brief respite during the Ford and early Carter years, the Cold War reheated between 1978 and 1988, as Carter, to a limited extent, and Reagan, to a great one, brought back the surrogate warfare, ideological crusades, and nuclear posturing that had marked the 1950s. Under Reagan, the possibility of nuclear warfare again shrouded the nation with nightmares of Armageddon. Presidents Bush and Clinton called for new approaches, but did little to reverse the habits of mind that the Cold War created. So defense spending remains at near Cold War levels and strategy continues to rely on nuclear weapons.

All this notwithstanding, the long age was by no means one of unremitting gloom and despair, far from it. The four new factors—surrogate and covert warfare, nuclear fear, anti-Sovietism, and a powerful military-industrial complex—interacted with other forces that some observers have mistakenly attributed to the Cold War. Like all other eras of American history, this too shares a complex order of long- and short-term trends, immediate and distant causes, cycles of intensity, and inconstant speed of changes.

In this chapter as in the book, we hope to make sense of three major developments: (1) The varieties of long-term historical trends that come together in the postwar world to shape its culture. (2) The ways in which change was cyclical or at least uneven, speeding up at one point and slowing at another. (3) The manner

in which the four unique elements of the Cold War impinged upon and affected long- and short-term historical changes. But what were the long-term trends with which these forces interacted?

To begin with, there is demographics. The most intimate and perhaps meaningful decisions of American adults—to form families and have children—seem remarkably untouched by the Cold War. The amazing rise in the birth rate during the late 1940s and 1950s (peaking in 1957), the declining age of marriage and growing marriage rate, and the low divorce rate all converged in the midst of the most intense years of nuclear fear and ideological and surrogate warfare. While it might be possible to interpret this reaction as hunkering down in the face of doom—retreating within the four walls of the household—it is far more likely that these were optimistic measures in response to the despair of the 1930s and the enforced separation of young Americans during the war years. It might even be argued that the 1950s was the first decade in which the nuclear family finally emerged universally in America, after decades of extended family living arrangements.

Since family formation and fertility respond to positive and negative economic and cultural stimuli, it is not surprising that this era of comparatively good times brought increased marriage and fertility. Furthermore, increased sexual activity at younger and younger ages, especially for women, first manifested itself in very early marriage and, then, after the 1950s, in growing incidence of premarital sex. By the 1990s this meant a much lower marriage rate, increased age at marriage, a declining birth rate, and the initiation of an active, adult, sexual life at a much earlier age. While the heightened uncertainty about a future threatened by nuclear war reinforced the tendency to live for the moment rather than defer sexual and other gratifications, the sexual revolution would probably have occurred without the Cold War.

The history of sexuality in postwar America is thus the story of increasing liberalization, first within and then outside of marriage. This occurred in three phases: the rebellion of men against marriage and the increasingly permissive fantasy life associated with the “Playboy” lifestyle of the late 1950s, the more significant rebellion of women against prescribed sexual expectations and behavior, and the increasingly open display and public tolerance of homosexuality beginning in the late 1960s. Exploited by market forces, particularly advertising, facilitated by improved contraception (especially the introduction of the birth control pill in 1960), and promoted by Hollywood films and popular music, this heightened and seemingly ubiquitous sexuality produced the related challenge to the traditional nuclear family. By the 1980s, a backlash was created among conservative forces which, through banning abortion and promoting “family values,” sought to reverse this trend.

If all of these changes conspired to raise the average age of marriage and lower the age of sexual initiation over the whole period, another result has been to lengthen greatly the stage of adolescence in America and to transform it from a period of social, economic, psychological, and cultural dependence upon the family into a period of dependent adulthood. Again the 1950s played a key transitional role in this transformation of the precocious adolescent from a transgressor against adult privilege and behavior to a credit-card-carrying member of a loose family organization. If anything, the gradual lowering of the age of sexual activity and liberation of sexual mores unify this longer period far more than the fluctuations in marriage rates and ages divide it.

