

2023

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Recommended Citation

O'Brien, David (2023) "Oswald Spengler and his Cold War Legacy," *The Histories*: Vol. 17: Iss. 1, Article 11.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/the_histories/vol17/iss1/11

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Oswald Spengler and his Cold War Legacy

By David O'Brien

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1991, scholars and policymakers alike celebrated the perceived “end of history.”¹ Today, the majority of people would evaluate this celebration as so incredibly optimistic it bordered on overwhelming naivety. As political scientists, civil servants, and pundits involved in current affairs are forced to confront numerous policies and long-term agendas established by cold war policy makers in response to the threat of the Soviet Union, they are forced to confront the philosophies and ideologies of their predecessors in government. While many hope and attempt to change the current trajectory of the policies of the United States, this cannot be done without understanding the intellectual roots of modern American foreign policy, why, and how they have emerged overtime.

American foreign policy throughout the Cold War was intellectually indebted to the German historian and philosopher, Oswald Spengler. While numerous Kennan scholars reference Spengler's influence on Kennan, few have had actually properly analyzed the similarities between Spengler's concepts and Kennan's ideas. For instance, Goldgeier has stated that there is more work to be done on Spengler's reading of history's influence on Kennan and his successors in the state department.² Additionally, numerous Kennan scholars, like Gaddis³ and Thompson⁴ view Spengler's influence on Kennan as merely a symptom of his own pessimistic idiosyncrasies related to his personal life (Kennan had numerous strained personal relationships, suffered from a lifelong battle with depression, and a few mental breakdowns) rather than serving as an

¹ Francis Fukuyama, *End of History and the Last Man* (Penguin Books Ltd, 2020).

² “A Complex Man with a Simple Idea,” *George Kennan for Our Time*, n.d., <https://doi.org/https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/Goldgeir%20Kennan%20Legacy%20Chapter.pdf>.

³ John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

⁴ Nicholas Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War* (New York: Picador, 2010).

important intellectual foundation for his ideas and actions throughout his career as a statesman. Spengler's primary influence on Kennan includes: his method and analysis of cultural souls that exist in various cultures and civilizations throughout history, his evaluation of the rise of socialism as a symptom of the decline of Western Civilization, and his belief in Prussianism as the strongest ideology for the West as it enters its final phase of existence.

Spengler's ideas can be seen directly in Kennan's political ideology and agenda, especially in the latter's understanding of socialism as a form of decline in the West, his evaluation of the Soviet Union, and his containment theory. Furthermore, Kennan's views surrounding the conflicts of the 20th century as ideological rather than economic, and his own personal sympathies towards Prussianism and undemocratic government were based on Spengler's writings.

Spengler

Oswald Spengler, born in 1880 to a middle-class family, spent the majority of his early life studying a variety of different topics ranging from Mathematics to Latin at an elite preparatory academy in Halle, Germany. He received no direct education surrounding a particular topic but instead enrolled as a private student at a variety of different universities. After his first Ph.D. dissertation on Heraclitus was rejected, Spengler received his doctorate for a dissertation in biology. Following his education, he worked as a tutor, magazine writer, and briefly as a teacher with little success. However, following the outbreak of World War I, he became an overnight sensation with his first major work, *The Decline of The West Volume One*,⁵ where he synthesized the many topics he studied over the course of his life to create an all-encompassing philosophy of history.

⁵ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West Volume One: Form and Actuality* (Rogue Scholar Press, 2021).

Following the publication of *The Decline of the West*, Spengler would go on to become a highly influential member of the German academy and a board member for the Nietzsche Archives. Though he would be removed from both positions after the rise of the National Socialist party, Spengler did manage to publish a variety of philosophical works with the Academy and Archives. His publications varied in topic but were largely centered around socio-political trends such as the consequences of industrialism on society⁶ to the rising political tensions throughout the 20th century⁷. While Spengler died in 1936, his last work *The Hour of Decision*⁸ prophetically warned another global conflict would occur within the next decade and argued it would determine whether the Anglosphere or the Teutosphere would lead Western society as it entered its final period before collapse.

