

MYTHS,

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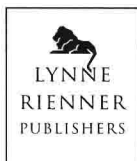
**THE CULTURAL SHAPING
of THREE COLD WARRIORS**

STEPHEN W. TWING

MYTHS, MODELS & U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

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BOULDER
LONDON

Published in the United States of America in 1998 by
Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.
1800 30th Street, Boulder, Colorado 80301

and in the United Kingdom by
Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.
3 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London WC2E 8LU

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Twing, Stephen W., 1961–

Myths, models, and U.S. foreign policy : the cultural shaping of
three cold warriors / Stephen W. Twing.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-55587-766-4 (hc : alk. paper)

1. United States—Foreign relations administration—History.
2. International relations and culture—History.
3. Dulles, John Foster, 1888–1959—Views on foreign relations.
4. Harriman, W. Averell (William Averell), 1891–1986—Views on foreign relations.
5. McNamara, Robert S., 1916– —Views on foreign relations.

I. Title.

JZ1479.T88 1998

306.2—dc21

98-3322

CIP

British Cataloguing in Publication Data

A Cataloguing in Publication record for this book
is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in the United States of America



The paper used in this publication meets the requirements
of the American National Standard for Permanence of
Paper for Printed Library Materials Z39.48-1984.

5 4 3 2 1

Preface

This work grew out of a strong conviction that ideas matter. It examines the shared meanings that members of U.S. society have imposed on the world. It also explores how those shared meanings helped to shape three important U.S. statesmen and their policy approaches to the Cold War. As such, it is a work of interpretation, seeking to examine individual worldviews and policymaking behavior in light of the shared meanings that have helped to define for Americans their society and its role in the world. In addition to closely examining three important myths and three important representative characters, the book also suggests a process by which those symbolic structures helped to influence U.S. Cold War-era foreign policy by shaping key policymakers.

* * *

During my work on this project, I have acquired many debts, both intellectual and personal. At the University of South Carolina I benefited tremendously from the guidance and intellectual encouragement of Donald Puchala, Daniel Sabia, and John Sproat. I also owe a special debt of gratitude to my adviser and friend Jerel Rosati for his guidance, encouragement, and friendship. I am extremely grateful to Jeanette Baker for reading the entire manuscript and providing insightful feedback. Completion of the book would never have been possible without the direct involvement, general patience, and encouragement of my wife, Christina. Lynne Rienner, Bridget Julian, and Shena Redmond of Lynne Rienner Publishers were extremely helpful throughout the publication process. Finally I am deeply indebted to my parents, Rhoda Ann and Al Twing, who always encouraged my curiosity.

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Culture and U.S. Foreign Policy

In recent years there has been increased interest among scholars of U.S. foreign policy in cultural influences on the content of that policy. The problem with much of the existing work on this topic is that its authors simply assert that there is a connection between certain strands of U.S. culture and certain patterns of U.S. foreign policy behavior without examining how (or even whether) these cultural elements actually influence the behavior of individual policymakers. This book seeks to explore this cultural shaping process whereby particular symbolic structures influence the ways individual policymakers view themselves and view and act toward the world.

Scholars trying to explain the content of U.S. foreign policy often focus on two important questions: How do key policymakers view the world? and What are the key sources of these worldviews?¹ Although most scholars of foreign policy behavior would agree that policymaker worldviews are an important variable in the foreign policy making equation, there is no consensus as to the source of these worldviews.

Some scholars have used theoretical tools from the personality or cognitive fields of psychology.² Others have examined how policymakers' worldviews are shaped by their use (and misuse) of historical examples.³ Although such psychological and historical approaches are useful and important, they do not directly address the important role of culture. Indeed, even with increased scholarly interest, the role of U.S. culture in shaping the worldviews of American foreign policy makers has remained underexplored. One reason is that there is so little agreement among scholars as to the definition of culture.

