

Critical Reading Exercise: Three Textbooks and a War

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Objective

The purpose of this exercise is to help students understand that the objectivity of historical narratives varies by author, and to improve critical thinking skills and reading comprehension.

Directions for Reading Exercise

Read the three essays on the origins of the Cold War. Answer the following questions with complete sentences and proper grammar. Use the grading rubric as a guide to what will be assessed in your work.

1. Compare and contrast the information in three narratives concerning the origins of the Cold War
2. Describe each author's perspective of the Cold War and of the US and USSR
3. Describe how the author's perspective may impact the readers understanding
4. Identify the limitations of each author's narrative and how they impact reader's understanding
5. Identify two reading strategies to improve one's reading and explain the value of each strategy

Three Textbooks and a War Critical Reading Rubric

Critical Reading Task	Insufficient	Emerging Competence	Good	Outstanding
Compare and contrast	Wrongly identifies or overlooks elements	Has few elements, largely minor in nature	Has several major elements with some commentary	Has several major elements with robust and insightful commentary
Describe author's perspective	Has no sense of perspective or evidence	Has some accurate sense but little to no evidence	Sound sense of perspective with underdeveloped evidence	Excellent sense of perspective and robust evidence to support claims
Describe impact of author's perspective	Offers no implications	Offers limited implications with little to no evidence	Offers sufficient implications with adequate evidence	Offers abundant implications with substantial evidence
Identify limitations	Wrongly identifies or overlooks limitations	Identifies very few and offers little insight to impact	Identifies many and offers reasonable insight to impact	Identifies many and offers unique and complex insight to impact
Discuss strategies	Errors in strategies and/or no insights	Offers one with underdeveloped insights	Offers two with some insight to value	Excellent insight to strategies and applications

The following three documents are the narratives for this exercise. ***Please note that while the sources are authentic, the essays are not extracted from published scholarly work.***

Cold War Origins-A

The Cold War was a conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union which lasted from 1945-1992. The conflict was characterized by competition between communism and capitalism for world domination, and by hostility between those who embraced totalitarianism and those who favored democracy. During the Cold War, competition between the United States and the Soviet Union was manifested in the arms race, the space race, and wars in which each superpower sided with a third party as to fight each other indirectly. The Cold War was a deadly but necessary response to communism in which the free world was morally obligated to protect vulnerable nations against totalitarianism and ruin. (Halle, 1967)

The Cold War began as a response to Soviet aggression following World War II. Though the United States and the Soviet Union were allies in the war, Joseph Stalin, the General Secretary and dictator of the Soviet Union, rejected the principles of the Atlantic Charter, that defined the terms and purposes of Anglo-American war against the Axis powers, and which asserted that neither the United States nor Great Britain would use the war to expand their territories. The Soviet army, however, had driven Germany from Eastern Europe and Stalin took advantage of this by establishing communism in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and East Germany. Between 1945 and 1948, as the Soviets sealed the Eastern Bloc nations off from the rest of the world, it was clear to western allies that the prediction Stalin had made in 1927 was indeed coming true, and that communists were initiating a new phase of conquest in the final struggle between communism and democracy. (Starobin, 1969)

The events of 1947-49 demonstrate that the Cold War originated from the desire of the United States to “demonstrate that freedom produces not merely guns, but the spiritual, intellectual and material richness that all men want.” (Dulles, 1954) In February, 1947, Britain informed the United States that it was unable to finance global resistance against communist threats, which were already manifest in Italy, Greece, and Turkey. Stalin’s Two Camp Speech of February, 1946 made plain the Soviet intention to crush capitalism, and so the United States had no alternative but to adopt the Truman Doctrine. In June, 1947, the United States announced the Marshall Plan, which would give billions of dollars to countries recovering from the war. The program helped European nations restore their urban and rural industries alike, and engendered good will to the United States.

