

John Lewis Gaddis and the Cold War research paper examples

[War](#), [Cold War](#)



Introduction

The Anglo-Americans and the Russians seem to be moving to attain the same goal - to hold in their hands the destinies and fate of half of the world (Alexis de Tocqueville). Many people begin their Cold War history with Tocqueville's prophecy made about events that would take place over a century later. Like many forecasts Tocqueville made his by his projections of the past and the present and how they would meld into the future. It must be noted that at this time all Russia and the United States had going for them was continents that were rich in resources as they were not as populous as they are today. That was where their similarities ended as the United States was the most democratic republic while Russia was monarchial authoritarianism. America was interested in personal interest while Russia was happy to put all the society's power in the hand of one man. Over a century later and Hitler makes a similar albeit less famous declaration. Adolf Hitler himself agreed that these two nations were world powers and he believed that they would have to decide who was mightier someday through war. He assumed that victory would come to the country that employs the help of the other remaining great nation - Germany (Gaddis, *We now Know: Rethinking the Cold War*). Was it a design of provision that saw to the division of the world or rather a set of laws and geography or could it be like many other great events something in between?

This professor of history at Yale did his best to explain the strategies on both sides and how the conflict unfolded. He does not pretend to claim that every

judgment he has made is correct and he is quick to concede when something he has previously said is seen to be false or not completely true. He delves deeper into the actions of the players, deeper I may say than any of the other past historians. With admiration he describes how Eisenhower ensured that nuclear war would be averted. The job of an historian is a bit easy when you consider that the topic being discussed has already occurred and now judgment can be made in hindsight. Gaddis claimed that stability was achieved through the Nixon-Kissinger détente albeit at the cost of millions of dominated people in the communist society who hoped that one day would be able to choose their own leaders. The saboteurs of the status quo according to Gaddis are those like John Paul II, Margaret Thatcher, Reagan and many other leaders who believed that the price the west paid for peace with Moscow was steep.

While the Cold War did not begin till the 20th century, events were been put in place from the 19th century that ensured that there would be a clash between the United States and Russia. In the early 19th century the Americans had begun to distance themselves from involving in European affairs. Russia also for their own reasons began to pull away from European affairs and it seemed as if for decades to come these two countries may not have anything in common. However trade and travel ensured that some sort of contact would still remain. They abolished involuntary servitude at similar times with the serfs gaining their emancipation in 1861 and in 1863 the American slaves were emancipated. They both were weary of Great Britain. Towards the end of the 19th century the Americans were modernizing their navy as the Russians were building their Trans-Siberian railroads (Gaddis,

We now Know: Rethinking the Cold War). These two separate events allowed both countries to enjoy an influence in Asia that was made easier through the eventual collapse of the ancient Chinese empire.

If what many historians say about World War II creating a vacuum in Europe's power play is true, then World War I created a vacuum of legitimacy. It swept away empires and discredited diplomacy as it was then known seeing as it could not stop or effectively end the outbreak of war. Now for the first time the course of Russian and American relations was being shaped by personalities as both governments fought briefly on the same side. But the government of the Soviet did not lay emphasis on God or free elections but rather on science as Lenin looked to overthrow the societies of other governments and achieve world revolution. At a similar time America was undergoing a revolution of some sorts with regards foreign policy as Wilson also sought to alter world politics through the removal of his ideology of injustice. History in the twentieth century was caused as a result of the clash of these two ideologies - Lenin's and Wilson's. They however dealt with the situations they found themselves in through a combination of purposefulness, eloquence, improvisation and sheer audacity. The history of the twentieth century would be totally different were it not for these leaders. As leaders they imposed their ideology upon their people, led a country and at the end of their time, left successors with less vision to determine how their legacies would be viewed (Gaddis, We now Know: Rethinking the Cold War).

