



The Cold War: A New History

By John Lewis Gaddis

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The Cold War: A New History By John Lewis Gaddis

In 1950, when Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh and Kim Il-Sung met in Moscow to discuss the future, they had reason to feel optimistic. International communism seemed everywhere on the offensive: Stalin was at the height of his power; all of Eastern Europe was securely in the Soviet camp; America's monopoly on nuclear weapons was a thing of the past; and Mao's forces had assumed control over the world's most populous country. Everywhere on the globe, colonialism left the West morally compromised. The story of the previous five decades, which saw severe economic depression, two world wars, a nearly successful attempt to wipe out the Jews, and the invention of weapons capable of wiping out everyone, was one of worst fears confirmed, and there seemed as of 1950 little sign, at least to the West, that the next fifty years would be any less dark.

In fact, of course, the century's end brought the widespread triumph of political and economic freedom over its ideological enemies. How did this happen? How did fear become hope? In *The Cold War*, John Lewis Gaddis makes a major contribution to our understanding of this epochal story. Beginning with World War II and ending with the collapse of the Soviet Union, he provides a thrilling account of the strategic dynamics that drove the age, rich with illuminating portraits of its major personalities and much fresh insight into its most crucial events. The first significant distillation of cold war scholarship for a general readership, *The Cold War* contains much new and often startling information drawn from newly opened Soviet, East European, and Chinese archives. Now, as America once again finds itself in a global confrontation with an implacable ideological enemy, *The Cold War* tells a story whose lessons it is vitally necessary to understand.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. If it's difficult to imagine a history of the Cold War that can be described as thrilling, that should add more luster to Yale historian Gaddis's crown. Gaddis, who's written some half-dozen studies of the Cold War, delivers an utterly engrossing account of Soviet-U.S. relations from WWII to the collapse of the U.S.S.R. The ideological clash between democratic capitalism and communism predated the war, of course, but the emergence of nuclear weapons created a new political situation. Suddenly, it was easy to imagine total war that might destroy not only the enemy but also the victor. Gaddis assesses what he sees as the positive contributions Thatcher, Reagan and Pope John Paul II made to furthering the disintegration of the U.S.S.R. and concludes with a sympathetic portrait of Gorbachev; his refusal to use force ultimately cost him both communism and his country, but, says Gaddis, it also made him "the most deserving recipient ever of the Nobel Peace Prize." The interpretations on offer are not startlingly original—we've read this before, mostly in other books by Gaddis himself—but a new, concise narration was Gaddis's aim here, and he succeeds royally. His synthesis is sure to reign with general history readers and in undergraduate classrooms. 8 maps not seen by PW. (Dec. 29)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Gaddis, professor of history at Yale and the Cold War's preeminent historian, delivers a concise, readable introduction to an era about which Americans have increasingly little recollection. The author has had the somewhat unusual opportunity to examine his period of expertise both from within—in his books *Strategies of Containment* (1982) and *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (1987), for instance—and now, with the benefit of new archival documents and hindsight, as a series of historical events. Although the relative brevity of the volume might suggest that Gaddis values concision over detail, the study gives new focus and meaning to one of the United States' watershed periods.

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From [Booklist](#)

Gaddis, a Yale history professor who often faced students for whom the cold war might as well have been ancient history, offers a comprehensive but highly accessible look at the dominant force in world history from 1945 until 1991. With the end of the cold war and the availability of Soviet, Chinese, and East European archival sources, Gaddis offers a rich examination of the political strife that he has detailed in several previous works. But Gaddis concedes it is not a deep examination, offering no original scholarship or exploration of how the cold war relates to more-current geopolitical concerns. Gaddis focuses each chapter on a significant theme: the return of fear following the end of World War II and U.S. acceptance of its role as a superpower, even a chapter on major actors in the conflict that focuses on Ronald Reagan and Pope John Paul III. Gaddis highlights other major figures from Khrushchev to Gorbachev, and Eisenhower to Nixon. Aimed at a new generation, this book is nonetheless enlightening for all generations. *Vanessa Bush*
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