In 1948, the Cold War intensified as the Soviet Union tried to prevent western allies from uniting and re-industrializing West Germany. The Soviets attempted to drive western allies from West Berlin by a blockade, to which the allies responded by air-lifting thousands of tons of food, supplies and fuel to Western Berliners. The Soviets lifted the block after a year, and to ensure its defense, the allies created the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1949. By that time, the Soviet Union had secured its despotic grip on Eastern Europe and developed its own nuclear weapons. It was clear they had no intention of cooperating with their former war allies. (Nitze, 1990)

Dulles, John F. Policy for security and peace. *Foreign Affairs*, 32 (3), April 1954; 353-364.

Halle, Louis. *The Cold War as History*. NY: Harper and Row, 1967.

Nitze, P. America: An honest broker. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (Fall, 1990), pp. 1-14.

Starobin, Joseph R. Origins of the Cold War: The Communist dimension. *Foreign Affairs*, 47, (July, 1969)

Cold War Origins-B

The Cold War was a conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union which lasted from 1945-1992. The conflict has been represented as a clash between two ideologies, capitalism and communism, wherein the United States and the Soviet Union competed with each other for global control. The conflict produced an arms race, space race, and several wars in which each superpower supported opposite sides, but rarely confronted each other face to face. The origins of the Cold War are complex, as tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union can be traced back to pre-World War II relations between Russia and the West that were influenced by Russia's isolationism, the West's animosity towards socialism, and Russia's enduring desire to protect itself from invasion by expansion. (Kennan, 1947)

Though the Soviet Union and the United States were allies against Germany in World War II, the relationship them was often strained by their pre-war experiences. In 1918, for example, the United States sent troops into Russia to fight the Bolshevik army and to defend the Czar. Subsequently, the United States refused to recognize the Soviet Union until 1933. The Soviets became convinced that the western allies were sympathetic to the Nazis as they did nothing to prevent Hitler from entering the Rhineland, annexing Austria, and taking Czechoslovakia. Thinking Hitler would respect Stalin's desire to obtain territory from the Baltic States as a buffer zone, he concluded the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August, 1939. By November, 1940, it became clear that Hitler would not support Stalin's vision of new western borders, and in June, 1941, the Soviets were compelled by the invasion of Nazi forces to ally themselves with Britain, France and the United States.

Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt had fought the war for different reasons. The United States and t Britain had agreed in the Atlantic charter, 1941, they would not fight for expansion. The Soviet Union, however, made no such declaration. Stalin's accepted the notion that great powers naturally controlled spheres of influence and was thus distressed by The United States' opposition to his bid for the Baltic States. (Schlesinger, 1967) The Soviet Union also felt it not treated as an equal partner in the fight against Hitler as the western allies promised in 1942 to create a second front in the west to take pressure of the Eastern Front, but it did not happen until June, 1944. The Soviets also felt slighted when Britain and the United States unilaterally accepted Italy's surrender, and were later criticized for wanting to handle Bulgaria's capitulation to the allies on its own. (Ibid)

The Soviet Union pushed the Nazi army back to Germany's capital before the western Allies reached it, which meant their soldiers occupied land from Berlin to Sophia, and any attempt to establish indigenous and autonomous governments in those eastern European nations would have to reckon with them. At the Yalta conference in 1945, Stalin promised that free elections would prevail in Poland, but between 1946 and 1948, the Soviets installed leaders in Eastern European nations who were aligned with Moscow— often by way of force. The crucible of the Cold War was Berlin, which sat in the heart of Soviet occupied East Germany and was divided into four quarters by the United States, Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union. The western allies called for the unification of the three occupied sectors of western Germany and refused to leave West Berlin at the Soviet's request. As Germany had twice invaded Russia in the 20th century, the prospect of a unified and re-militarized Germany was intolerable to the Soviets. The West went forward with plans however, not only to unify western Germany, but to help Europe build free market democracies with money from the Marshall Plan, which was very well received by the victims of war. (Gaddis, 1997). By 1949, Soviet-American relations entered a deep freeze as the North American Treaty Organization had been formed to protest western allies against its enemies in the east.