We see that this body of work is compelling and thoughtfully written and the arguments show that the writer put a lifetime worth of research into the

pages of this book. We see in this work more than narrative as Gaddis peels through the principles of two world powers as they negotiate for global dominance while armed with the capacity to end life (Gaddis, *When Worlds Collided*). He also goes a step further in his claims that the world is better due to the fact that the conflict was fought and won in the manner it was as it accomplished the feat of settling fundamental issues. The atom bombs that were dropped on Japan signified the start of the Cold War as its deployment led Truman and Stalin to the same conclusion. In Truman's note to himself he said, "The human and his emotions change not from age to age. He however must change now or face absolute and complete destruction and maybe an insect age will succeed him." Stalin was terser but he too said, "Atomic weapons can hardly be used without spelling the end of the world" (Gaddis, *The Cold War*).

My Personal Views

While Gaddis' book on the Cold War does a lot to bring life to this historical event that very well changed the course of humanity, I see this historical piece as one that was wrought with a lot of biases that is being passed off as facts. I will look into a couple of them here.

Ronald Reagan - anybody that reads the book will come away with many things but one of the things one is almost certain to leave with is the fact that Gaddis almost idolises Reagan. He claims that Reagan was a vital part of the collapse of the Soviet Union and eventual collapse of the Cold War (rhapsodyinbooks, *Review of the Cold War*). In a bid to bring home this point he claimed that Reagan was one of the sharpest and grandest strategists of

his time as “ his strength lay in his ability to see beyond complexity to simplicity” (Gaddis, The Cold War).

Unfortunately not many historians or researchers agree with him on the topic. Lou Cannon who penned Reagan’s biography claimed that Reagan himself was ill informed on matters on foreign affairs. The Pulitzer Prize winning historian Richard Rhodes was quoted as saying that the commitment to defence that Reagan demonstrated with regards the Cold War primarily stemmed from his belief that the Armageddon was coming. Being a religious man he depended on the Bible or a script to act as a guide and had on many occasions been seen blatantly reading from cue cards.

Wilson and Lenin - in this book the seeds for the Cold War is traced back to the visions that Wilson and Lenin had at the end of World War I. He claimed that both leaders saw a world that could be improved by capitalism and socialism respectively. Socialism according to Gaddis drew its strength from the fear it created while capitalism had no need to and Gaddis saw this as the main differences between both ideologies and in turn was the asymmetry of the Cold War. I see this picture of Wilson to be false on many levels. History has offered us with many instances where Wilson’s actions demonstrated many things but definitely not capitalism.

At the beginning of the World War, Wilson stringed together a 200, 000 strong members of the American Protective League whose job it was to spy on their neighbours for loyalty. The Four Minute Men who was headed by George Creel told his workers that “ fear was an important element to be bred in the civil population.” Wilson was fine with getting disloyal union men arrested. There have also been sayings that Wilson was never fair to the

Negro society.

Racism – when Gaddis covered the McCarthy era of the Cold War, the acts of racism were very well ignored. Senator Joseph McCarthy was a Wisconsin senator and he led a witch hunt against American citizens with mostly leftist affiliations or sympathies. During his era which lasted from the late 1940s to the late 1950s Americans accused of having communist sympathies or even being communists were investigated aggressively and saw themselves losing their jobs, careers, freedom or life as they knew it. Many of these hunted people committed suicide and among the many that lost their jobs was J. Robert Oppenheimer who helped in World War II to develop the atomic bomb. The fact that he felt it should not be used anymore was seen and painted as a sign of defection.

At this time many prominent blacks shared leftist sympathies as they voiced their objections to the treatment of blacks in America. Many of them who were classed disloyal as a result were Langston Hughes, Lena Horne, Paul Robertson and W. E. B. DuBois. Unfortunately Gaddis reserves a little more than a page to discuss an event and a time that many African Americans are still bearing scars for. It was almost like it wasn't important enough to research.

America's Part in the Cold War – this book paints the picture that while the United States was a largely innocent force the USSR wanted to destroy the American way of life. However George Kennan who gave his analysis of the Soviet Union that came to be used as the basis for U. S. Cold War strategy. He said that the focus America had on the Russian military stemmed from a misguided projection that Russia's military was a threat. History tells us that

America was not an innocent bystander in the events that led up to the Cold War but that she also had a part in it. Gaddis on the other hand seems to look at the Cold War and the crimes purely from the views of those committed by the USSR.