Spengler's work followed a long tradition that sought to repair the rift between materialism and metaphysics. His works function as a response to the rising support of analyzing history from a materialistic perspective. While Cold War policy planners utilized his works as a foundation for their own thought, he was continuing the traditions of thinkers before himself. His primary influences, Goethe and Nietzsche, both argued in favor of incorporating cultural and psychological aspects into their analysis of a variety of topics. Both of their major works reflect this method and deviate from other philosophers who chose to adopt a more material or tangible analysis of society. This unusual approach contributed to Goethe and Nietzsche's immediate and ongoing impact in Europe. Their study of culture and metaphysical concerns influenced many intellectual projects and helped reimagine traditional debates such as that between Herodotus and Thucydides surrounding the method of historical analysis as myth vs direct events.

⁶ Oswald Spengler, *Man and Technics: A Contribution to a Philosophy of Life* (Arktos Media Ltd, 2020).

⁷ Oswald Spengler and K. R. Bolton, *Prussian Socialism & Other Essays* (London: Black House Publishing, 2018).

⁸ Oswald Spengler, *The Hour of Decision* (Rogue Scholar, 2020).

And now, finally, I feel urged to name once more those to whom I owe practically everything: Goethe and Nietzsche. Goethe gave me method, Nietzsche the question faculty – and if I were asked to find a formula for my relation to the latter I should say that I had made of his ‘outlook’ (Ausblick) an ‘overlook’ (Überblick). But Goethe was, without knowing it, a disciple of Leibniz in his whole mode of thought. And, therefore, that which has at last (and to my own astonishment) taken shape in my hands I am able to regard and despite the misery and disgust of these years, proud to call a German Philosophy.⁹

The primary goal of Spengler’s works was to actualize the concept proposed by Nietzsche in his work the *Will to Power*. Spengler, clearly built on Nietzsche’s conception of history as written in *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*. “The unhistorical,” writes Nietzsche, “and the historical are equally necessary for the health of an individual, a people and a culture.”¹⁰ Spengler’s works were dedicated to synthesizing both the unhistorical, being, ideals, and metaphysics, with the historical, becoming, action, and the physical.

However, Spengler’s methodology and approach reflects not only his admiration for Nietzsche but pulls from his background in biology as well. In utilizing this discipline, the influence from Goethe also becomes increasingly apparent. Spengler applied Goethe’s theory of morphology to analyze civilizations as organisms. In response to Kant, Goethe sought to establish a more naturalistic method of analyzing natural sciences through simply spectating and analyzing the interaction of living things rather than forming a hypothesis and testing it. He believed that establishing a hypothesis prior to observation leads to the individual focusing more on their own thoughts rather than proper analysis. The primary goal of Goethe’s methodology was to establish archetypal patterns in nature which would then be used to further understand the general nature of everything as a whole. Spengler utilizes Goethe’s methodology to analyze history rather than traditional sciences by establishing archetypal patterns for civilizations. This

⁹ Spengler, *Decline of the West: Volume One*, vii.

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (Indianapolis: Hackett, n.d.).

is followed by establishing a case that aspects of culture acting outside of the archetypal pattern emerge as an aspect to the culture's own lifespan, like that of an animal demonstrating different behavior than its peers. Thus, Spengler argues that there are objective "biological" laws that all civilizations are bound to follow and simultaneously supports an argument for cultural relativism, since cultures develop their own relative values, ideals, arts, etc. While the primary purpose of this essay is to analyze Spengler's relation to policymakers, one must keep in mind that his own ideas and methodology emerged from previous thinkers. Spengler himself, while an autodidact and anti-academic, would influence intellectual elites and be viewed as an intellectual giant of his era. Spengler's work would be utilized as an explanation for how and why the scientific and materialistic methodology of his time was not enough to resolve the problems of the human condition. Throughout his work he observed all of history as symbolic for a deeper unconscious process that is attempting to actualize itself in the material world. To Spengler, all actions and words are an attempt to actualize a deeper fundamental metaphysical concept.

But the prime symbol does not actualize itself; it is not operative through the form-sense of every man, every community, age and epoch and dictates the style of every life-expression. It is inherent in the form of the state, the religious myths and cults, the ethical ideals, the forms of painting and music and poetry, the fundamental notions of each science – but it is not presented by these. Consequently, it is not presentable by words, for language and words are themselves *derived* symbols. Every individual symbol tells of it but only to the inner feelings, not to the understanding. And when we say, as henceforth we shall say, that the prime symbol of the Classical soul is the material and individual body, that of the Western soul pure infinite space, it must always be with the reservation that concepts cannot represent the inconceivable and thus at the most a *significant feeling* may be evoked by the sound of words.¹¹

