Benjamin Cowan, Assistant Professor from George Mason University, will give a talk based on his research interests in right-wing radicalism, morality, sexuality, and 20th-century imperialism. This presentation will draw on previously untapped archives to argue that Cold War struggles against “subversion” must be understood in cultural terms, as a reaction to the consequences—real and perceived—of modernization. Inscribing Brazil’s Cold War military dictatorship (1964-1985) into a century-long, transnational trajectory of right-wing activism, Benjamin Cowan will demonstrate that anti-modern moral panic animated powerful, hard-line members and supporters of the military regime. As these hard-liners institutionalized state-sponsored, anti-Marxist violence, their moral panic conflated communist subversion with cultural changes based in modernization itself. Combining Cold War and culture war, rightists focused their anticommunism on specific gendered and sexualized areas of concern: “modern” youth, women, and mass media.

Benjamin A. Cowan is Assistant Professor in the Department of History and Art History at George Mason University. His Securing Sex: Morality and Repression in the Making of Cold War Brazil was recently published by the University of North Carolina Press (2016).