Gaddis, J. L. *We now know: Re-thinking Cold War history*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Kennan, G. *The sources of Soviet conduct*. *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 26, No. 2; (July, 1947), pp. 556-582.

Schlesinger, A. *Origins of the Cold War*. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Oct. 1967); pp. 22-52.

Cold War Origins-C

The Cold War was a conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union which lasted from 1945-1992. The rivalry between these nations was largely an ideological one that set free market democracy against communism. The conflict led to an arms race and several wars in which the Americans and Soviets fought each other through third party armies. The Cold War has its roots in the early 20th century, as the United States sent soldiers to aid the Czar's army against the Bolsheviks in 1918 and refused to recognize the Soviet Union until 1933. The Cold War grew out of mutual suspicions about the intentions of the superpowers to gain hegemony over the world.

Though the United States and Soviet Union were allies in World War II, they did not share a common vision for its outcome. Having been invaded several times in their history by western nations, the Russians desired to create a buffer between themselves and war offered the occasion to acquire the Baltic States and other Eastern European nations that stood between Moscow and Berlin. The western allies sought to defeat the Nazis, restore European borders, promote democracy, and renew business and trade on western terms. Western allies typically read the Soviet desire for national security as an excuse of the exportation of communism, and the Soviets typically interpreted Western promotion of free-market democracy as a smoke screen for the exploitation of the working class by the rich; they held that since the United States had imposed hegemony over Latin America under the auspices of national interests, it too was justified in pursuing national interests in Eastern Europe. (Williams, 1959)

The Cold War took shape in the final months of the war and was firmly fixed in international relations by 1949. The United States made clear their desire to influence the shape of Europe following the war by accepting Italy's surrender in 1945 without Soviet input, and underscored the zeal for control by sending the CIA to Italy in 1948 where it circulated anti-communist propaganda and paid people to vote for Christian Democratic candidates. (Del Pero, 2001) Further, there was great anxiety about the pending German surrender and the terms of peace. The Soviet Union had lost approximately 27 million in the war, endured the occupation of over 100 million square miles of its country for nearly three years, and lost over 700 cities. By contrast, the United States had not been occupied and had lost about 350,000 in combat. The Soviets believed it was only fair to establish the Eastern Bloc as a prophylactic against future invasions. To complicate matters, following the Nazi's surrender to the Soviets, the Soviets anticipated they would join the United States in defeating Japan. This assistance was unnecessary however, as the United States used atomic bombs to force Japan's surrender. The fact that the United States had kept the atomic bomb a secret strengthened Soviet beliefs that the United States did not consider the Soviets as equals but as adversaries. (Alperhovitz, 1965) Moreover, the fact that some Americans were openly calling for the Western Allies to turn against the Soviet Union and drive them out of eastern Europe back to Moscow engendered little Russian good will. (Hastings, 2010)

To a large extent, the Cold War was unavoidable as the United States could not reconcile Soviet claims with its own agenda. The United States pursued a course of international diplomacy that espoused self-governance and liberty while supporting dictatorships in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. As the United States poured money into the re-building of Germany's industries as part of the Marshall Plan, and pursued its proliferation of nuclear weapons, the Soviet Union concluded that the West did not respect its vulnerability nor was it sincere about compensating Russia for the great sacrifices it made to free the world of Nazi fascism.

Alperhovitz, G. *Atomic Diplomacy*. N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1965.

Del Pero, M. The United States and "psychological warfare" in Italy, 1948-1955. *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 87, No. 4 (March, 2001), pp. 1304-1334.

Hastings, M. *Winston's War*. N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf.

Williams, W. A. *The tragedy of American diplomacy*. N.Y.: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc. 1959.