With Spengler's continuation of the metaphysical concepts proposed by Goethe along with the approach towards understanding history by Nietzsche, he developed his major work *The Decline of the West*. Spengler writes that history as a field is being evaluated incorrectly. Instead

¹¹ Spengler, *Decline of the West: Volume One*, 175.

of viewing history as a long list of empirical evidence and separating the field into various sub disciplines such as art history, eastern history, ancient history, medieval history, and modern history, history should be evaluated as a whole. Through Goethe's methodology, Spengler sought to analyze the world soul, which could only be done through a sweeping examination of all of world history, not an examination of specific time periods or epochs. Spengler believed epochs should be analyzed as turning points in a civilization rather than analyzed as specific events. Through breaking away from the paradigm established by Marxist and Whig historians where history is consistently evolving towards a specific end goal, Spengler paved the way for people to come to terms with the calamity of the early 20th century. Through an analysis of world history, Spengler developed a theory that over the course of time there has been nine civilizations: Egyptian, Babylonian, Indian, Chinese, Apollonian/Classical/Greco-Roman, Magian/Arabian, Mexican, Faustian/Western, and Russian. Each of these civilizations have their own "soul," which attempts to actualize itself through everything produced within itself ranging from all arts to all sciences.

The soul of each civilization endures a life cycle that is analogous to the four seasons or the various phases of life that humans endure. The first phase is Spring or adolescence, where the soul of civilization is completely unconscious and free and merely interacts with the world and allows itself to be influenced by nature and other souls. For the West, this phase is represented by early Christendom and the general domination of the church. The second phase is Summer or youth; here the soul begins to actively strive to attain its soul in a material sense. This is the period which is often viewed as the golden age of civilization and the pinnacle of art and culture. For the West, this phase is represented by the Renaissance Baroque period where Spengler believed the West had achieved its goal of creating art and science that perfectly encapsulated

infinity. After this period comes the most important epoch for each soul, where a specific figure initiates the transition of continuous actualization and success to failure and decline. Spengler viewed Socrates as the figure who best encapsulated this paradigm shift for the Greeks from the Hellenic warrior ideal expressed through Achilles and Odysseus to the ironic and pedantic Socrates. For the West, this paradigm shift is represented by Rousseau where the West once valued purity and continuous conquest came to admire general equality. Following this period, is Autumn or “manhood” where the soul begins to sacrifice aspects of its cultural ideals and principles for the sake of economic prosperity and stability. This period was represented in the West by the modern era. Finally, the civilization ends with Winter or old age where the civilization can no longer maintain itself and finally collapses. Spengler believed this period would begin in the West during the early 21st century.

While Spengler dedicates his work to explaining the three main souls, Apollonian/Classical, the Faustian/Western, and Magian/Arabic, the primary focus of his work surrounds the Faustian/Western soul. This is because Spengler’s viewed the West as the only soul he could fully grasp since he was a product of it. In addition to *The Decline of the West*, all of Spengler’s following works focus on the declination of the Western soul and the political and intellectual implications of societal decline. Best illustrated in his work *The Hour of Decision*, Spengler adds a particular emphasis on the importance of German civilization and its response to collapse, as he believed it was the country that best encapsulated the Western spirit.

The Western spirit is defined by its goal to actualize the infinite, which it does through continuous expansion and its continuous effort to overcome the natural world. This can be seen through the infinite nature of music and the decadence of paintings from the Baroque period. This can also be seen in Western sciences attempting to quantify things beyond human

perception as shown with imaginary numbers in mathematics and theoretical physics. Spengler considered the Baroque period as the pinnacle of the West and most capable of encapsulating the Faustian soul. Ultimately, however, Spengler viewed the attempts to perpetuate the soul as a tragic and futile endeavor as no soul can actually overcome the natural order of reality.

Following World War I, Spengler's idea that the best time to live in the West had passed became widely popular throughout Germany and was legitimized by various intellectual circles.

In addition to the evaluation of the morphology of various cultural souls and analyzing their various stages, Spengler believed a new soul would emerge over the next millennium that would create a sophisticated culture: the Russian soul. Spengler argued that the Russian soul had been lying dormant for centuries as a result of the overwhelming influence of both the Magian soul and the Faustian soul, thus trapping the Russian soul in the "Spring" season/stage. As the West declines, the Russian soul will begin to emerge as the new dominating force of the world. Spengler argued that the success of Bolshevism in Russia was a symptom of the West's domination over Russia and maintained it would not remain socialist for a long period of time.¹² After the collapse of Bolshevism, the Russian soul will finally begin to emerge from its subservience under the Magian and Faustian souls and fully attain its own cultural identity.