CULTURE AS MEANING

In the field of cultural anthropology, there are many broad definitions of culture. The nineteenth century British anthropologist

E. B. Tylor defined culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”⁴ This definition is all-encompassing, and since it includes both ideas and behaviors, it would be extremely unwieldy as a basis from which to do research on the relationship between culture and policymaker worldviews. This encompassing behavioral-ideational approach to defining culture is shared by American anthropologist A. L. Kroeber, who writes, “Culture is the mass of learned and transmitted motor reactions, habits, techniques, ideas, and values and the behavior they induce.”⁵

Other anthropologists such as Ruth Benedict seem to focus solely on behavioral aspects, arguing, “Culture is that complex whole which includes all the habits acquired by man as a member of society.”⁶ Because this definition fails to address ideational components of culture, it does not provide a useful starting point for researching the culture-to-worldview connection. In fact, all three of these anthropological definitions of culture are unsuitable for this type of research. And there are hundreds more in the cultural anthropology literature that are equally unsuitable.⁷

This definitional pluralism within the field of cultural anthropology is not an insurmountable obstacle, however. There is a fairly rich tradition of sociological thinkers who theorize about culture and whose conceptualizations of it are useful for exploring the culture-worldview-behavior connection. The three classical sociologists whose works are most relevant for this purpose are Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber. All three thought extensively about the role of culture in influencing human behavior. All three thinkers (albeit to differing degrees) approached the culture concept from the standpoint of the problem of meaning.⁸ That is, all operated from the assumption that human beings have a basic need to make sense of the world and to feel connected to something larger than themselves. Conceptualizing culture as a system of meaning provides an excellent starting point to look for the behaviorally relevant linkage among cultural phenomena (i.e., myths, religions) and individual policymakers.

Of these three sociological thinkers, Karl Marx probably focused on the problem of meaning the least. In his theory of historical materialism, cultural phenomena such as religion and myths are a part of society’s superstructure, which is powerfully determined by its economic base. Culture, therefore, is of secondary importance for Marx in his attempt to explain macrolevel social change. To the extent that Marx considered cultural phenomena, he tended to focus on religion.

Marx saw the need to conceptualize culture as a system of meaning but believed that the alienation brought on by capitalist relations of production created a void of meaning. For Marx, religion filled this void but was a form of false consciousness: It was created by humans to help dull the pain of their oppression and their alienation from themselves, their labor, and other human beings.⁹ And at the same time that it dulled this sense of alienation—caused, he said, by the capitalist system—it obscured and perpetuated it. So Marx did approach culture as a system of meaning of sorts even as he downplayed its role in his social theory.

French sociologist Émile Durkheim tended to focus on religion as an important example of culture as a meaning system. He also held the notion that religion is (at least in part) a symbolic representation of social forces that act on the individual.¹⁰

In his study of primitive religious practices in Australia, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Durkheim shows how religious symbolism serves to represent predominant social forces to individuals, thus helping them both make sense of and feel reverence for the society. In his analysis of the totem, he explains that a deity confronts the individual both as a constraint and as a source of strength and ennoblement.¹¹ He concludes that the forces of constraint and empowerment portrayed in religious symbolism are actually representative of social forces acting on the individual: Society presents itself as a deity through the symbolism of the totem. Thus for Durkheim, "Religion ceases to be an inexplicable hallucination and takes a foothold in reality. In fact we can say that the believer is not deceived when he believes in the existence of a moral power upon which he depends and from which he receives all that is best in himself: this power exists, it is society."¹²

In his definition of religion, Durkheim builds in the notion of religion as a system of meaning:

Before all it is a system of ideas with which individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members, and the obscure but intimate relations which they have with it. This is its primary function; and though metaphorical and symbolic, this representation is not unfaithful. Quite on the contrary, it translates everything essential in the relations which are to be explained: for it is an eternal truth that outside of us there exists something greater than us, with which we enter into communion.¹³

Thus for Durkheim, religion is a cultural phenomenon that supplies the individual with meaning in its most basic form: a sense of connectedness to something larger than ourselves.

