

## **A Guide for John Lewis Gaddis' The Cold War: A New History**

As we embark on our study of the Cold War, it is vital to understand the various perspectives of historians regarding this pivotal event that dominated the second half of the twentieth century. While all of you were born after the collapse of the Soviet Union, John Lewis Gaddis has developed a unique approach to understanding the Cold War that specifically targets the challenges your generation faces as it attempts to make sense of an era that may as well be the equivalent of ancient history.

Rather than having questions that specifically target key facts presented in this text, the questions provided will focus on a few key conceptual and overarching ideas presented. In addressing this focus, it will be imperative that you utilize this text to supplement the facts that are presented in your International text. Keep in mind that the facts presented in this text will be accurate, as Gaddis is the pre-eminent Cold War historian in the United States, but the interpretation will provide a nuanced understanding of the narrative that has been told *ad nauseum*.

Now, before you approach the reading of this text it is important to understand how you should read this text. First and foremost you should have a working narrative of the Cold War. This is where reading your primary (Hodder) text is vital as you will develop the narrative and from there you will then be able to read historians' interpretations of this era. As you read the Gaddis text it is also important that you read it as you would a historical novel (despite the text not being a novel). What this means is that it is not important to read this text the way you would read your average history textbook. You should not be taking copious notes from this text and you should be very judicious in your annotations and highlighting. By having a basic, operative knowledge of the Cold War you should focus on understanding the connections and themes that Gaddis makes with each chapter in relation to the Cold War as a whole. While you may read your textbook sitting upright at a desk/table, this actually would not be the best approach with this text. Find a comfortable place/position to sit, sit back, relax, and read this text with a pencil in hand. Do not become obsessed about annotations, but rather only annotate when something stands out or when you are able to make some relevant connection to prior knowledge. When you read, if you do not understand the connection/interpretation that Gaddis makes, or if you are uncertain about what is meant, make note of it. Bring your text with you to class and engage in a discussion with your peers. Of course I will help with some of the synthesis as we prepare for exams, but it is also imperative that you begin developing a deeper historical understanding.

For each chapter you will be provided some guiding questions. These questions are not meant to be exhaustive of everything that is addressed in the chapter, but rather are supposed to be thought-provoking. Some will require a closer reading of the text and reconciliation with the narrative, while others will require you to engage in the complexity of historical synthesis. Be sure you stay on top of the reading as there may be reading quizzes to ensure accountability. Also realize that this is not simply "busy work." Neither you nor I have time for "busy work" and, therefore, everything I ask you to read is predicated upon preparing you to score well on your exams in May.

### **Guiding Question(s) for Preface and Prologue:**

1. Gaddis contends that the Cold War "was a necessary contest that settled fundamental issues once and for all." What issues were settled and do you agree with Gaddis' assertion?
2. Often the close of the Second World War is viewed as the triumph of capitalism and democracy over the imperial and authoritarian, even totalitarian, governments of Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy, and Hirohito's Japan. Why might this optimism be misplaced according to writers such as George Orwell?