Unlike the Faustian soul that strives for the infinite, the Russian soul strives to perfect the earth in front of it. The Faustian soul focuses on continuously building upwards and outwards, while the Russian soul seeks to perfect what it already has. This emphasis on the immediate demonstrates the general values of the Russian soul as well as the importance of rural life. While the Faustian soul sought the infinite through constant expansion and the Magian sought actualization through its current state of existence, the Russian soul finds the infinite in its

¹² Spengler, Oswald (2020) *The Decline of the West Volume Two: Perspectives of World History*, (Rogue Scholar Press), 196.

current state, making it somewhat of a synthesis of the two. Spengler argues that the emerging Russian soul is best illustrated through the architecture of Orthodox cathedrals compared to mosques and gothic cathedrals. While Orthodox cathedrals share the architectural designs of domes and spires, their focal point is flat surfaces, representing the infinite plain.¹³ Orthodox cathedrals focus on the plain, and there are signs of a future cultural architecture different from the general Magian architecture surrounding Russia; it had failed to emerge because the power of the two cultures surrounding Russia were too disparate and repellent from one another. However, because of Russia's location and size, neither the Magian or Faustian souls had been able to fully dominate the Russian landscape. This has further contributed to the slow germination of both soul's influence and Spengler's argument of Russia remaining in the "trapped Spring season." Yet, Spengler remains adamant that the Magian and the Faustian souls will eventually lose global influence, and the Russian soul will emerge and slowly overpower the two.

Spengler's two lesser-known works, *Prussianism and Socialism*¹⁴ and *The Hour of Decision*,¹⁵ both seek to address the issues that appear in his seminal work, *The Decline of the West*. *Prussianism and Socialism* defines the final phase of Western Civilization, socialism, and the appropriate response to it, Prussianism, a cultural and political agenda that seeks to maintain traditional German values. This is done through a highly disciplined culture and a hyper-militaristic society governed by aristocrats and military leaders.¹⁶ To Spengler, socialism represents the final stages of decline where egalitarianism and rationalism triumph over aristocracy and the unconscious soul. Socialism is the harbinger of the end of Western

¹³ Spengler, *Decline of the West Volume One*, 211.

¹⁴ Spengler, *Prussian Socialism*.

¹⁵ Spengler, *Hour of Decision*.

¹⁶ To Spengler, Prussianism serves as the complete inverse of socialism and the perfect response to decline since it would allow Western culture to continue while simultaneously combat modern egalitarian tendencies.

Civilization; it represents the complete destruction of all of his markers for what makes a civilization great. As discussed earlier, figures like Socrates, Buddha, and Rousseau each encapsulate the transition from culture to decline through their focus on rationalism and destroying hierarchy. Spengler supported hierarchy due to his belief that peak culture always occurred under aristocratic society. Spengler viewed increasing democracy as a sign of decline as shown with the decline of the classical world after the rise of populism as well as the reduction of high art under the enlightenment era. Additionally, one can attribute his opposition towards populism and his support for aristocracy again to his adoration for Friedrich Nietzsche and his work on the board on the Nietzsche Archive. Additionally, Spengler's animosity towards the common man likely stems from his thesis surrounding Heraclitus. Heraclitus, a critic of democracy, wrote "The best want one thing above all others, ever flowing fame among mortals. But the many stuff themselves like livestock."¹⁷ This quote directly reflects Spengler's own opinion on the masses and serves as a philosophical basis for why they must be governed. In contrast, Rousseau's concept of the social contract and his defense of egalitarianism functions as the birth of socialism as a concept and directly opposes what Spengler believes are the guiding factors of Western Civilization.