Like Durkheim, Max Weber conceptualized culture generally and religion specifically as systems of meaning. In his essay "Methodology in Social Science and Social Policy," Weber summed up his argument that culture should be understood as a system of meaning. "The transcendental presupposition of every cultural science lies not in our finding a certain culture or any 'culture' in general as valuable but rather in the fact that we are cultural beings, endowed with the capacity and the will to take a deliberate attitude towards the world and to lend it significance."¹⁴

Like those of Durkheim, Weber's cultural studies involved the study of religion. In perhaps his most famous such study, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber analyzed the connection between two Protestant doctrines (predestination and the theory of the elect) and the strong motivation among members of some Protestant sects to accumulate capital and succeed in business activities.¹⁵ Weber did not argue that these ascetic Protestant beliefs were the sole factor responsible for the rise of capitalism in these societies, but he did make a persuasive case that they played an important role.

After showing that this Calvinist theodicy played a role in creating the rationalized and bureaucratized world of modern capitalism by imposing a set of meanings on believers' everyday lives, Weber went on to lament that the workers in the modern capitalist world were suffering from a shortage of meaning.¹⁶ Thus like Durkheim and Marx, Weber highlighted the ubiquitous human need to feel connected to something larger than oneself, the need for meaning.

Following in the footsteps of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, a new generation of sociologists approach culture as a system of meaning. In the works of Robert Bellah, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, and Clifford Geertz, one finds an approach to culture that is, if anything, more focused on the central importance of meaning for the human condition than are the works of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber. By their own admission, all of these later sociologists build on and modify the works of the earlier theorists.¹⁷

In his work on the sociology of religion, Robert Bellah explicitly draws on the work of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber. At the same time he criticizes their work for being overly reductionist (i.e., for being too quick to reduce religious phenomena to material social forces).¹⁸ In response to this problem, he proposes a doctrine he calls symbolic realism, which treats religious symbolism as an objective entity that cannot be reduced to material social forces.¹⁹ In other words, Bellah sets out to study religious symbolism itself, because of

the central importance of its meaning for human beings, not in an effort to find out what social forces lie at its foundation.

Particularly enlightening is Bellah's discussion of symbols and meaning.

Symbols are cultural objects that serve to give meaning to acts or objects by classifying them in categories that include other acts or objects. They provide a context of meaning for discrete acts and objects. Meaning in this sense is location in a context, in a larger interrelated framework defined by values or norms of a more general order than the specific act or object. Human action is almost by definition symbolic action, which is another way of saying that it always involves culture.²⁰

For Bellah, then, the problem of meaning must be central to a working conception of culture. Often he stresses the cognitive aspects of the human need for meaning (i.e., the need to make sense out of the world). But he does not ignore the human need for meaning in the noncognitive, more intuitive and affective sense (i.e., the need to feel connected to something larger than ourselves). In fact, he laments the lack of sources of this latter type of meaning in modern society.²¹ Thus like Marx, Durkheim, and Weber before him, Bellah conceives of culture as a socially transmitted system of meaning, but he focuses more explicitly on two distinct senses in which humans need meaning.

Like Bellah, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann build on the thought of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, although not exclusively.²² They also share Bellah's conception of meaning as location within a context. Berger and Luckmann's classic 1966 *The Social Construction of Reality* is a powerful theoretical treatment of the dialectical process by which human subjective meanings become objectified into the reality that we experience as society and of how those objectifications allow individuals to live in and make sense of the world.²³ In their treatment of this dialectical process, they clearly emphasize the meaning-providing aspect of human culture.

