H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Yale Richmond. *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain.* University Park: Penn State University Press, 2003. xiv + 320 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-271-02302-1.

Reviewed by William B. Whisenhunt (College of DuPage)
Published on H-Russia (November, 2004)

Cultural Exchange and the Cold War

Just over a decade after the Cold War has ended, we now see a variety of studies emerging concerning this recent historical era. The Cold War prompts great debates about who started it, who made it last so long, why it ended, who won, and many others. Many memoirs have emerged from participants on both sides. Some scholarly works have also been published trying to set this recent era in historical context. The book under review here is a blend of personal account and scholarly analysis.

Yale Richmond, a retired Foreign Service officer, has produced an interesting account of cultural exchanges between the West, primarily the United States, and the Soviet Union from the 1950s to the 1980s. His stated purpose is to propose an alternate interpretation for why the Cold War ended with the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The role of the arms race pushed by Ronald Reagan, the internal corruption of the Soviet system, and a flawed communist ideology usually dominate most studies of the end of the Cold War. Richmond seeks to show that the impact of cultural exchanges between the United States and the Soviet Union was a contributing, if not the major, factor to the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. He argues that the Soviet Union finally collapsed because of its own contradictions and irrationalities. These were illuminated as Soviets were exposed over several decades to Western ideas through these exchanges. He contends that this theory deserves serious scholarly attention and discussion with other leading theories.

This book is a comprehensive account of the history of the cultural exchanges between the United States and the Soviet Union. The work is organized into twenty-five chapters based on personal experience, interviews, and scholarship to create a narrative on this vital connection at this tense time. Richmond covers nearly every aspect of these exchanges over these three decades. The arrangement is roughly chronological, but it does stray into topical issues at times. He initiates his discussion with the Moscow Youth Festival in 1957 where nearly 100,000 young people (foreign and Soviet) converged on Moscow for a variety of activities. The Soviets wanted to host the festival for propaganda purposes, but they were unable to control the many Western ideas, especially music, that circulated among the participants. From there, the author notes the formal establishment of cultural exchanges in 1958.

The fourth chapter focuses on the first period of scholarly exchanges. He traces the development of such organizations established for exchanges like the Council for International Exchange (CIEE) and the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX). Here he notes the participation of such notable later government officials as Aleksandr N. Yakovlev, architect of glasnost under Mikhail Gorbachev, and KGB official Oleg Kalugin. Some of the earliest Americans visiting the Soviet Union were Alfred Reiber, now professor emeritus at the University of Pennsylvania, Terence Emmons of Stanford University, and Peter B. Maggs, professor of law at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This lengthy chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the establishment of Fulbright lecturers in the Soviet Union and the suspicion that went along with them.

Chapters five and six cover science, technology, the humanities, and social sciences. DÃ©tente helped open the doors for the exchange of scholars in these critical areas. Much of the work in these areas was collaborative, which put American scholars in the awkward position of having to work under Soviet research guidelines. Moscow think tanks and international conferences exposed scholars and officials on both sides to the realities in each country. Some observers and participants believe that these conferences exposed the realities of both countries to each side, and that these conferences boosted the power and the legitimacy of the doves over the hawks in both countries. Richmond gives special notice to the work of the Quakers in Russia, where their

contacts go back to the time of Peter the Great. Richmond concludes that their "Soviet programs were not deliberately aimed at westernizing the Russians–although they hoped to do so–but simply at normalizing relations between two countries with opposing ideologies" (p. 112).

Richmond moves quickly through a series of chapters on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the performing arts, movies, and exhibitions. In each chapter, he provides an overview of the topic and a list of significant examples for each, but not a lot of analysis on any one of these topics. These chapters tend to be some of the shortest–mostly under ten pages. Chapters thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen focus on books, publishing, and journalists with some important information about how each side tried to create an image of the other in the media. These sections also note what books were allowed into the Soviet Union and what was popular whether formally allowed or not. The last ten chapters analyze a series of cultural and political developments in the 1970s and 1980s culminating in the dramatic events of Mikhail Gorbachev's term in office.

The last two chapters are particularly interesting. Chapter 24 discusses the problem of deception in the exchange process. For more than thirty years detractors on both sides believed that the other wanted more information than what the exchanges offered on the surface. In many ways, this plagued legitimate exchanges with an atmosphere of suspicion. The last chapter looks at the future, or at least the current relations. Richmond notes the support that Condoleeza Rice, national security advisor to George W. Bush, gave to the idea of exchanges in late 2000, but he did not mention the mutual expulsion of diplomats in the first few months of 2001.

By the end of the book, the reader has a clear picture of the general course of these cultural exchanges. Richmond provides extensive details concerning American and Soviet political, cultural, academic, and scientific leaders and their involvement in this process. In addition, the author links the problems and tensions of the larger political world to the cultural interaction between the two nations. Richmond makes a compelling case that the exchange system was a significant, long-term, and gradual cause for the ultimate collapse of the Soviet Union. It is a topic worth further research and analysis. Richmond's good overview of the relationship during this time complements some more detailed works like David Caute's *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (New York, 2003) which gives a much more detailed account of the artistic relationship during the Cold War.

Besides Richmond's stated thesis noted above, this book provides the scholar with an insightful account of the trials and tribulations Americans and Soviets faced while trying to make cultural connections. It reveals to newer scholars and generations to come what this pioneering generation of American and Soviet scholars faced while trying to establish positive relationships in a negative age. Today's scholars of Russia and the former Soviet areas still face obstacles (some remnants of the Soviet system and some new ones), but this history of exchanges provides a much needed perspective.

The book does have some minor problems: it is somewhat awkwardly organized, and the imbalance in the length and the depth of the chapters leaves this reviewer wanting more on several topics. He repeatedly notes how the Soviets were influenced by their exposure to Western people and ideas over these decades, but he does not analyze as thoroughly the impact of American exposure to Soviet people and ideas.

These are secondary, however; Richmond's book successfully opens the debate about how cultural connections helped end the Cold War and provides a much needed history of this relationship for the future. This book should be read by current scholars in this area, but it might not be as accessible to the general reader. Nonetheless, this book is a significant contribution to this field and an interesting read.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl.

Citation: William B. Whisenhunt. Review of Richmond, Yale, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain.* H-Russia, H-Net Reviews. November, 2004.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=9915

Copyright © 2004 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.