

In reading the works of Barton Bernstein, “Politics and the Policies of the Truman Administration” and John Lewis Gaddis, “Getting Tough with Russia: The Reorientation of American Policy 1946, we can compare each by answering a series of questions to distinguish the motives and perspective of each author as well as determine if they were either an orthodox historian, revisionist historian, or post-revisionist historian.

Firstly, we will discuss the topic, period, the focus, either U.S. or Soviet officials, and the argument made by each author. The Topic of Bernstein’s piece is that of the emerging revisionist interpretation of American actions not simply as a necessary response to Soviet challenges but rather as an investigation to understand the American ideology and interests, mutual suspicions and misunderstandings, and an investigation into the failures in seeking to achieve accommodations. Bernstein argues that the United States contributed to the war by overextending its policy and power, refusing to accept Soviet interests.¹ The topic in Gaddis’ piece discusses negotiating with the Soviet Union from a place of strength. Policymakers felt the United States could achieve the kind of peace settlement they wanted, and fortified with the atomic bomb would give them the ultimate tool they needed for negotiating strength. Ultimately, Gaddis argues that there was a massive divergence in overt policy from poor communication between the State Department, the White House, and Capitol Hill.² Gaddis and Bernstein are focused on the period immediately following World War II, with Bernstein focused on the transition between the Roosevelt and Truman administrations. In contrast, Gaddis is focused more on the Truman Administration. Bernstein appears to be focused on the period directly following the war, and Gaddis seems to be a year or two following the war. Gaddis is more

¹ Barton Bernstein, *American Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Cold War* (Chicago, 1970) P. 17

² John Lewis Gaddis, *Getting Tough with Russia: The Reorientation of American Policy 1946* (1946) P. 283

focused on the U.S., and Bernstein is concerned with the U.S. and the Soviet Union equally while offering objections to the U.S. policy as being without fault.

Both authors portray a slightly different perspective of the early years of the Cold War on the heels of World War II. In Bernstein's writing, he observes the miscommunication between the Soviets and the United States policymakers. Bernstein focuses on Roosevelt's will to make concessions to the Soviets, and that "America's welfare rested upon international peace, expanded trade, and open markets"³ and transitioning to Truman's presidency, that era of concessions would end. Truman would speak sternly, knowing in the back of his mind that he would be willing to use an atomic bomb if he felt justified. Truman was unwilling to make compromises as his will was to spread capitalism to all regions of the globe. Gaddis' portrayal of the early years of the Cold War was more focused on the internal strife of the United States and how it influenced developmental policy. Gaddis took a more holistic approach in analyzing how sources added to distention at home and how supposed allies had fueled the mania between U.S. policymakers and legislators. Gaddis was neutral in his presentation of who was to blame for the tension of the Cold War but does a good job explaining how the mainstream news additionally fueled further dissent at home, regardless of what the Soviet's messaging looked like. Bernstein's attitude toward the Cold War is that the U.S. was unwilling to make worthwhile concessions to the Soviet Union and fueled by their madness at home, which led them to project their wrongdoings and scheming onto the Soviets. Bernstein felt it was unnecessary, and the U.S. was as eagerly trying to spread capitalism as they believed the Soviets were trying to spread communism.

³ Barton Bernstein, *American Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Cold War* (Chicago, 1970) P. 18

When determining which school each author would fall under, neither Gaddis nor Bernstein would fall under the orthodox school because neither explicitly blamed the Soviet Union for the Cold War. Still, instead, that action on both sides contributed to the war. Gaddis would be more of a revisionist as he applies faults to both sides. At the same time, Bernstein, even though he explicitly states his perspective is revisionist, airs closer to post-revisionist as he places more blame on the United States and its unwillingness to make worthwhile concessions. He discusses how Truman walked back many of the concessions made by the Roosevelt administration.

Where these two authors converge is in their analysis of inflammatory statements made by officials of the United States for provoking stern action and even pushing war against the Soviet Union. In Gaddis' writing specifically, he illustrates how the words of the Soviets can be loaded and twisted to fit a Western motive, specifically when looking at soviet statements regarding capitalism and the U.S.-based media spinning it as something entirely different, as Stalin had once stated, "War could have been avoided had some method existed for periodically redistributing raw materials and markets between nations according to need. No such method could exist, however, under capitalism."⁴ *Time* had immediately spun this narrative, stating that it was "the most warlike pronouncement uttered by any top-rank statesman since V-J Day." Similarly, Bernstein highlights a highly inflammatory argument made by Harriman, which has primarily been a misinterpretation of Soviet policy, "the extension of Soviet control over neighboring states by independent action; we were faced with a barbarian (Soviet) invasion."⁵ Both Bernstein and Gladds were aware that there was an inflammatory dialogue being used, both

⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, *Getting Tough with Russia: The Reorientation of American Policy 1946* (1946) P. 299

⁵ Barton Bernstein, *American Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Cold War* (Chicago, 1970) P. 25

interparty and across continents. Both men were also aware of Truman's willingness to use nuclear weapons as well.

The significant differences between the works were their focus span, with Gladdis paying particular attention to interparty dialogue and the incredible depth of division at home and how it influenced the development of Cold War policy. In contrast, Bernstein focused on U.S. and Soviet dialogue as two entities colliding in real-time. Bernstein was also focused on global policy tied to the Cold War, paying particular attention to the U.S. and Soviet concerns and desires of what should happen to Poland, Germany, and other states bordering the Soviet Union after the war.

Overall, both Gladdis and Bernstein appear to be of the revisionist school, with neither explicitly supporting the U.S. or Soviet Union and both men viewing the tumultuous decision-making between parties in Gladdis's case and the decision between the Roosevelt and Truman administrations in Bernstein's case.