I apprehend the reality of everyday life as an ordered reality. Its phenomena are prearranged in patterns that seem to be independent of my apprehension of them and that impose themselves upon the latter. The reality of everyday life appears already objectified, that is constituted by an order of objects that have been designated as objects before my appearance on the scene. The language used in everyday life continuously provides me with the necessary objectifications and posits the order within which these make sense and within which everyday life has meaning for me.²⁴

Besides this basic level of symbolic meanings found in the socially constructed reality of everyday life, Berger and Luckmann discuss four other levels of symbolic meaning frameworks. Although basic-level meanings are sufficient for helping individuals move through their everyday surroundings, there are times when more comprehensive meaning frameworks are needed. These frameworks range from simple explanations at the lowest level (perhaps further categorizations of objects encountered in everyday life) to symbolic universes at the highest level of inclusiveness (e.g., philosophical traditions or religious doctrines).²⁵ Symbolic universes represent the highest level of meaning integration.

Berger and Luckmann, then, provide a detailed conceptualization of culture as a source of meaning. Their scheme of ever-widening spheres of meaning is extremely useful because it allows the analyst of culture to locate particular cultural phenomena (i.e., myths, theodicies) within this range of widening comprehensiveness of context. And their systematic analysis of the dialectical culture production process is extremely important for providing an understanding of how humans impose meaning on their world, creating social reality and even, to some extent, themselves.

Perhaps the most significant cultural theorist of this era is Clifford Geertz. Like Bellah, Berger, and Luckmann, Geertz builds on the thought of Durkheim, Weber, and, to a lesser extent, Marx.²⁶ Geertz has probably contributed more than any other thinker to the development of the semiotic culture concept. He argues that human culture consists of socially transmitted symbolic structures that are intersubjectively shared by members of a society who use them to orient themselves to their physical and social world.²⁷ Since human beings, relative to other animals, are born with few genetically encoded instructions for behavior, their behavior is, as Geertz puts it, "guided predominantly by cultural rather than genetic templates."²⁸ According to Geertz, with no rigid genetic templates to orient them to their world, human beings use these socially transmitted symbolic structures as mental models that guide them through everyday life.²⁹

In his study of religion, Geertz explores both the cognitive and the intuitive/affective dimensions of the human need for meaning and shows how religion (and culture more generally) connects our everyday lives with a much larger reality, within the context of which our everyday world makes sense.³⁰ In this sense religion is what Berger and Luckmann call a symbolic universe.³¹ For Geertz, however, the affective aspects of symbolic universes are just as important as the cognitive aspects. Religious symbols may help us

make sense of the world by connecting us to something larger, but the connection itself also fulfills an important need. Thus in Geertz's treatment of religion, these societally transmitted symbolic structures fulfill the most basic cognitive and affective human requirements.

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY AND SYMBOLIC STRUCTURES

Whereas religion is an important symbolic structure for fulfilling cognitive and affective requirements, it is not by any means the only one. The task for the cultural analyst studying U.S. foreign policy is to locate other such symbolic structures transmitted within U.S. society. Upon locating and examining these symbolic structures, the analyst must then attempt to determine how they have influenced the behavior of American policymakers. This is precisely the aim of this book.

Scholars of U.S. foreign policy have identified several interesting symbolic structures transmitted within U.S. society that serve as important sources of meaning for Americans and that have foreign policy relevance. Historian Michael Hunt argues that U.S. foreign policy has been guided by a three-pronged foreign affairs ideology based on liberal exceptionalism and racism.³² Historian Loren Baritz argues that the U.S. Vietnam policy was heavily influenced by both a myth of U.S. technological invincibility and a Puritan-inspired "city on the hill" myth that portrays the United States as democratic example and savior for the world.³³

Historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. agrees that U.S. foreign policy has been significantly influenced by the city-on-the-hill myth. He sees historical phases where U.S. diplomacy was shaped first by the city-on-the-hill myth and then by an experimental or pragmatic myth that has a more realpolitik orientation.³⁴ Whereas the city-on-the-hill myth calls for the United States to stay true to its highest ideals in its dealings with the world, the pragmatic myth suggests that since the United States is an ongoing and vulnerable democratic experiment, it must doggedly pursue its interests in the world in the most effective way possible.