Just as family-related demographics and sexual behavior changed rapidly after 1945, so too did the physical movement of Americans out of older eastern and midwestern cities into the suburbs. Huge population shifts occurred as Americans moved from these same, older urban areas into the West, the Southwest, and the South (particularly Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas). While this movement may have looked new because it was so dramatic, it was part of an older trend that had its roots in the population movements of the 1930s and particularly in the military dispersal of millions of young Americans during the Second World War. A nation is never so mobile as when it is at total war fighting enemies from both coasts. So the 1950s shift in the Cold War economy sped up a process that had begun earlier and continued well after the social and cultural observers wrote their amazed accounts of its implications. Thus when Lucy and Desi Arnez and Fred and Ethel Mertz abandoned their (television) apartments in New York City, they were only following what millions of ex-G.I.s and their wives had been doing since World War II, and what the film industry had done four decades earlier when it left studios in New York and New Jersey for sunnier climates.

Looked at over the whole of the twentieth century, the communications revolution of the 1950s endlessly portrayed and fictionalized contemporary culture. It brought television into millions of American homes but in fact was only one of a series of dramatic changes in communications marking almost every decade of the century. In the twentieth century, there have been at least three movie revolutions: the pre-World War I era of flickering nickelodeons, the ambitious and glamorous silent pictures of the 1920s, and the revolution in sound and color of the 1930s. Throughout these decades radio, too, dramatically changed in America. Then came the impact of television in two phases—an introductory half-decade or so after World War II, and a second, intense period of change during the 1950s and 1960s when television became universal and its full potential became apparent for the first time. Add to this the deepening sophistication in recorded sound

and the dimensions of the communications revolution become clear. With plummeting prices, television, radio, records, and music became available to almost every American. Yet this earlier communications revolution pales beside a second intense age of invention and distribution of culture based upon computers, digitalized sound and images, satellites, and other advanced technologies that began in the 1980s. Next to this, the 1950s television revolution seems to be primitive at best, and remarkable only because the changes were so visible and sparked so much discussion about its effects on American society.

Democrats and Republicans have dominated politics throughout the postwar era, successfully fending off or coopting most challenges from the left and the right. Third parties have found it almost impossible to crack the two-party system. Within the two major parties, a general consensus prevailed on both domestic and foreign policies. Truman's ouster of former Vice President Henry Wallace as Secretary of Commerce in September 1946 not only completed his purge of New Dealers from his cabinet but effectively ended the vigorous postwar challenge from his own party's once-formidable left wing. Thereafter political debate and electioneering proceeded within narrow ideological bounds, especially where foreign policy was concerned. The basic framework of international containment and limited social democracy—guns and butter—held sway until challenged by the antiwar movement in the late 1960s and by Reagan-Bush efforts to dismantle the welfare state in the 1980s.

Overall there has been a steady decline of the Democratic majority and coalition assembled in the late 1920s and 1930s. The Republicans have gradually and very slowly become the majority party in the United States—if not by actual affiliation, then by voting behavior, especially at the presidential and congressional levels. This has been, for much of the era, a very bitter struggle, occasionally over serious philosophic and policy issues but more often between men of great political ambition and lesser principles.

What is not new or unique to politics of the Age of Cold War is character assassination, opportunism, anticommunism, smear, and guilt by association—in other words, “McCarthyism”—although its late 1940s and 1950s practitioners, including not only Nixon Republicans but Harry Truman and many of his Democratic colleagues, took these practices and turned them into an art form. During its most virulent phase, the firing of respected professors, including top scientists from major universities, blacklisting of Hollywood celebrities, persecution of policymakers and lower-level government employees, targeting of homosexuals, and celebration of the stoolpigeon as the citizen par excellence, induced widespread fear and temporarily silenced some of the nation's most creative voices. American democratic politics has periodically bottomed out on

the lowest level of the standard "all that the traffic will bear." Free enterprise and market principles translated into politics has meant a boom and bust cycle of ethics.

Anticommunism was first effectively employed against labor and radical forces in the aftermath of the Haymarket episode in 1886 and again on a large scale during and after World War I. Anticommunism turned against Democrats was a well-known tactic of the 1930s. The Democrats circulated their own kind of debased coin in identifying every Republican, beginning with Herbert Hoover, with the Great Depression. What is remarkable is how little anticommunism really worked to reverse the Democratic political majority after World War II. That process was much more gradual and depended upon complex long-term phenomena.

