



IN COLD FEAR: THE CATCHER IN THE RYE CENSORSHIP CONTRO

PAMELA HUNT STEINLE

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In Cold Fear: The Catcher in the Rye Censorship Controversies and Postwar American Character Pamela Hunt Steinle

In Cold Fear examines the censorship controversies over J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* as a cultural debate occurring across America, 1954-present. *Catcher* presents a narrative in which adolescent embrace of American ideals of individualism and egalitarianism lead to criticism and rejection of dominant postwar social practices—a narrative as threatening to some adults as it is heartening to others. Attempts to remove *Catcher* from high schools as an "un-American" text have generated continuous and extensive controversy, distinguishing it as one of the most frequently taught postwar novels—and the most frequently censored.

Treating *Catcher* as a cultural Rorschach test, *In Cold Fear* tracks debate discourse in open-ended interviews, public media, editorial letters, and in school board and community meetings in Alabama, California, New Mexico, and Virginia. Debate participants express common agreement with Salinger's critique of postwar American life but divide over whether adolescents should be either exposed to or protected from this perspective. The peculiar angst of the debate is explained by participants' articulation of a wizing of the American spirit: a declining vision of American exceptionalism, recognition of social powerlessness, and fearfulness of an uncertain American future rooted in the threat of nuclear annihilation.

In Cold Fear provides historical post-holes for understanding how differing audiences interpreted *Catcher* and offers a suggestive context for understanding the contemporary anxieties of America's "troubled teens."

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