A third foreign policy-relevant myth, the market myth, has been identified by historian William Appleman Williams. Williams argues that since the turn of the century the United States has followed an economically exploitive "open door" approach to the rest of the world.³⁵ He argues that underlying this open-door approach has been a mythical conception of U.S. society as the idealized arena for economic competition.

So Baritz, Schlesinger, and Williams have identified three myths that not only serve as important sources of meaning and identity for Americans but also are relevant for U.S. foreign policy. These three scholars have identified an important connection between certain strands of American culture and the content of U.S. foreign policy. Their work suffers from a common shortcoming, however. Each scholar identifies a myth (or combination of myths), points to patterns in U.S. foreign policy behavior, and assumes that the myth (or myths) must have somehow shaped the policy, but none attempts to explain precisely how culture shapes policy. The key to understanding the relationship between U.S. culture and foreign policy lies in exploring and examining this mechanism of influence.

How does one make sense out of these different myths, two of which (the Puritan and pragmatic) seem to be quite contradictory in their substantive influence on U.S. foreign policy? Some scholars such as Schlesinger argue that these myths alternate over time in exercising the predominant influence over U.S. foreign policy with periods of Puritan crusading followed by periods of pragmatic experimentation.³⁶ Unfortunately, Schlesinger does not discuss just what determines whether the foreign policy of an era will be Puritan or pragmatic. Are changes in the cultural orientation of U.S. policy simply responses to changes in U.S. society or in the international environment, or can they be attributed merely to changes in the circulation of policymaking elites? Is it possible that these three cultural traditions could exercise influence over policy simultaneously in tension with each other? One way to answer this question is to examine the cultural shaping of individual policymakers.

Do individual statespersons suffer from a form of cultural schizophrenia, conceiving of themselves as Puritans today and pragmatists or entrepreneurs tomorrow? Or is it more likely that some policymakers identify consistently over time with the city-on-the-hill myth, others with the pragmatic myth, and still others, the market myth? After all, these three myths serve as important sources of not only collective identity in society but also individual identity; they help to answer the question What makes one an American? Thus it would seem that if an individual is influenced more by one myth than by the others, this identification would tend to be somewhat stable over time.

The only way to answer this question is to examine closely the biographies, and thereby the cultural shaping, of individual statespersons. This is also the only way to make the crucial two-part connection between these different societal-level symbolic structures and the worldviews and self-conceptions of leaders and between the worldviews and self-conceptions of leaders and their policy behavior.

In addition to these myths, there is another type of societal-level symbolic structure that warrants examination for its influence on U.S. foreign policy. Closely related to the three myths previously outlined are three representative characters. Alasdair MacIntyre first identified the representative character in his 1984 moral-philosophical treatise entitled *After Virtue*; Robert Bellah and his colleagues further developed the concept in *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Whereas the three myths serve as idealized models of U.S. society, various representative characters within U.S. culture serve as idealized models for individual behavior.³⁷ The three representative characters within U.S. culture that correspond to the city-on-the-hill, pragmatic, and market myths are, respectively, the Puritan, the manager, and the entrepreneur.

These two sets of societal-level symbolic structures (the three myths and the three representative characters, all of which will be discussed in much more detail in Chapter 2) and their influence on individual worldviews, self-conceptions, and policymaking behavior are the focus of this book. The exploration of this cultural shaping process is conducted via three case studies. Each closely examines one statesman's formative experiences, his evolving worldview and self-conceptions, and finally his policy preferences and policymaking behavior in light of these societal-level symbolic structures.

The subjects are three important cold warriors: John Foster Dulles, Averell Harriman, and Robert McNamara. Analyzing the worldviews, self-conceptions, policy preferences, and policymaking behavior of three cold warriors provides a common substantive focus. All three of these men were faced, in their careers as policymakers, with the superpower confrontation that dominated the global political scene during the Cold War years. Focusing on the Cold War era thus allows one to compare and contrast the way they conceptualized the communist threat and the strategies and tactics they devised for dealing with that threat. Previous study of Cold War-era U.S. diplomatic history has suggested that these three statesmen differed significantly both in the ways they conceptualized the Cold War confrontation and in the strategies and approaches they proposed.