One of these was the state of the economy. In the short run, the economy always has an immediate impact upon elections and other forms of political culture. In the long run, the economy's impact on American life was even more pronounced. The period following World War II, which began by unleashing the enormous pent-up demand for housing, transportation, and other consumer goods and services such as higher education, is characterized by generally strong growth and the development of a modern consumer economy. Within this broader age, the 1950s was the most egalitarian decade of the postwar period as measured by distribution of wealth. Since then inequality has steadily increased, leading to the tremendous disparity between rich and poor of the Reagan-Bush-Clinton era. During this period, too, there has been a remarkable transformation of the American economy. It could be argued that the 1950s is the last decade of the industrial age. Thereafter the American economy shifted rapidly to producing advanced technology, services, distribution and credit systems, entertainment and communications, banking, and construction. Basic manufacturing industries, on the other hand, declined and relocated in search of lower-paid and nonunion workers.

Population distribution reflected this transformation. From the four-part urban model—downtown commercial, retail, and entertainment center; middle-class residential area; industrial zone; and surrounding working-class housing—the line between cities and suburbs disappeared. New sorts of population conglomerates and nodules merged with multiple smaller centers. Dispersed populations were linked by highways, and engaged in many new small-scale white-collar forms of work and commerce. Among the most striking developments in the 1950s is this rapid transition to a new pattern of work, accommodation, and consumption.

Within this transformation of so many aspects of American life, the most

profound social alteration was probably the end of the legal segregation of the races in the South and the tentative beginning of integration throughout the nation. A social goal still unachieved—the color-blind society—has had many beginnings in America and many moments to commemorate. Throughout the century and a half since the Civil War, high expectations of progress have repeatedly been dashed and betrayed by political opportunism and racism. Yet a variety of forces came together at the end of World War II that doomed legal segregation forever in the South and held out hope for fundamental restructuring in the North. After making significant strides in the 1950s, civil rights activists anticipated even greater gains in the 1960s. The walls of legal separation, so carefully constructed since the end of the nineteenth century, crumbled rapidly. Efforts to eliminate de facto discrimination and resulting social and economic inequality met resistance, however, from hostile whites who were goaded in part by uncertain employment prospects and a steady two-decades-long decline in real wages beginning in 1973. Since then, each decade of the postwar era has been faced with some new sort of crisis related to the painful process of eliminating prejudice and inequality in all their tenacious forms.

Something of the same story might be told about the position of women in America during these years. Despite the weight of advice, opinion, and propaganda, women continued (after a short recess immediately after 1945) to enter the work force in larger and larger numbers. Women's changing socioeconomic position burst into public view in the early 1960s when feminists denounced the suburban housewife lifestyle that kept women dependent, undereducated, underemployed, and largely underfulfilled. Although some deliberately exaggerated the prevalence and harmful effects of a lifestyle that had never been universal nor, by and large, entirely imposed on those who lived it, their critique had a salutary effect. Not only did it create a past to be universally despised and rejected; it proposed new ways of organizing gender relations that had a profound effect on the very real inequalities that existed everywhere between men and women. For the next three and a half decades, perhaps no issue would prove so divisive—and creative—as this ongoing effort by growing numbers of women to change their social roles, redefine the nuclear family, and assert increased control, real and symbolic, over their bodies.

Advocates of women's liberation often encountered stiff resistance from traditionalists whose social conservatism was reinforced by the religious awakening that began in the United States during the 1950s and, with some ups and downs, continues to the present. This longest awakening in American history—a history that is awash with eruptions of religious fervor and evangelical agitation—is also one of the most remarkable. Catalyzed by the new methods of communication

developed by Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, Norman Vincent Peale, and Billy Graham, this impulse has moved significantly from the periphery of American politics to its very center.

