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Review of The Cold War: A History in Documents

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H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Allan M. Winkler. *The Cold War: A History in Documents.* New York, and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 160 pp. $30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-512356-2.

Reviewed by David L. Snead (Department of History, Texas Tech University)
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An Incomplete Look at the Cold War

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[The edition examined by the reviewer was an advance, uncorrected reading copy]

Allan Winkler's -*The Cold War: A History in Documents* provides a useful, but incomplete, collection of primary sources for use in examining the cold war. Winkler, a Distinguished Professor of History at Miami University in Ohio, obviously had the general reader and beginning undergraduate student in mind when he compiled this collection of documents. Winkler explains that "This book tries to capture the most important cross-currents of the cold war...". However, he adds, "it is not a history of everything that unfolded in the postwar period, but rather a focused assessment of the most visible, direct effects of the long-lasting confrontation that had such a powerful impact on both the Soviet Union and the United States."[1] The book is only partially successful in achieving these objectives. While it contains many useful documents, in particular pictures and illustrations, it does not adequately present the complexity of the cold war. The book fails to provide sufficient primary materials concerning any country besides the United States. It also covers the period after the Vietnam War much too quickly.

The strengths of Winkler's book are many. His first four chapters provide a chilling reminder of just how seriously Americans viewed the cold war in the first two decades after World War II. Chapter One details the major events in the cold war between 1945 and 1953, and contains excerpts from Joseph Stalin's address to the Soviet people in early 1946, Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech, the Truman Doctrine, George Marshall's speech unveiling the Marshall Plan, NSC-68, and Harry Truman's reaction to the start of the Korean War. Winkler uses Chapter Two to explore how the cold war affected American society and includes materials on Congress's attacks on communists in Hollywood, the Hess and Rosenberg trials, and the antics of Senator Joseph McCarthy. Chapter Three traces the cold war during Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy's presidencies by examining such topics as Eisenhower's first inaugural address, John Foster Dulles' massive retaliation speech, the lyrics of songwriter Tom Lehrer, the Bay of Pigs Incident, and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Chapter Four provides a pictorial essay on the impact of the development of nuclear weapons on American society. Through well-selected documents, pictures, and other images, Winkler effectively captures the fear and anxiety that existed in the United States between 1945 and 1963.

These four chapters should give a student a glimpse at the early period of the cold war in the United States, but by themselves might be misleading. Winkler fails to offer materials that would allow the student to know that the cold war was far more complex than simply the United States acting out of fear of the Soviet Union. Even if Winkler designed this book to show the cold war in the United States, he should have provided some documents illustrating both the Soviet Union's perspective and actions. For example, he could have shown the Soviet reaction to the Marshall Plan or one of Nikita Khrushchev's speeches after his country's launch of -*Sputnik*. Besides an excerpt from Stalin's 1946 speech, Winkler does not provide a single document that reveals the Soviet side. If you add to this Winkler's failure to offer documents illustrating the truly international character of the cold war, you can see the limits of this collection.

Winkler examines the Vietnam conflict and the end of the Cold War in the final two chapters of his book. In Chapter Five, Winkler traces American involvement in Vietnam from the end of World War II to 1975. He opens with excerpts from Vietnam's

Declaration of Independence in December 1945, examines the growing commitment of the United States to first France and then South Vietnam under presidents Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy, and concludes with views of the policies of both presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. Chapter Six briefly examines the last thirty years of the Cold War by including details from the 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty, SALT I and II, Ronald Reagan's "Evil Empire" speech, and George Bush's 1992 State of the Union address declaring an end to the cold war. As with the first four chapters, Winkler succeeds best in providing illustrations capturing the mood in America during the decades.

The brevity in which Winkler deals with the last thirty years of the Cold War, with the exception of the Vietnam War, is striking and bothersome. Although there are obviously more government documents available from the earlier periods of the cold war, there are plenty of materials from 1963 to 1991. While the materials he includes are quite good, he could have provided much more. He could have provided information on the Olympic boycotts of 1980 and 1984, the shoot down of Korean airliner 007 in 1983, the Iran-Contra scandal, and the revolutions in Eastern Europe. The list of possible subjects could go on and on. He mentions some of them but generally does not provide the supporting documents that would help students understand them.

Beyond the preceding evaluation of the book, this reviewer would be remiss not to mention a few factual errors that hopefully were corrected before the final version of the manuscript went to press. In his description of the Marshall Plan, Winkler identifies the secretary of state's unveiling of the plan in a commencement speech at Harvard University in June 1949, as opposed to the correct date of 1947.[2] Also, he reports that 54,000 Americans died in the Korean War.[3] While this figure was generally accepted into the 1990s, a revised estimate puts the total at 36,913 battle and non-battle deaths.[4]

Allan Winkler has performed a service to professors who teach courses on the cold war by offering an easily accessible collection of primary materials. Unfortunately, the collection is not as complete as its needs to be. Winkler needed to provide materials that show more sides of the cold war than simply events in the United States. Additional sources from the former Soviet Union and other countries would have made this collection much more valuable and useful.

Professors looking for wonderful illustrations of the early cold war in the United States should look with pleasure on Winkler's work. However, those looking for a more complete examination of the cold war should look elsewhere.[5]

[1]. Allan M. Winkler, *The Cold War: A History in Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15.

[2]. Ibid., 29.

[3]. Ibid., 45.

[4]. The breakdown of American casualties in the Korean War is 33,651 battle deaths, 3,262 non-battle deaths, and 103,284 wounded. See the U.S. Army Center of Military History's website, http://web1.whs.osd.mil/mmid/CASUALTY/KOREA.PDF, or the electronic records at the National Archives and Records Administration, http://www.nara.gov/nara/electronic/casualty.html for a breakdown of American casualties in the war. The 54,000 dead that Winkler and many other historians have cited includes 17,730 deaths during the time period of the Korean War but not in the Korean theatre.

[5]. See for example Edward H. Judge and John W. Langdon, *The Cold War: A History through Documents* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1999).

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