



For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War

By Melvyn P. Leffler

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To the amazement of the public, pundits, and even the policymakers themselves, the ideological and political conflict that had endangered the world for half a century came to an end in 1990. How did that happen? What caused the cold war in the first place, and why did it last as long as it did?

The distinguished historian Melvyn P. Leffler homes in on four crucial episodes when American and Soviet leaders considered modulating, avoiding, or ending hostilities and asks why they failed: Stalin and Truman devising new policies after 1945; Malenkov and Eisenhower exploring the chance for peace after Stalin's death in 1953; Kennedy, Khrushchev, and LBJ trying to reduce tensions after the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962; and Brezhnev and Carter aiming to sustain détente after the Helsinki Conference of 1975. All these leaders glimpsed possibilities for peace, yet they allowed ideologies, political pressures, the expectations of allies and clients, the dynamics of the international system, and their own fearful memories to trap them in a cycle of hostility that seemed to have no end.

For the Soul of Mankind illuminates how Reagan, Bush, and, above all, Gorbachev finally extricated themselves from the policies and mind-sets that had imprisoned their predecessors, and were able to reconfigure Soviet-American relations after decades of confrontation.

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Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #222273 in Books
- Published on: 2008-09-02
- Released on: 2008-09-02
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.50" h x .5" w x 5.50" l, 1.25 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 608 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Drawing on extensive research in American and Soviet archives, Bancroft Prize–winner Leffler (*A Preponderance of Power*) offers a scintillating account of the forces that constrained Soviet and American leaders in the second half of the 20th century. Leffler begins by admitting that he was shocked by the rapid demise of communism. If Reagan and Gorbachev could end the Cold War, why hadn't earlier leaders been able to do so? To answer that question, Leffler examines five crucial moments when Washington and Moscow thought about avoiding or modulating the extreme tension between them. At the end of WWII, Leffler says, Stalin thought that cooperation with the West might be preferable to entrenched hostility. Yet he and Truman were pressed by an international order that engendered... fear to make decisions that led to Cold War and shaped policy for decades. Leffler examines why Eisenhower and Malenkov couldn't wipe the slate clean after Stalin's death; how Khrushchev, Kennedy and Johnson reacted to the pressures of international allies and domestic political enemies; why détente foundered under Carter and Brezhnev, and what circumstances allowed leaders of the 1980s to focus on common interests rather than differences. Leffler has produced possibly the most readable and insightful study of the Cold War yet. 47 b&w illus., 6 maps. (Sept.)

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From [Booklist](#)

After five decades of constant tension, three "hot" wars, numerous surrogate wars, and a near Armageddon over Cuba, the cold war ended, not with a bang but a whimper. Faster than anyone could have expected (or hoped), the Soviet economy came close to implosion, while satellites in Eastern Europe broke free, with virtual Soviet acquiescence. So it is left to historians to consider why the cold war began, why it endured, and why it ended. Professor Leffler has the benefit of almost two decades of hindsight as well as access to recently declassified American and Soviet documents. The result is a series of fresh and often provocative perspectives on the struggle. But Leffler is no dogmatic revisionist with an ideological ax to grind. He lays the causes of the conflict on the totalitarian monstrosity created by Stalin in which a mixture of hostility and paranoia was hardwired into the system. However, he does not view the length of the struggle as inevitable. Critics will find much to dispute here, particularly Leffler's focus on the personal qualities of leaders.

Freeman, Jay

Review

"A scintillating account of the forces that constrained Soviet and American leaders in the second half of the 20th century . . . Possibly the most readable and insightful study of the Cold War yet." ?Publishers Weekly (starred review)

"With a keen eye for telling detail, a concern for the choices of individual leaders, and careful judgments, Leffler generates a narrative that carries the reader along as it develops important new ideas. This landmark study transcends many of our standard arguments about the Cold War to focus on what it was really about. Driving much of the maneuvering for security and advantage was the struggle over which political system could meet people's needs and produce a better society." ?Robert Jervis, Columbia University

"This is a lively and very wise book on the Cold War from its beginning to its end. Concentrating on five critical intervals in the history of Soviet-American rivalry, Melvyn P. Leffler, one of the West's leading

authorities on U.S. foreign policy, mines a wealth of new sources for this fresh and stimulating analysis of Cold War crises. The portraits of Cold War leaders, both Soviet and American, are convincingly and elegantly drawn. As illustrated by Leffler, their travails and successes demonstrate how important leadership is in maintaining peace in an unstable world.” ?Norman M. Naimark, Stanford University

“Melvyn Leffler does an excellent job of surveying key phases of the Cold War. His analytical perspective, emphasizing both structure and agency, is illuminating throughout. The book is sophisticated and erudite but also engagingly written and lively. For the Soul of Mankind will appeal to general readers as well as to experts and university students, and will be a standard text in classes dealing with the Cold War.” ?Mark Kramer, Harvard University

“There will never be a last word on why the Cold War began and why it ended, but Mel Leffler's book is certainly the latest word--based on accumulated American and now Soviet sources. Leffler avoids the pitfalls of the older revisionism, which blamed the U.S. for the conflict, and of Cold War triumphalism, which saw the Soviet Union's collapse as testimony to American steadfastness in the face of Soviet obduracy. His is a story of two nations whose leaders, haunted by very different fears of a recurrent past, at crucial junctures perpetuated the conflict and made it insoluble. The Cold War ended, finally, when two remarkable men, Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan, were able to recognize what was unfounded in their fears of each other.” ?John B. Judis, author of The Folly of Empire

“Indefatigably researched: there does not appear to be a relevant archival collection, official or unofficial, that Leffler has not seen. And, most important, it is an intellectually honest work . . . This is, in short, the best book anyone has yet written on the United States and the origins of the Cold War.” ?John Lewis Gaddis, The Atlantic Monthly on A Preponderance of Power

“Brilliant . . . The author appears to have read every national security document that was generated by the White House and the State and War departments . . . For sheer comprehensiveness and thorough investigation, this volume is unmatched. It is also miraculously literate, thought-provoking and quite surprising in its line of argument.” ?Carolyn Eisenberg, The Nation on A Preponderance of Power

“[A] sweeping work . . . Leffler is one of America's most distinguished cold war historians, and this enlightening, readable study is the product of years of research and reflection.” ?Jonathan Rosenberg, The Christian Science Monitor

“A masterful account of the Cold War by a distinguished historian in full stride . . . This important book will enlighten and sophisticate the debate on the Cold War, even if it will not end the discussion.” ?G. John Ikenberry, Foreign Affairs

Users Review

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Lula Barnes:

The reason? Because this For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War is an unordinary book that the inside of the publication waiting for you to snap it but latter it will distress you with the secret this inside. Reading this book adjacent to it was fantastic author who have write the book in such amazing way makes the content on the inside easier to understand, entertaining means but still convey the meaning totally. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this any longer or you going to regret it. This phenomenal book will give you a lot of rewards than the other book have got such as help

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Robert Long:

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