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Call for Papers | Cold War 2.0 and Transnational American Studies

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Deadline for Abstracts: 31 May 2025

The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 is often celebrated as the symbolic ending of the Cold War. Not only was it construed as emblematic of neoliberal theorist Francis Fukuyama's "end of history," but it was also considered the harbinger of a new era, which Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri term "Empire"—the culmination of the US-centered global order. Few Western critics at that historical juncture realized that the Cold War had never ended in the Asia-Pacific, where it would continue to expand and reinforce its political alliances and military infrastructure in the twenty-first century. Indeed, following the "pivot back to Asia" under the Obama administration and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's inauguration of "America's Pacific Century" in 2011, the Cold War has evolved in new directions in face of the rise of the People's Republic of China and the shifting dynamics of the "Indo-Pacific" region. With the proclamation of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's 2020 manifesto on "Communist China and the Free World's Future" and the escalation of trade wars into tech wars between the US and the PRC under both the Trump and the Biden administrations, Cold War 2.0 has finally taken full-fledged shape in North America and around the globe.

Like Area Studies and Comparative Literature, American Studies as an interdisciplinary field gained its institutional prominence during the Cold War in the 1950s. Sustained by American exceptionalism and the cultural politics of the "American Century" in what critics call "a tripartite structure," American Studies flourished at home and abroad as the US government-sponsored exchange programs promoted the grand narrative of democracy, freedom, and human rights around the globe. While engaging American literature, history, and culture in critical traditions such as Marxism since its early days in the 1930s, American Studies did not reflect on what Amy Kaplan dubs "the three absences" of the critique of imperialism in the field until the early 1990s. And only since the transnational turn in the mid-2000s has American Studies finally begun to seriously investigate globalization and reconfigure its field imaginary, methodology, and objects of study. In this sense, transnational American Studies is at once obligated and well positioned to critically evaluate the meaning and implications of Cold War 2.0 in relation to the US and the US-centered global order.

In theorizing Cold War 2.0, how should one move beyond the dichotomy of democracy versus autocracy and avoid the pitfall of replacing communism with autocracy as the new national, cultural, and religious Other? If Cold War 2.0 reflects a systemic crisis of the US-centered global order, then how does it equally point to a possible rise of the Global South? Why and how has Cold War 2.0 been embedded in what Bruce Cumings describes as “the twain of American global strategies,” which has paired “an Atlantic-facing internationalism” with “a Pacific-facing expansionism”?

As Cold War 2.0 focuses policymakers’ attention on high tech, the US state apparatus has directed its thrust against Chinese American scientists and engineers in a fashion recalling McCarthyism and exercised the state of exception to suspend the constitutional rights of its naturalized citizens. How have the meanings of democracy, freedom, and human rights correspondingly changed and become discursively interwoven with science and technology? As the PRC’s research and development capacity, manufacturing power, and supply chains steadily expand, why and with what results has the United States increasingly adopted an autocratic style of state intervention that emulates the PRC in its approach to global trade, economy, and governance? How might Laura Doyle’s notion of “inter-imperiality” inform our assessment of the rise of the PRC and Cold War 2.0? What changing roles do the European Union, particularly Germany and France, and the Global South play in Cold War 2.0? Why and how will transnational American Studies continue to matter under the second Trump administration?

We welcome essays that theorize Cold War 2.0 in terms of the geopolitics and geoeconomics of the Transpacific and in relation to both the Western world, often framed as “the international community,” and the Global South as a site of resistance, negotiation, and appropriation. We are also interested in work that explores the changing dynamics of transnational American Studies in the new era of Cold War 2.0 in contexts and genres including speculative fiction (*Ghost Fleet*, 2034, and *White Sun War*, etc.), video games (*Call of Duty: Black Ops 6*, *Arms Race 2*, *Sea Power*, and *Black Myth: Wukong*, etc.), and Hollywood and global cinemas (*Charlie Wilson’s War*, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, *The Silent Revolution*, *The Spacewalker*, *Thirteen Days*, *Cold War*, *The Death of Stalin*, *The Lives of Others*, *Live Free or Die Hard*, and *Oppenheimer*, etc.). Finally, we are interested in special topics such as refugee and ecological crises in Ukraine and the Middle East.

Please submit a 250-word abstract by May 31, 2025. The guest editor of the special forum of *The Journal of Transnational American Studies* will review abstracts and invite full-length essays of 5,000 to 10,000 words, inclusive of notes and bibliography. Please email abstracts and questions to Dr. Yuan Shu at eng.complit@ttu.edu.

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