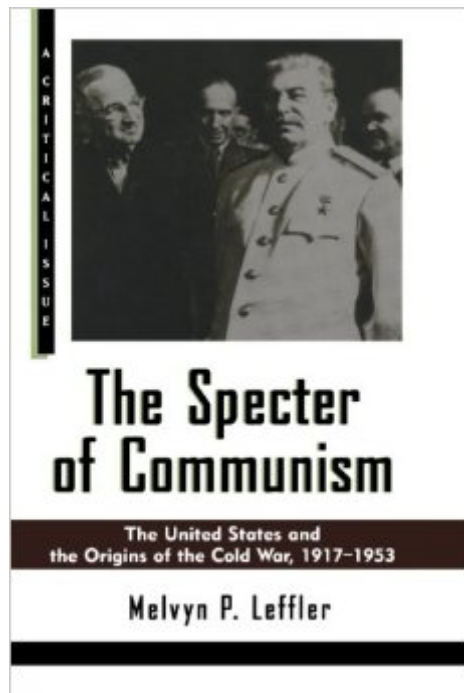


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The Specter Of Communism: The United States And The Origins Of The Cold War, 1917-1953 (Hill And Wang Critical Issues)



Synopsis

The Hill and Wang Critical Issues Series: concise, affordable works on pivotal topics in American history, society, and politics. The Specter of Communism is a concise history of the origins of the Cold War and the evolution of U.S.-Soviet relations, from the Bolshevik revolution to the death of Stalin. Using not only American documents but also those from newly opened archives in Russia, China, and Eastern Europe, Leffler shows how the ideological animosity that existed from Lenin's seizure of power onward turned into dangerous confrontation. By focusing on American political culture and American anxieties about the Soviet political and economic threat, Leffler suggests new ways of understanding the global struggle staged by the two great powers of the postwar era.

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Customer Reviews

Melvyn Leffler's "The Specter of Communism" is a superb, short, and nuanced history of the origins of the Cold War. It should be assigned reading in any college course on 20th century American foreign policy. In Leffler's telling, Stalin felt vulnerable after World War II and wanted to preserve good relations with the U.S. The Soviet dictator insisted, however, on moving his borders westward, installing a puppet regime in Poland, and playing a leading role in the occupation of Germany and Japan. These goals didn't necessarily clash with core U.S. interests and might not have resulted in a Cold War if Europe and East Asia hadn't been on the verge of collapse after 1945. Since World War I, Washington had been haunted by the fear that the resources of Europe and Asia might fall

under the control of one hostile power -- either Germany or Russia -- that could then threaten the security and political economy of the U.S. Washington policymakers didn't think that Stalin planned to start a new war, but they panicked when communist parties surged in France, Italy and elsewhere. Assuming that communist governments would link their economies to the USSR's, Washington responded by moving to rebuild the German economy and integrating Germany into a U.S.-led European bloc. Stalin, fearing a revival of German power, clamped down on Eastern Europe and blockaded Berlin. The Cold War was soon going at full steam. One of the high points of Leffler's book is the discussion of the domestic politics of anti-communism. American conservatives didn't give a hoot about Europe or foreign policy; however, they did want to exploit anti-Red feeling in order to discredit New Dealers and crack down on labor unions and civil rights groups.

Melvyn P. Leffler's *The Specter of Communism: The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917-1953* examines the evolution of U.S. - Soviet relations during the first half of the twentieth century. Stettinius Professor of History at the University of Virginia, Leffler provides an interesting analysis of U.S. - Soviet relations from the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) until the death of Joseph Stalin (1953). Leffler argues that the foundations of the Cold War were laid following the Bolshevik Revolution and the continued concern for national security on both sides of the political spectrum contributed to the escalation of tensions. *The Specter of Communism* expands the understood duration of the Cold War and provides convincing arguments for the necessity of this expansion. The early stages of anti-Communism in the United States following the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia continued throughout the period of peace and escalated following the power vacuum left in the wake of the Second World War. Leffler shows that the failure of the British to regain control of Europe placed the United States in the leadership role for all of the West. Leffler argues that the experiences of Russia during the First and Second World War profoundly impacted their post-war conduct. The arms race that followed the Second World War showcased the fear of the Soviet Union, who had fought two staggeringly costly wars over the previous three decades. The Soviet desire for security and the expansion of Soviet influence throughout Eastern Europe gave rise to fears within the United States. This vastly different ideological and political entity was spreading beyond its own borders, which was perceived as a direct threat to the American way of life.

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