Perhaps these differences in worldview and approach can be partially explained by the fact that each individual was predominately influenced by a different set of myths and representative characters. Previous impressionistic study of the three suggests that John Foster Dulles may have been predominately influenced by the city-on-the-hill myth and the Puritan representative character, whereas Averell Harriman may have been influenced more by the market myth and the entrepreneur character, and Robert McNamara

may have been more influenced by the pragmatic myth and the manager representative character. In order to get at the worldviews, self- and role conceptions, policy preferences, and policy behavior of these statesmen, I have made extensive use of their personal papers and correspondence.³⁸ A set of basic questions was designed and used to aid in identifying their basic normative and descriptive beliefs about world politics in general and about Cold War U.S. foreign policy in particular.³⁹

In Chapter 2, I discuss the societal-level symbolic structures (i.e., the myths and representative characters). In addition to elaborating on them conceptually, I explore how they have been transmitted through American society and how they have informed the nation's political discourse.

NOTES

1. I am using the term *worldview* to denote the body of basic descriptive and normative beliefs a policymaker holds about world politics. Typical component beliefs in the worldview of a policymaker would address such basic issues as the structure of the international system, identification of the most threatening actors in the system, and the preferred role of the United States in the world.

2. For a classic example of the personality approach see Alexander George and Juliette George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personality Study* (New York: Dover, 1956). For a classic example of the cognitive approach see Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in World Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

3. See Richard Neustadt and Ernest May, *Thinking in Time: The Use of History for Decision Makers* (New York: Free Press, 1986).

4. A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (New York: Random House, 1952), 81.

5. *Ibid.*, 84.

6. *Ibid.*, 81.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Robert Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 35.

9. Karl Marx, "Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," 43–44, reprinted in Neil Smelser, *Karl Marx on Society and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 13–14.

10. Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), 236.

11. *Ibid.*, 240.

12. *Ibid.*, 257.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Max Weber, "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy," in Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (New York: Free Press, 1949), 81.

15. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

16. Ibid., 182.
17. For an excellent review of the influence of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber on these later theorists, see Wuthnow, 18–49.
18. Robert Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Posttraditional World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 248–250.
19. Ibid., 253.
20. Ibid., 261.
21. Ibid., 255.
22. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Press, 1966), 6–18.
23. Ibid., 18–22.
24. Ibid., 22.
25. Ibid., 94–97.
26. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1973), 405.
27. Ibid., 12.
28. Ibid., 75.
29. Ibid., 44.
30. Ibid., 108.
31. Berger and Luckmann, 95–97.
32. Michael Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).
33. Loren Baritz, *Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us into Vietnam and Made Us Fight the Way We Did* (New York: Morrow, 1985).
34. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Cycles of American History* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1986).
35. See William Appleman Williams, *The Contours of American History* (Chicago: Quadrangle Press, 1966). See also William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Dell, 1962).
36. Schlesinger, 16–17.
37. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 25–31. See also Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 39–41.
38. The Dulles case study is the only one that makes extensive use of speeches to tap into the policymaker's worldview. Speeches could be viewed as less than ideal windows into an official's worldview, since in the modern era they are increasingly written by professional speechwriters. Dulles, however, consistently refused the services of speechwriters, preferring to draft his own speeches, albeit with occasional feedback from colleagues. See Townsend Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), 149.
39. The questions were as follows:
 - 1.a. What is the relationship between morality and international relations?
 - 1.b. How much weight should moral considerations carry in the formulation and conduct of U.S. foreign policy?
 - 1.c. To what extent should the Cold War be viewed in moral terms?
 - 2.a. What is the role of power in international relations?
 - 2.b. How should U.S. power best be used in the Cold War? What forms should it take (i.e., military, diplomatic, economic, ideological/cultural)?