

VICTORY:  
THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION'S  
SECRET STRATEGY THAT HASTENED THE  
COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION

Peter Schweizer

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reviewed by FRED BARNES

For nearly three decades after World War II, one of the great breakthroughs in defeating the Nazis was kept secret. This was the cracking of the German coding machine Enigma. The system for breaking the code, known as Ultra, was at the core of the most dazzling and significant deception in military history, Operation Fortitude. A joint venture of Brits and Yanks, Fortitude "made full use" of Ultra, double agents, dummy armies, phony radio traffic, and other clever measures, writes historian Stephen Ambrose in *D-Day: June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II*. These actions persuaded the Germans that Allied forces were more than double their real size and that the D-Day landing would occur in Norway or Pas de Calais in France, not in Normandy. So thoroughly fooled were Hitler and his lieutenants that even when American, British, and Canadian troops hit the Normandy beaches, the Germans thought the landing was a feint and the real invasion would take place elsewhere. Without the deception, D-Day might have failed entirely, and the war been prolonged, or worse.

My point, though, is how long it was before the full story of Ultra and the massive deception became known. Something similar is happening with the story of victory over Soviet Communism in the Cold War. It is coming out in dribs and drabs: tales of daring spy flights over the Soviet Union in the late 1940s, accounts of successful economic warfare,

brehtaking revelations of geostrategic bonanzas. But the whole story won't be known until reams of classified documents, particularly a string of National Security Decision Directives drafted under President Reagan, are made public years from now.

However, we've already learned enough to know that the Soviet empire didn't fall over on its own. It was pushed. We know that Strobe Talbott, President Clinton's deputy secretary of state and a former *Time* correspondent, was wrong when he wrote in 1990: "The Soviet system has gone into meltdown because of inadequacies and defects at its core, not because of anything the outside world has done or not done or threatened to do." How do we know Talbott is wrong? Common sense, for one thing. When two sides fight and one loses, chances are the winner had something to do with it. Then there's the testimony of Soviet generals, economists, and defectors to buttress this impression. And now there's Peter Schweizer's compelling, if underreported, book.

Schweizer, former fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, doesn't have a documentary record to rely on. But he's interviewed the top national security officials of the Reagan administration—Caspar Weinberger, George Shultz, Robert McFarlane, Donald Regan, John Poindexter, Ed Meese, Richard Allen, Bill Clark, et al.—and they've revealed more to Schweizer than they did in their own books. Schweizer says they've disclosed the "secret strategy" pursued by the Reagan administration in the Cold War, the strategy to roll back Communism, not merely contain it. Sorry,

but I wince at the use of the word "secret." After all, the strategy—to put military, technological, political, and economic pressure on the Soviets—wasn't secret. Only parts of it were, and Schweizer deserves credit for spelling them out in compelling fashion.

Most notable was the effort to undermine the Soviet Union economically. I had not known, for instance, of CIA Director Bill Casey's relentless campaign to get Saudi Arabia to increase oil production, flood the market, and drive down oil prices. Why was Casey so eager for this? Two reasons. One, it would help the U.S. economy in the same manner as an across-the-board tax cut. Second, and more important in Casey's mind, it would ruin the Soviet economy. The Soviets relied on oil exports almost entirely for their hard currency. For every dollar drop in the price of a barrel of oil, the Soviets lost a dollar in hard currency. Thus, when the Saudis increased production from 2 million to 6 million, then to 9 million barrels a day, in 1985, it "drove a stake through the heart of the Soviet economy," writes Schweizer.

Had Casey, along with Reagan, prompted this Saudi move? "What factor lay most heavily on the minds of the Saudis when they made the decision is anybody's guess," admits Schweizer. But the administration had certainly done enough favors for the Saudi ruling family that reciprocation was in order. The Saudis had been allowed to buy AWACS radar planes. Reagan issued a special executive order that permitted a private sale to them of Stinger missiles without notifying Congress. Reagan repeatedly promised American defense of Saudi Arabia. "At one point Reagan looked the Saudi king straight in the eye and gave him his absolute assurance that he would do whatever was necessary to ensure the integrity of Saudi Arabia," says Schweizer. "It was something Reagan excelled at—a personal diplomatic gesture pregnant with meaning." Still, Schweizer isn't certain even whether oil pricing was a fundamental part of the comprehensive strategy to "exacerbate" the Soviet economic crisis. Oil pricing, he says, was "apparently codified into policy." Apparently? We'll know for sure when the presidential directives are released.