The most important failure of socialism is its mission to provide the greatest good to the greatest number of people, which will inevitably lead to mob rule. Spengler argued that under mob rule, civilizations are bound to collapse under themselves since the mob is incapable of governing itself beyond its own immediate material conditions and its inability to grasp the world-picture. Additionally, Spengler argued that all great leaders are bound to be viewed poorly by the general populace of their subjects. He provides Bismarck and Metternich as two pertinent

¹⁷ Heraclitus and T. M. Robinson, *Heraclitus: Fragments* (Toronto: Univ. Toronto P., 1991).

examples for his readers, both of whom were viewed poorly during their time but afterwards hailed as some of the great statesmen. Yet in contrast, Spengler argued that leaders under socialism rule for the sake of economic interests rather than the state. Since the masses, which lacked an aristocratic spirit, achieved more political power, Spengler believed they would utilize this for purely material gain rather than spiritual fulfillment. This would then lead to a ruling class dominated by the need for economic and material progress rather than spiritual and psychological fulfillment, the keystone of a proper culture. When nations are ruled under economic interests rather than state interests, all policies become utilitarian and rational rather than for the sake of a higher cause and actualizing the soul because of the masses' lack of desire for anything beyond basic comforts and material bliss. He condemned the failure of socialism to maintain hierarchy, allowing popularity to govern nations rather than genuine power, and its focus on the quantity of resources for a society over the quality of policies. Spengler believed socialist societies will continuously institute policies of continuous material expansion and gluttony at the cost of any and all spiritual fulfillment and noble deeds.

While Spengler viewed the rise of socialism as hopeless and claimed that collapse was inevitable, he did recommend Prussianism to arrest decline and salvage Western Civilization. Under Prussianism, socialist reforms were instituted pragmatically in order to maintain the power of the German hierarchy and its traditional values.

But the Prussian style demand not only a mere precedence of higher policy over economics; it demands that the economic life should be disciplined by a powerful state, which is the precondition of free initiative in private enterprise - for, whatever else it may be, it is not a mere super-party, complete with program and ready to press organization to the point of abolishing the idea of property (*Eigentum*); which, precisely among Germanic peoples, denotes freedom of the economic will, and lordship over that which is one's own.¹⁸

¹⁸ Spengler, *Hour of Decision*, 200-201.

Under Prussianism, the state is able to preserve its power while simultaneously addressing the economic necessities of the current political landscape. Prussianism as a policy agenda is best illustrated by Bismarck's social reforms that were instituted by the Junkers to placate the masses and maintain national strength. They can be additionally identified as traditional German principles under the reign of Frederick the Great.

In addition to his concept of Prussianism, in *The Hour of Decision*, Spengler identified the primary issues of his time and implored the German people to respond to them. Spengler warned that there will be another world war in the near future that will determine which European country will lead the West in its final period. This war would determine the guiding country for Western Civilization in its final era and how the West would be able to combat the two primary factors that will destroy it: socialism and the rise of more primitive souls among "colored" races.¹⁹ Spengler argued the solution to these issues is Caesarism, the use of strong executive authority to combat egalitarianism and put power back into the hands of elites who can properly govern the mob. Through sweeping executive authority and the reinstatement of hierarchy, the West would be able to combat the dangers of "socialism" and preserve itself against the rising rival souls.²⁰ Caesarism functioned as a compromise between populist sentiment and traditional Prussian values, which serve as a cornerstone to Western Civilization. However, Spengler made a point to inform the reader that even if the West succeeds in appointing a Caesar, this would only mitigate decline, not stop it all together. Thus, Spengler warned that the primary danger the West was facing was not any particular country rather it was the rise of Bolshevism as a whole. Spengler viewed Bolshevism, not as a Russian phenomenon,

¹⁹ Spengler views the Russian soul as part of the "colored" races due to its connection with East Asia.

²⁰ Spengler, *The Hour of Decision*, 201.

rather it was a sign of Faustian decline. This concept would go on to heavily influence George F. Kennan, the architect of American Cold War Policy.

George F. Kennan

While many major US policy planners utilized Spenglerian philosophy, the primary purpose of this essay is to analyze the connection between Spengler's ideas and George F. Kennan. Born in 1904, Kennan served as an ambassador in the foreign service from 1928 to 1947, the first director of policy planning from 1947 to 1949, counselor to the state department from 1949-1950, ambassador to the Soviet Union for a brief period in 1952, and the ambassador to Yugoslavia from 1961-1963. After his long career in the civil service, he would work as a critic of American foreign policy, ivy-league academic, and prolific writer. In his memoirs, Kennan referenced reading Spengler during his summer in Weimar Germany in 1926, a few months prior to entering the foreign service, "To this latter place I took Goethe's *Faust* and Spengler's *Untergang des Abendlandes*, wading persistently through them with the help of a dictionary."²¹ Spengler's effect on Kennan during his long career as a United States policy planner and analyst can be seen in government documents, personal notes, academic essays, and magazine articles. While Spengler left a sweeping effect on Kennan, it is only appropriate to evaluate the most impactful document of his career, "The Long Telegram" (1946).²² The concepts Kennan purposes throughout the "Long Telegram," mirror Spengler's. Additionally, "The Long Telegram" attempts to address the two emerging threats to Western Civilization: rise of socialism and its ideological hold over the Russian soul.

