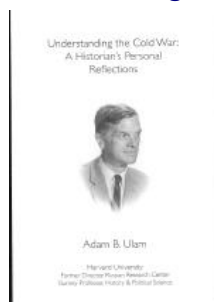


Understanding the Cold War: A Historian's Personal Reflections by Adam B. Ulam (2000), 311 pages.



This is a remarkable book for various reasons. The publisher (author's wife Mary) notes that the author did not intend this to be another scholarly work. Rather, he wrote it at the very end of his life in the form of observations on the world. To hasten its appearance he decided to publish the work himself. Sadly, he died while in the midst of making final changes. His wife, his two sons, nephews, as well as his academic friends joined in the remarkable effort to supplement the original text with their own recollections pertaining to the specific periods of his life, a poignant help in making the book more inclusive. It was published by the *Leopolis Press*, a Latin name for Lwów, the birthplace of Adam Ulam who was born there in 1922 to a well-to-do family of lawyers, bankers, architects, and businessmen. He was surely born under more than just one lucky star. His older brother studied mathematics

at Harvard under a special 4-year program, but in the summer of 1939 he revisited Lwów, with the return planned for September 3rd aboard the MS BATORY. The father of the boys made frantic efforts to get a U.S. student visa for Adam, just for one year, and luckily he succeeded. Suddenly the sailing date was changed to mid-August, and both sons bid their father good-bye, sailing from Gdynia. The last time they saw their father was when they waved to him at the Lwów railway station. The Ulam family perished in the Holocaust. World War II began shortly after the boys' landing in New York.

The second lucky star beamed with Adam's American education starting with Brown College in Rhode Island, where the author took to his Ivy League school like a fish to water. The young newcomer displayed an immense intellectual curiosity and earned best marks, to be followed by graduate school at Harvard, all under a special scholarship. His teaching career was equally impressive: 45 years on the Harvard faculty and for many years as Director of the Russian Research Center. He became one of the world's foremost authorities on Russia and the Soviet Union. Blessed with a photographic memory, he wrote his 18 books in long-hand, for to him the computer was *terra incognita*. His talent for foreign languages was greatly assisted by Harvard's outstanding teachers. This book contains many examples of his natural humor and ready wit: he recalls with amusement how one of his students phoned him, in a heavy German accent, to complain about a D minus grade in British history. Oops, sorry, this was, an administrative foul-up, Professor Ulam explained, and the grade should be an A. The student turned out to be Henry Kissinger.

Adam Ulam was primarily a man of ideas and never thought of becoming a man of action. As he watched a legion of Harvard graduates moving into important positions in the government or industry, he never felt being left behind. Two of his works are now classics: *The Bolsheviks* and *Stalin*. Our readers are likely to be quite familiar with this subject matter, whether through their own experiences or those of their families. Still, Ulam's magisterial analysis of the sordid history of the Soviet Union constantly impresses by the lucidity of his narrative and argument. Chapter 7, "On Being an Expert," is fascinating. Equally impressive are several concluding chapters related to perestroika and the events that followed. After Dr. Ulam met Gorbachev in Russia, it became obvious to him that the latter did not understand that Eastern Europe had not been converted to communism at all, only conquered by the Soviet Union, and that once the threat of suppression had been lifted, the communist regimes were doomed. He also maintains that while Stalin's inhumanity was instrumental in making the Soviet Union an awesome power, by the same token Stalinism was also the prime cause of communism's downfall in Europe. Yet, Ulam does not pretend that this downfall could be anticipated so soon. The fall was one of the surprising events in 20th century history. As to its main cause, it will be discussed and argued for generations.

The author did not have a chance to do the final proofreading, and thus two factual errors remain: the Warsaw Uprising took place in 1944 and not 1943 (p.48); Mussolini was captured by the Italian partisans near Milan and not in Naples (p.140).

George Suboczewski