Some Things to Remember For Discussion About Three Textbooks and a War

- a. Scholarly thinking about the Cold War origins is represented by at least three schools of thought in the United States. The traditional or orthodox school champions the United States as the defender of peace, decency, and democracy. This view tends to blame the Soviet Union for hostilities and enumerate the abuses of communism without an objective assessment of the abuses of capitalism, and without a fair attempt to see the world from the Russian perspective. Leading scholars in this school include several who worked in the State Department or other government agencies during World War II and subsequent Cold War, such as John Foster Dulles¹, Paul Nitze², Herbert Feis,³ Louis Halle⁴ and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr⁵.
- b. A second school, the revisionist, challenges orthodox conclusions that the United States foreign policy was based only on altruism, democratic visions, and fair trade. Their work emerged in the late 1950s and gained considerable attention and credibility in the 1960s and 1970s. Revisionist scholars pointed to the role of the United States in international coups, such as Guatemala and Iran, and to the war in Vietnam as evidence that the United States had a Cold War agenda that was not always transparent to the world and did not always result in democracy or economic well-being for the masses. These writers include Gar Alperhovitz⁶, Gabriel and Joyce Kolko⁷, Carl Marzani⁸, and William Williams⁹.
- c. The post-revisionists represent a synthesis of traditional and revisionist scholarship as it blends their insights and addresses the concerns raised by each perspective. Post revisionists began writing prior to the fall of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, and like scholars of all schools now have the access to previously classified documents from both the United State and Soviet Union that will enrich our knowledge about the Cold War and the motives of those behind the key events. Post-revisionists include John Lewis Gaddis¹⁰, Robert Pollard¹¹, Thomas Paterson¹², Daniel Yergin¹³, and Melvyn Leffler¹⁴.
- d. It is essential to remember that even within these schools of thought, there is variety and debate. The traditional perspective, for example, was embraced by Arthur Schlesinger and John Foster

¹ Dulles, J. F. *War or peace*. N. Y.: Macmillan, 1950.

² Nitze, P., Reardon, S. L. and Smith, A. M. *From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the center of decision*. N.Y.: Weidfeld and Nicholson, 1989.

³ Feis, H. *From trust to terror: The onset of the Cold War, 1945-1950*. N.Y.: W. W. Norton, 1970.

⁴ Halle, L. *The Cold War as history*. N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1967.

⁵ Schlesinger, A. Origins of the Cold War. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Oct. 1967), pp. 22-52.

⁶ Alperhovitz, G. *Atomic diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam*. N. Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1965.

⁷ Kolko, J. and Kolko, G. *The limits of power: The world and the United States foreign policy 1945-1954*. N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1972.

⁸ Marzani, C. *We can be friends: Origins of the Cold War*. N. Y.: Topical Press. 1952.

⁹ Williams, W. A. *The tragedy of American diplomacy*. N. Y.: Norton and Company.

¹⁰ Gaddis, J. L. *The Cold War: A new history*. N.Y.: Penguin Books, 2005.

¹¹ Pollard, R. *Economic security and the origins of the Cold War, 1945-1950*. N.Y.: Columbia press, 1985.

¹² Paterson, T. G. *Soviet-American confrontation: Post-war construction and the origins of the Cold War*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University press, 1973.

¹³ Yergin, D. *The shattered peace: The origins of the Cold War and the national security state*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977.

¹⁴ Leffler, M. *The specter of communism: The United States and the origins of the cold War, 1917-1953*. N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1994.

Dulles but for different reasons; Schlesinger was staunchly dedicated to democratic principles, but he did not share Dulles' theological convictions regarding the moral obligation to purge the world of communism. It is also true that while both Williams and Marzani were revisionists, Williams did not see the proletariat as the great harbinger of a new socialist world order, while Marzani embraced socialism.

- e. As archival information becomes available, and as the long-range consequences of Cold War events manifest themselves globally, scholarly thinking on the topic is subject to change. The critically thinking historian, therefore, is constantly investigating assertions and cross-examining the testimony of scholars that have gone before. The critically thinking historian understands that a fair report of the past will turn reader's attention to the complexity of the matter and the fact that even experts argue about the past, primary sources, and the significance of their findings.