Religion has always played a large and sometimes contradictory and complex role in American politics. Throughout most of the twentieth century, for example, the Protestant majority worked to exclude Catholics and Jews from high national office. Yet on a local level, Catholic and Jewish groups could often control ethnic-religious urban political machines. Religion also played a significant role in the Populist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and again in the 1920s. In the postwar world, religion emerged gradually and steadily as a potent political force. To some degree this was even true of the presidency of (Catholic) John F. Kennedy. Even more important was the emergence of second-wave, second-generation Protestant evangelicals (after Billy Graham) who merged conservative theology with conservative politics behind such rallying cultural issues as abortion, but cut much deeper into the cloth of the social welfare state by proposing a sort of neoliberalism of the nineteenth-century variety.

America's welfare state had begun during the New Deal and expanded rapidly in the immediate postwar period into large-scale government intervention into society, culture, and economics. The G.I. Bill of 1946, for example, was a landmark extension of the principles of the welfare state as was the expansion of such programs as social security. Very similar was the introduction of a host of other new programs that were passed up to the end of Richard Nixon's term in office. Thereafter from 1973, despite some additional gains, optimism about the possibilities of a socially engineered society eroded. Declining real wages and dwindling opportunities turned erstwhile allies into fierce competitors over shrinking benefits.

If these cycles and long-term developments define the postwar period in a broad sense, what is the specific role of the unique factors of the Cold War? How did nuclear fear, anti-Sovietism, surrogate and covert wars, and the military-industrial complex alter the transitions and changes that flow inexorably through this period? Clearly their impact was substantial, particularly in two clusters of years: from the end of the 1940s to the early 1960s, and in the first half of the 1980s. But Cold War culture is not synonymous with American culture, even at the height of its impact. It is the interaction between these unique elements of Cold War culture and the long-standing trends that existed independently and in large part antedated the Cold War that created American civilization in this age.

We take strong issue with those observers who have found the Cold War to

be responsible for every change and cultural distortion occurring during these years. Nevertheless, the vividness of the perceptions suggests that the principal effect of the Cold War may have been psychological. It persuaded millions of Americans to interpret their world in terms of insidious enemies at home and abroad who threatened them with nuclear and other forms of annihilation. Seeing the world through this dark, distorting lens and setting global and domestic policies to counter these fanciful as well as real threats was and is, then, the largest impact of the Cold War.

The chapters in this book explore the ways in which the Cold War intersected ongoing developments of American civilization and sometimes added unique elements of its own. In doing so, they challenge and complicate many of the previous interpretations of this period. Readers will, we believe, quickly become aware of how difficult and contentious—and how exciting—this undertaking is.

As the chapters show, Americans experienced the Cold War in a multitude of ways that reflected profound differences between generations, genders, races, classes, regions, and religious groups. William Tuttle and Peter Filene explore the impact of generation. Tuttle finds that children raised during the war and in its aftermath were pulled in dramatically different directions. The Holocaust and the atomic bomb created an immediate sense of their vulnerability in a world whose end was imaginable. At the same time, permissive child-rearing created the expectation of being nurtured and protected, heightening the value of life. These contradictions begat a generation that both sought security and rebelled against it.

But generational difference isn't everything. Peter Filene, in analyzing the impact of the Cold War on those raised during the Great Depression and the Second World War and also on their children, highlights differences between members of the same-age groups. He shows that while postwar policymakers became obsessed with the threat of communism at home and abroad, most Americans were more concerned with work and family. In the 1960s their children, raised to expect security and fulfillment, rebelled against obstacles posed by sexual puritanism, rigid gender roles, and the United States invasion of Vietnam.

All of the postwar generations grew up in a new economic environment. Ann Markusen demonstrates that the needs of a defense-based economy spurred growth but distorted existing patterns of work and community. Establishing that the military might be needed to insure that America's form of industrial capitalist democracy prevailed in the Cold War precipitated the rise of gunbelt regions in the south Atlantic states, New England, and the mountain and Pacific states. In fact, she argues, not only did traditional industrial areas decline as a result, but almost no aspect of American life emerged untouched

by the force of this investment and production. Even politics shifted as conservatives from defense-rich areas exercised greater and greater influence.

