

The Academy of Political Science

475 Riverside Drive · Suite 1274 · New York, New York 10115-1274
(212) 870-2500 · FAX: (212) 870-2202 · aps@psqonline.org · <http://www.psqonline.org>

POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

Volume 121 · Number 2 · Summer 2006

No part of this article may be copied, downloaded, stored, further transmitted, transferred, distributed, altered, or otherwise used, in any form or by any means, except:

- one stored electronic and one paper copy of any article solely for your personal, non-commercial use, or
- with prior written permission of The Academy of Political Science.

Political Science Quarterly is published by The Academy of Political Science. Contact the Academy for further permission regarding the use of this work.

Political Science Quarterly

Copyright © 2006 by The Academy of Political Science. All rights reserved.

Book Reviews

The Cold War: A New History by John Lewis Gaddis. New York, Penguin Books, 2005. 352 pp. \$27.95.

Students of the Cold War have good reason to be indebted to John Lewis Gaddis, who preceded the work reviewed here by publishing six books on that near-half-century confrontation, including such landmarks as the 1972 “post-revisionist” classic *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press) and the conceptually innovative 1982 *Strategies of Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press), which appeared in an updated edition in 2005. Gaddis’s ability to address important issues with impressive fluency and insight makes him one of the rare academics whose works receive respectful attention in the public press. These qualities also have led his books to be widely assigned in college and university courses. *The Cold War: A New History*, however, is the first book Gaddis has explicitly addressed to students and the general public. His particular concern, he explains, is with reaching readers who are too young to have experienced the conflict as it unfolded.

Has he succeeded in writing a work that can be recommended to the uninitiated? The answer would be yes, if one judges by its initial reviews in current affairs periodicals. Sixteen of the eighteen early reviews that appear on the website <http://www.metacritic.com/books/authors/gaddisjohnlewis/coldwar> were judged by the webmaster to be positive, two as mixed, and only one as negative. But for specialists whose concern is with the book’s suitability as an introductory account of the Cold War, the answer is likely to be no.

For some of the latter, the objection will be its celebratory tone. Not everyone will want to assign a work that declares in its opening passages that “the world is a better place” for the Cold War “having been ... won by the side that won it” (p. xi). However, the book has a more fundamental pedagogical shortcoming. In a puzzling statement for the author of a number of excellent narrative histories, Gaddis declares that “any attempt to capture” the Cold War “within a simple chronological narrative could only produce mush,” explaining that he has therefore chosen “to focus each chapter on a particular theme” and allow the book’s chapters to “overlap in time and over space” (p. xi).

The resulting volume brings to mind an unassembled jigsaw puzzle. Deprived of the discipline of chronology, it moves from event to event with no

obvious plan, rarely developing an episode or theme thoroughly enough to provide the reader with an adequate understanding of it. Gaddis's impressionistic exposition serves the reader poorly on matters that range across the period of his concern and include such momentous topics as the end-of-war conferences between Joseph Stalin and his Anglo-American counterparts, the trajectories of the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the successive American national security postures, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the summitry of Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, and the collapse of the communist regimes of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

That said, the volume is laden with the pronouncements of a scholar who has been long steeped in his subject. If it does not work well as a new basic history, it *is* of interest as a set of challenging reflections on a conflict that was unprecedented in the danger it posed and startling in its unexpected and peaceful conclusion. If the book were assigned not as a basic text but as a concluding reading in a seminar on the Cold War, it might serve well. It would serve even better with two additions that are standard for such brief overviews—a timeline and a bibliographical essay.

FRED I. GREENSTEIN
Princeton University

Darfur: The Ambiguous Genocide by Gerard Prunier. *Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2005. 240 pp. \$24.00.*

To be properly understood, Gerard Prunier argues, the Darfur crisis needs to be situated within the broader framework of colonial and postcolonial Sudanese politics and, to a lesser extent, regional geopolitics, including the Chado-Libyan conflict. As an expert on East Africa, the author is very qualified to undertake such a task. He strives painstakingly to disentangle the interplay of power between different local, national, and regional players to show how their ambitions, strategies, and actions intersect to shape the dynamics of Sudanese politics, including the Darfur crisis.

The Sudan is one the most conflict-ridden countries of the world. Aside from the Darfur crisis, the Sudanese civil war, with a death toll of two million people and with four million people displaced between 1972 and 2002, is the worst crisis that postcolonial Africa has experienced.

About the size of the state of California, Darfur, which existed for several centuries as an independent country before being annexed to the Sudan in 1916 (p. x), represents one-fifth of the Sudanese landmass. The origins of the crisis are well known: in February 2003, two rebel groups, the Justice and Equality Movement and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), took up arms jointly against the Government of Sudan (GoS) in order to be part of the power-sharing deal being crafted between the GoS and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/SPLA (SPLM/SPLA) of John Garang. Darfur, it must be recalled, had been loyal to the central government for a long time, despite decades of