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Another eye-popping part of the Reagan strategy was the use of economic disinformation. This was news to me, and I was thrilled to learn of it. "This was a widespread program, including altered or fabricated technological information in both civilian and military areas," Schweizer writes. The information was part true, part false, with "enough truth to get Soviet engineers to take the bait and begin digesting the information and using it in their own designs, mixed with enough fiction to make their efforts ultimately fail." My favorite was the sale of blueprints for gas turbine components with a built-in engineering flaw. It caused serious delays in construction of the Soviet natural gas pipeline, thereby delaying the accrual of hard currency from gas sales.

Schweizer also runs through the administration's exploitation of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, its funneling of CIA funds to Solidarity in Poland, its emphasis on high-tech weapons like the Strategic Defense Initiative, its bid to keep the Soviets from buying new technologies they couldn't produce on their own—all aimed at bringing the Soviet economy and ruling class to the breaking point. These efforts are well known. But Schweizer places them as part of an overall strategy, and that's the beauty of his valuable book. Strobe Talbott says Mikhail Gorbachev responded "primarily to internal pressures, not external ones." Schweizer explains convincingly how these internal pressures were intensified by deliberate American acts.

This is a short book, but I sometimes lost the trail. Schweizer tells the story of economic warfare chronologically, mixing it in with the evolution of SDI, recruitment of Sweden in the fight to save Solidarity, and so on. There was a better way: he should have isolated the economic strategy and followed it through to the end, then turned to a different element. One more problem: Bill Casey. Schweizer didn't interview Casey, who died in 1987, but he makes the anti-Soviet policy sound more Casey's than Reagan's. Maybe it was, but if so, we should be told explicitly. After reading *Victory*, I wasn't sure if Reagan's role was marginal or major. No doubt later, fuller accounts of the triumph over Soviet Communism will nail that down. □

## COLORED PEOPLE: A MEMOIR

Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

Alfred A. Knopf/216 pages/\$22

reviewed by FRANCIS X. ROCCA

"Academic superstar" may be an oxymoron, but if there is such a thing, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., is it. Cornell gave him tenure at age 33, and Harvard made him chairman of Afro-American Studies when he was 40. An avid and adept publicity seeker, he writes regularly for the *New Yorker* and the *New York Times*, and has brought his friend Spike Lee to Harvard as a visiting professor. Barely into middle age now, he's written his autobiography. But a professor's career, no matter how glittering, is humdrum stuff compared to a movie star's, or even a politician's; so readers will be grateful that this book ends before its subject ever sets foot on a university campus.

Gates's childhood coincided with the desegregation of his hometown, Piedmont, West Virginia (pop. 2,565 at his birth in 1950). The elementary school was integrated the year before he entered first grade; the union at the paper mill, not until the end of his teens. His coming-of-age story is thus also one of dramatic change in a contained, closely observed society.

The story is told through folksy anecdotes, with frequent asides on the customs and mores of family and neighbors, and this lack of a strong structure can be distracting; but it is rich territory we are rambling through, and our guide has a keen eye for trivia with retrospective significance. In a chapter on pre-Afro hair care, we learn about the brands of grease, the art of the hot comb, the inconveniences of a Murrayed-down stocking cap or a lye "process." One detail symbolizes the futility of these exertions: the "kitchen," an incorrigibly kinky tuft

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at the base of the neck that can only be trimmed off.

The author gets his tonsorial expertise from his mother, who used to earn extra dollars from dressing hair in her home, and who eventually went bald from having her own treated in this damaging fashion. Mrs. Gates is the book's most memorable character, with something of the tragic about her. A dignified woman, punctilious in speech and dress, she consistently encouraged her children to compete in white society. Yet she hated white people, "hated them with a passion she seldom disclosed." When TV showed the riots after the assassination of Martin Luther King, "the first colored secretary of the Piedmont PTA watched the flames with dancing eyes." She lived to see one son a surgeon and the other a prominent literary critic, yet she could not enjoy all the fruits of their success. When they bought her the grand house she had used to clean as a maid, she moved in reluctantly, haunted by the memory of a stingy and inconsiderate employer.

His mother, Gates now believes, was depressive. In her later years she also suffered debilitating obsessions and compulsions. But her ambivalence about race relations, if especially intense, was not unique. Gates—who has in recent years publicly denounced the "hate literature" published by the Nation of Islam—recalls mixed feelings when he discovered her secret loathing at age nine: "It was like watching the Wicked Witch of the West emerge out of the transforming features of Dorothy. The revelation was both terrifying and thrilling." The occasion was the telecast of a documentary on Malcolm X, whose diabolization of