

St. Cloud State University

## The Repository at St. Cloud State

---

Library Faculty Publications

Library Services

---

1-2010

### Cold War History on the World Wide Web

Thomas D. Steman

*St. Cloud State University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/lrs\\_facpubs](https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/lrs_facpubs)



Part of the [History Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Steman, T.D. (2010). Cold War History on the World Wide Web. *MAC Newsletter*, 37(3), p. 16-17.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Library Services at The Repository at St. Cloud State. It has been accepted for inclusion in Library Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of The Repository at St. Cloud State. For more information, please contact [tdsteman@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:tdsteman@stcloudstate.edu).

## **Cold War History on the World Wide Web**

It's been 25 years since Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the former Soviet Union in 1985, ultimately signaling the end of the Cold War. A struggle between the United States, the Soviet Union, and their allies, the Cold War was a struggle stemmed from the numerous political, military, ideological, cultural, and economic difference between the two sides. These tensions, and many other aspects of Cold War history, are well documented on the World Wide Web

The National Security Archives at George Washington University, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/>, provides a valuable overview of many Cold War topics. The National Security Archives describes itself as an organization that “collects and publishes declassified documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act,” and the Web site encompasses many historical national security topics, from shortly after World War II through the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The “Documents” link on the National Security Archives’ homepage leads to a page where users can access original, digitized records covering such topics as nuclear history, U.S. intelligence, and Europe; many of the subjects headings feature materials that document the Cold War. For example, the “Reykjavik File,” spotlights previously secret documents from U.S. and Soviet archives regarding the 1986 summit between Gorbachev and President Ronald Reagan. The collection also includes digitized records related to Soviet plans for a preemptive nuclear strike, possible military responses to the 1961 Berlin crisis, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s secret trip to China in 1971, and these primary sources are supplemented by background information about and historical context for each classified document. The National Security Archive Web site is absolutely fascinating and kept me reading for many hours on intriguing aspects of foreign policy. Incidentally, one of my favorite parts of the Web site does not involve national security and instead documents President Richard Nixon’s December 1970

meeting with Elvis Presley by providing access to original photographs and records related to the Oval Office meeting, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/elvis/elnix.html>.

As with the National Security Archive, the Freedom of Information Act has facilitated the declassification and digitization of Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) files, <http://vault.fbi.gov/reading-room-index>, including many from the Cold War era. For example, the Web site provides access to FBI documents related to Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who were convicted of espionage against the United States for helping to deliver information about the atomic bomb to the Soviet Union. The FBI file is available as a PDF document, as are all other files on the Web site, and it includes 171 scanned pages discussing the circumstances of the case, activities leading to espionage charges against the Rosenbergs, and their federal trial. Taken as a whole, the digitized FBI files, many of which describe investigations into high-profile civilians and organizations, help demonstrate the considerable espionage and intelligence activities that occurred during the Cold War.

Propaganda was another component of the Cold War, and both sides produced numerous films as part of their campaigns to discredit the other. For a peek at some of the films that were created and distributed for these purposes, researchers can visit the Web site for the Moffit Library's Media Resource Center at the University of California, Berkley, <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/propaganda.html#coldwar>. Propaganda films in the collection are displayed in alphabetical order by category and title, and the list also features a film summary, film credits, and links to other resources that supplement the films. A number of films have been digitized and can be viewed on-line for no charge, allowing users not only to see the propaganda methods firsthand but also providing viewers with insights into the language, clothing, and attitudes of the time. My favorite films included *Capitalism*, which

sought to present a "clearer understanding" of capitalism to help the public develop their own opinions about the economic system; *Don't Be a Sucker*, a 17-minute film that preaches against the evils of totalitarian societies; and *Operation Abolition*, a 42-minute film produced by the U.S. House Un-American Activities Committee as an attack on the Communist Party. Overall, these films are a fascinating component of Cold War history.

Oral histories are another valuable primary source for Cold War researchers, and a number of these interviews are available on the Library of Congress Web site as part of the American Memory collection, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/diplomacy/>. *Frontline Diplomacy: the Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training* provides access to complete transcripts of more than 1,500 oral history interviews narrated by U.S. diplomats. The collection mostly focuses on the post-World War II era, and the interviews are organized by author (narrator and/or interviewer) and subject, although users can also search the interview transcripts by keyword. Even though only some of the interviews are accompanied by short biographies of the narrators and by summaries of the interviews, the collection presents a critical mass of primary source materials related to the U.S. Foreign Service.

Presidential libraries are also home to an abundance of historical resources documenting the Cold War, including three repositories located in the Midwest. The Cold War began during the presidency of Harry Truman, and the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum in Independence, Missouri, houses numerous Cold War resources. In fact, a number of primary sources have been digitized and made available on the library's Web site, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/photos/av-photo.htm>

[\[https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/audiovisual-materials-collection\]](https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/audiovisual-materials-collection), and these resources

are organized into subject categories, including the Cold War, the Berlin airlift, and the Korean War. Materials related to the Korean War, which began in 1950 and ended with an armistice in 1953, are especially rich, as users can access on-line exhibits, week-by-week accounts of the fighting, oral history transcripts, photographs, and sound clips. I was especially impressed with the sound clips, which include Truman's thoughts on his April 1951 firing of General Douglas MacArthur as commander of United Nations forces in Korea, excerpts of a speech and radio report discussing progress in the war, and veterans describing their combat experiences. The oral histories are also impressive, as a wide range of diplomats and government officials, many from outside the United States, share their observations about the Korean War.

The Cold War continued during the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961) and the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, located in Abilene, Kansas, has made available on-line many digitized primary sources related to Cold War issues, [http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online\\_documents.html](http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents.html). Of particular note are records related to McCarthyism, the Rosenbergs, and *Sputnik*, and notable collection topics include the U-2 Spy Plane Incident and aerial intelligence during the Cold War. For certain topics, the Web site features an abundance of scanned documents, including memorandums, speeches, press releases, and meeting notes, but not all of these rich resources are complemented by digitized images. Each document, however, is listed with a location code within the library to facilitate further research, and each topic's page contains a list of recommended secondary sources.

The Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum, located in Ann Arbor, Michigan, also features numerous Cold War primary resources on its Web site,

<http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/docs.asp>. Notable resources include documents related to intelligence investigations and reform, and photographs from Ford's 1974 trip to the Soviet Union for arms reduction negotiations. In addition, the Vietnam War is extremely well represented via digitized resources, as users can access meeting minutes of the cabinet and the National Security Council and view an on-line exhibit, "A Day in the Life of a President," featuring documents and photographs from April 29, 1975, when the evacuation of Saigon occurred.