



Fraser J. Harbutt. *The Cold War Era.* Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2002. x + 371 pp. \$43.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-57718-052-4; \$109.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57718-051-7.

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Published on H-Diplo (December, 2002)

A Magisterial Cold War Narrative by a Public Intellectual

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This is a capacious monograph. It is engaging and informative as well as thematically and chronologically comprehensive. While synthetic, the solid and readable narrative is carefully balanced. The writing of actual history is juxtaposed with a perceptive offering of different points of view before explicit judgments are rendered.

The volume forms the sixth part of a series, whose senior editor is Jack P. Greene, titled *Problems in American History*. As readers might expect, the core of the analysis provided in this work is decisively on the actions of, and the consequences visited upon, the U.S. government and its people. Undergraduates, especially in introductory courses, will gain an insight into the reasons behind policies pursued by the United States and the impact they had at home and abroad. A different, more negative way of commenting on this tendency would be to brand this volume as “Americano-centric.”

If properly complemented, however, by exposure to primary sources of the period and by presentation of regional subtleties of foreign cultures and conflicts elsewhere (such as the Middle East), this affordable text could be the heart of courses on the United States during the Cold War. Students will digest its contents comfortably. Four chapters last approximately sixty pages and two more about forty pages.

The author, Dr. Fraser J. Harbutt of Emory University, is a learned hand on the subject. His seminal 1986 transatlantic work, *The Iron Curtain: Churchill, America and the Origins of the Cold War* (which won the Bernath Memorial Prize), easily qualifies him as an authority in the field, although his argument that the Cold War began in February 1946

as a result of Churchill’s effect on Truman remains highly controversial. Harbutt blends academic training in New Zealand and in the United States. His primary area of expertise is U.S.-British-Soviet relations in the 1940s. According to his own website, Harbutt will soon publish an analysis of the Yalta Conference titled *Yalta’s Shadow: The Decline and Fall of Traditional Diplomacy*. Indeed, he drew on some materials from this manuscript in the first chapter.

Nevertheless, this reviewer found the chapter on the 1960s (especially the exploration of American motives and practices of the Vietnam War) the most interesting, perhaps because Harbutt witnessed these developments as a young man. He also has not done much prior work on this era, which allows for fewer predispositions and more creative insights, for example on the JFK leadership, enriching this portion.

Harbutt’s overall tone affirms domestic and foreign U.S. policies. This empathy embraces, for example, Harry S. Truman and his Fair Deal (p. 66). In contrast to William Chafe who ignored it and James Paterson who had a “modest” view of this endeavor, Harbutt focusses on the substantial “difficulties” Truman encountered, thus magnifying the challenge and redeeming the results by following Alonzo Hamby’s celebratory comments on Truman’s stewardship. Harbutt, however, duly footnotes the opposing scholarship.^[1]

In a brief section (pp. 88-97, p. 95 in particular), Harbutt follows the scholarly consensus in his view of the Eisenhower administration, while deeming the Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, “managerial.” Harbutt sympathetically stresses continuity and moderation in those deeds. Change and extremism are downgraded, although, arguably, the conduct of this president and members of his cabinet did not consistently adhere to such standards. Harbutt minimizes Ike’s usage of McCarthy’s discourse for the 1952

victory while lending little credence to the “rollback” strategy.

On occasion, Harbutt’s opinion borders on the apologetic. An example is the brief, largely sympathetic treatment of Henry Kissinger’s actions culminating in the 1973 coup in Chile (p. 233). Harbutt denies that there was direct American involvement, recent evidence to the contrary notwithstanding.[2] In contrast, Harbutt does not give much credit to the United States in general, and to Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. Bush personally, for the successful end of the Cold War. Harbutt sees more merit in the “European dimension” (p. 308), and, naturally, because “Gorbachev set a cracking pace” (p. 309) for internal reforms inside the Soviet bloc and for openness towards the West. It would seem that Harbutt opined, correctly to my mind, that the Cold War, although very much an American phenomenon, began and ended through the acts of others.

Harbutt is thorough in mentioning Richard Hofstadter, among other historians, as approving of Eisenhower’s pro-business approach (p. 131). The name of that prominent scholar unfortunately did not make it into the index, as was the habit of the editors with most other authors whose influential works Harbutt

cites. Such a format might be customary, but in a companion work such as this one, it limits the utility of the volume as a reference tool.

To my mind, the biggest disappointment in the book is the “Selective Bibliography” (pp. 353-8). It is too narrow for those students who would want to enrich their knowledge or commence a research paper. On the Truman era, for example, Harbutt mentions his own work on the early Cold War. He also cites the original contribution of George F. Kennan, and some scholarship about him. Harbutt omits any reference to a graduate advisor of mine at Columbia University, Anders Stephanson, who has published widely on Kennan in particular and on the Cold War in general.

Notes

[1]. William Chafe, *Unfinished Journey: America Since 1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), and James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). See also Alonzo Hamby, *Man of the People: A Life of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[2]. Christopher Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* (New York: Verso, 2001).

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Citation: Itai Sneh. Review of Harbutt, Fraser J., *The Cold War Era*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. December, 2002.

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