

Understanding the Cold War: A Historian's Personal Reflections // Transaction Publishers // 9781412840651 // Adam Bruno Ulam // 410 pages

Reviewing *Understanding the Cold War*, Stephen Kotkin, director of Princeton's Russian Studies Program, observed "...And whereas some celebrated analysts, such as John Maynard Keynes, had dismissed Marxism as 'illogical and dull,' Ulam highlighted the doctrine's intricacy and comprehensiveness, which, he argued, explained its attraction not just to peasants, but also to intellectuals." "There is really only one legitimate measure of an autobiography, and that is its ability to bring the author to life for the reader, giving a sense of who the person was and why. Our understanding of the Cold War is shaped by the work of historians. The global tensions of 1945 and beyond have been researched, studied and interpreted by thousands of historians. In this thorough but controversial book, Williams concluded that since the 1890s, the overriding function of US foreign policy has been to secure foreign markets for American-made goods and services. He calls this the "Open Door policy" because it seeks to open up other nations for American capitalists by removing tariffs and other trade barriers. Other historians have also returned to claiming the Cold War as an ideological struggle, rather than one based on power or geopolitical rivalry. Some writers and academics have pondered what the Cold War means for the future. According to the historian Archie Brown, you need to accept the primacy of politics and human agency both in the USSR and the West. He chooses five books to understand the Cold War and offers some broader reflections on the qualities of good political leadership then and now. Interview by Eve Gerber. OUT NOW. Let's begin with Odd Arne Westad's *The Cold War: A World History*. How did this book expand our understanding of the Cold War? The book's strength is its breadth. There are some who look back to the Cold War period with a certain nostalgia, thinking this was a time of prudent and disciplined rivalry in which there were rules of the game regulating US-Soviet relations. Historians with an interest in the reflections of the Cold War in culture, architecture, science, or changing concepts of gender and race will object to Westad's mostly diplomatic history of great men. But the voices of ordinary people and their perspectives on the Cold War, from letters by US teenagers to Soviet jokes to the memory of political violence in South East Asia, are made heard throughout the book. And as opposed to many traditional accounts of the Cold War, Westad's gripping narrative is more about political ideas than about rockets, more about the intertwinedness of politics. On that score, Adam Ulam's *Understanding the Cold War* succeeds on every level. To spend time with this book is to spend time with Adam himself. Adam Ulam's autobiography stands on its own, giving a clear picture of both the man and his career and displaying his analytical prowess and personal charm in abundance." —Thomas P. M. Barnett, Project Muse. About the Author. Adam B. Ulam (1922-2000) taught at Harvard University from 1947 until his retirement in 1992. He was Gurney Professor of History and Political Science, and twice director of the Russian Research Center.