He heaps blame on Khrushchev for America being brought to the brink of war in the early 60s. An opposing view is however seen by Frederick Kempe and his analysis of the contributions of JFK to the Cold War. He claimed that the Berlin Wall crisis grew from the indecisiveness of Kennedy and many other crises that followed as a result. While it is truth that the missiles sent to Cuba was sent by Khrushchev, this was done after Kennedy had approved the Bay of Pigs Invasion (rhapsodyinbooks, Review of the Cold War). It seemed as though Gaddis was happy to omit JFK's contribution while laying all the blame on Khrushchev. In a similar manner he denies Gorbachev the praise that has been heaped on him by many other historians and evident in his Nobel Peace Prize as he claimed his leadership could not be compared to those of Margaret Thatcher, John Paul II or even Ronald Reagan.

Conclusion

Gaddis ended his book like he began it with a discussion on the nature of war. While true that there are always casualties from any war, the Cold War changed how wars were looked at forever. He cited Thucydides who said human nature was formed in a way that they could always find and demonstrate a propensity for violence. In concluding his work of research he admits that the Cold War proved that military strength which for five centuries had been the defining characteristic of power was no longer. He

also posited that the Cold War disproved Marx's view of capitalism as the plan to elevate greed above everything else.

Over a hundred years ago Tocqueville had predicted bipolarity, this he did without necessarily predicting hostility. Many things contributed to the Cold War: tradition, demography and geography to mention but a few. They however did not determine it as it took men to respond in an unpredictable way to cause a chain of causation. If the world never had Stalin would there still have been a Cold War? While we may never know we do however know that Stalin possessed some traits that set him apart from other players at the start of the Cold War. Here was a man who deprived everyone in a bid to achieve personal security and was happy to rely on terror. He transformed the country into an extension of himself and saw war and revolution as a means to an end. Stalin saw America as an unreconstructed enemy as he viewed conciliation as naiveté and will forever remain in our history books as a result - history that John Gaddis enjoys espousing.

Works Cited

Gaddis, John. L. The Cold War. New York: Penguin, 2007. EBook.

http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=CbD2O7VQZh4C&pg=PT4&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=4#v=onepage&q&f=false

Gaddis, John. L. We now Know: Rethinking the Cold War. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. pp 1 - 25. PDF.

<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/nowknow.htm>

Gardam, Tim. When Worlds Collided. The Observer. 8 Jan. 2006. Web. 22

Sep. 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/jan/08/historybooks>.

<https://assignbuster.com/john-lewis-gaddis-and-the-cold-war-research-paper-examples/>

features

Beschloss, Michael. Look Back in Relief. The New York Times. 15 Jan. 2006.

Web. 22 Sep. 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/books/review/15beschloss.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

rhapsodyinbooks. Review of The Cold War: A New History by John Lewis

Gaddis. 20 Jul. 2011. Web. 22 Sep. 2013.

[http://rhapsodyinbooks.wordpress.com/2011/07/20/review-of-](http://rhapsodyinbooks.wordpress.com/2011/07/20/review-of-%E2%80%9Cthe-cold-war-a-new-history%E2%80%9D-by-john-lewis-gaddis/)

[http://rhapsodyinbooks.wordpress.com/2011/07/20/review-of-](http://rhapsodyinbooks.wordpress.com/2011/07/20/review-of-%E2%80%9Cthe-cold-war-a-new-history%E2%80%9D-by-john-lewis-gaddis/)

[%E2%80%9Cthe-cold-war-a-new-history%E2%80%9D-by-john-lewis-gaddis/](http://rhapsodyinbooks.wordpress.com/2011/07/20/review-of-%E2%80%9Cthe-cold-war-a-new-history%E2%80%9D-by-john-lewis-gaddis/)