The resulting polarization of American politics shattered the illusory though deep-seated sense of unity that pervaded American culture during the 1950s. Alan Brinkley identifies the factors that gave rise to this illusion as postwar prosperity, which spawned a huge new middle class, suburbanization, increasing bureaucratization of white-collar work, and proliferation of middle-class images and values through television westerns, variety shows, quiz shows, and situation comedies. None of these elements, Brinkley contends, flowed directly from the Cold War itself. But the stiff uniformity of this new middle-class culture provoked a scathing critique from writers and intellectuals.

Other groups rebelled as well. Joanne Meyerowitz challenges the belief that the 1950s were uniformly conservative and bleak by identifying sources of dissent within Cold War culture itself. A number of groups, including women and gay men and lesbians, in order to claim expanded rights and privileges, circumvented the conservative logic of Cold War culture by appropriating the very language and values U.S. officials used to promote the Cold War. This tactic was also used effectively by African Americans who tried to force the United States to live up to the human rights promises of Cold War rhetoric.

Jane De Hart elaborates a different interaction between gender roles, sexuality, and anticommunism. Showing how American nationality and the human body have become integrated and parallel metaphors, she examines the special pressures the Cold War placed upon women. Domestic containment, or the promotion of an exaggerated domesticity designed to thwart a budding revolution in gender roles and expression of "deviant" sexuality, became an almost official ideology. And yet, De Hart argues, millions of women maneuvered successfully to escape its constraints. De Hart further demonstrates that while Cold War containment of international communism gave domestic containment its unique coloration, efforts to undermine the sexual and gender revolution have outlasted the Cold War and proved that the link was more convenient than inherent.

National identity during the Cold War was also grounded in American military superiority. But the novel *Catch 22* exposed the fundamental irrationality of an economy and culture based upon the insane logic of militarism, particularly in the nuclear age. Stephen Whitfield contends that Joseph Heller's epic novel was as much about the Cold War as it was about World War II where the action is set. It had its greatest resonance with a generation appalled by the seemingly inexorable expansion of the war in Vietnam. Heller's brilliance was to reverse the values and assumptions of warfare. Heroes desert. The rules of military conduct are corrupt. The purpose of war is irrational. The game is fixed.

Heller stood almost alone among writers in identifying the irrationality of Cold War logic in 1961. Among filmmakers, Stanley Kubrick occupies a similar place for his 1964 film *Dr. Strangelove*, which ridiculed the assumptions of deterrence and the nuclear arms race. But a much more common attitude toward the military in the 1950s was reflected in what Chris Appy labels “sentimental militarism.” Appy discovers a moral certitude about American militarism, cloaked in a curtain of benign nostalgia, in several of the most popular movies of the decade. These films tried to create popular support for the ongoing militarization of American society and its struggles in places like Korea. But, Appy contends, this World War II–style sentimentalism even rang false at the time. Its cheery imbecility would soon be exposed by Heller and Kubrick and thoroughly discredited by opponents of United States overseas aggression.

When Leo Ribuffo steps back even further, viewing the Cold War era in the context of century-long trends, he finds surprisingly little that is new. While other contributors to this volume have located the roots of Cold War society, culture, and politics in the 1930s and 1940s, Ribuffo traces most of them to Progressive politics and Woodrow Wilson’s foreign policy. He ends by challenging us to reconsider what if anything has actually changed.

Historians and other citizens will have to answer the vexing questions posed by Ribuffo and the other contributors to this volume. The understandings we derive will be of more than academic interest. In a crucial sense, how we understand this troubling though fascinating period in human history will go a long way toward determining the kind of future we collectively shape in the twenty-first century and beyond.

Notes

1. *Strategic Air Command*, director, Anthony Mann, producer, Samuel J. Briskin (Paramount, 1955).
2. Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs: 1945 Year of Decisions* (New York: Doubleday, 1955; Signet Books, 1965), 465.
3. Quoted in Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb’s Early Light* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 5.
4. Quoted in Boyer, *Bomb’s Early Light*, 7.
5. Boyer, *Bomb’s Early Light*, 355.