²¹ George F. Kennan, "A Personal Note." Essay. In *Memoirs, 1925-1950*, 19.

²² The Long Telegram was written in response to Stalin provoking fear throughout the United States during his speech at the Bolshoi theater, where he emphasized the need for expansion. Kennan wrote this analysis Feb. 13, 1946 after Former-Ambassador to the Soviet Union Harriman requested him to do so.

Kennan differentiated himself from the policy analysis of his contemporaries by viewing the USSR as not only a militaristic and economic threat but primarily as a cultural entity. To Kennan, the conflict of the cold war, while consisting of armed force and two opposing forces, was an ideological battle rather than a material conflict. Kennan's main goal was to ultimately mitigate the exact form of cultural decline described by Spengler via bolstering Western culture through improvement of national morale through art, culture, and civil service projects, which encapsulated Western civilization as discussed throughout Spengler's works.

Kennan continued to argue throughout his many works that America should focus on defeating socialism as an ideology rather than the USSR as a nation, the two of which while attached were not completely linked. This differentiated Kennan from the typical political realist concerned with decline. The majority of foreign policy planners and analysts, concerned themselves through utilizing global power dynamics for the sake of furthering the Wilsonian ideal of global peace and prosperity. This is best illustrated by figures like Edward Stennitus Jr. and Henry Wallace. Kennan, however, viewed global politics through the lens of cultural politics of both the United States and the West with the goal of both strengthening Western cultural and weakening foreign cultural organisms that may weaken the West. Kennan sought to defeat the Soviet threat through overcoming the socialist system both at home and abroad rather than directly competing with the nations within it. Spengler's teachings directly influenced his policies as shown through Kennan's focus and concerns of American decline stemming from culture and socialism rather than direct conflict with the Soviet Union on the international stage via force.

Spengler's influence is best demonstrated by the way in which Kennan viewed the soul of specific nations and civilizations as emerging. Kennan's conception of a nation's soul follows

Spengler's distinction between rural areas as the root of culture and urban areas as the root of decline. As Spengler stated in *The Hour of Decision*, Fascism as a form of government is bound to emerge in response to the crisis of socialism as it affects a nation's soul. According to Spengler's writing, Fascism would primarily stem from rural regions, while Communism would inevitably emerge from urban regions. This is because Fascism functions as a method of preserving the Western Soul, while Communism functions as a method of eroding it. Since Fascism stems from the soul, it is grounded in rural areas, the soul's roots. Since Communism actively erodes the soul, it is grounded in the most "soulless" parts of a culture, urban areas. Kennan clearly shares this sentiment with Spengler. For instance, during his service in Germany during World War II, Kennan makes a point to say that German cosmopolitans operated practically outside of Nazi culture. "The Berliners themselves - the simple people, that is - were, of all the major urban or regional elements among the German population, the least Nazi-fied in their outlook."²³ While some policymakers influenced by Spengler would continuously attempt to strike a balance between maintaining American ideals and the militaristic praxis of fascism, like policymakers Nitze and Kissinger, Kennan would come to fully develop fascist sympathies, likely due to his Spenglerian roots.

Rather than claim that Moscow is the center of the Russian culture, Kennan consistently referred to socialism as its own entity that had taken control of Russia. Kennan even claimed that the majority of Russian citizens did not even support the Communist regime. This can be seen, once again, in "The Long Telegram,"

First, [Communism] does not represent natural outlook of Russian people. Latter are, by and large, friendly to outside world, eager for experience of it, eager to measure against it talents they are conscious of possessing, eager above all to live in peace and enjoy fruits of their own labor. Party line only represents thesis which official propaganda machine

²³ George F. Kennan, "Wartime Service in Germany." Essay. In *Memoirs, 1925-1950*, 108.

puts forward with great skill and persistence to a public often remarkably resistant in the stronghold of its innermost thoughts. But party line is binding for outlook and conduct of people who make up apparatus of power--party, secret police and Government--and it is exclusively with these that we have to deal.²⁴

Kennan's thoughts surrounding the culture of Russia and the principles of socialism is reiterated in his article "Religion in Russia", published in 1992, after the collapse of the USSR,

And, taken together with many other glimpses of ordinary Russian life, this said something to me about the Russian people. It gave me a sort of ultimate confidence – a desperate and unreasoning confidence, if you will – in their ability to survive, somehow, the dreadful situation in which Russia now finds herself, to survive this crisis as they have survived so many others, and to play their part, once again, among the great peoples of the world.²⁵

While this article clearly stems from Kennan's personal experience with the Russian people, it perfectly mirrors Spengler's own thoughts surrounding Russian Orthodoxy lying in wait to establish itself as the foundation of the Russian Soul as discussed earlier. Kennan did not evaluate the situation in the USSR as any form of Russian culture. He viewed the Soviet Regime as superimposed on and alien to Russian society, where it is actively working to subvert and control each and every nation operating within it.

In "The Long Telegram," Kennan further argues that the best possible way to defeat communism is to reinvigorate Western society.

Much depends on health and vigor of our own society. World communism is like malignant parasite which feeds only on diseased tissue. This is point at which domestic and foreign policies meets Every courageous and incisive measure to solve internal problems of our own society, to improve self-confidence, discipline, morale and community spirit of our own people, is a diplomatic victory over Moscow worth a thousand diplomatic notes and joint communiqués. If we cannot abandon fatalism and indifference in face of deficiencies of our own society, Moscow will profit--Moscow cannot help profiting by them in its foreign policies.²⁶

²⁴ George F. Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs*, December 7, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/1947-07-01/sources-soviet-conduct>.

²⁵ George F. Kennan, "Religion in Russia." Essay. In *At a Century's Ending: Reflections, 1982-1995*, 65.

²⁶ George F. Kennan, "The Long Telegram," Wilson Center Digital Archive, accessed December 5, 2022, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116178>.

“The Long Telegram” directly warns the government that the battle of the Cold War depends on the spirit of the American people. The fight to stave off “indifference” is the keystone against collapsing into a communist dictatorship.

Furthermore, “The Long Telegram” is the first document which places the policy of containment, the basis for almost all US foreign policy surrounding the Soviet Union since its inception, in conversation. Kennan’s policy of containment focused on isolating the Soviet Union to stop its ideological, political, and economic principles from spreading throughout the world. Containment theorists believed that if socialism was contained and isolated from the rest of the world, it would cannibalize itself and no longer threaten institutions at odds with the Socialist ideology.

Soviet power, unlike that of Hitlerite Germany, is neither schematic nor adventuristic. It does not work by fixed plans. It does not take unnecessary risks. Impervious to logic of reason, and it is highly sensitive to logic of force. For this reason it can easily withdraw—and usually does when strong resistance is encountered at any point.²⁷

Kennan argued that the solution to Soviet power is not a direct plan targeting any aspects of the Soviets since its power is not backed by any form of logic. The solution is simply stopping Soviet power from spreading across the world through global intervention. While later on, the primary method of doing so would be through militaristic intervention and covert operations, Kennan went on record saying political intervention should be the primary method for stopping Bolshevism from spreading globally.²⁸

Kennan’s containment policy alongside his belief in strengthening the national spirit of the United States as well as the culture of the West as a whole demonstrates his belief that collapse is directly tethered to widespread social indifference or apathy. This parallels Spengler’s

²⁷ Kennan, “The Long Telegram”

²⁸ George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950*, 359.

analysis of cultural souls. Kennan's focus on Western principles and its own psychological fortitude illustrates its importance in combating soviet influence. Additionally, through isolating the Soviet Union, Kennan worked to isolate socialism to protect the West from the spread of communism.

In addition to "The Long Telegram," Kennan's, 1947 *Foreign Affairs* magazine, publication the article "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" illustrates his desire to resolve the issue of decline by influencing American public opinion. While "The Long Telegram" sought to illustrate the dangers of decline and the dangers of communism to state department officials, Kennan's article, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" sought to illustrate the need for the American people to actively work towards the preservation of Western culture and American identity. "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" described and discussed the same ideas proposed by "The Long Telegram," however unlike "The Long Telegram" it was developed for public consumption. "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" illustrates Kennan's confidence in his ideas surrounding containing social contagions and bolstering the spirit of the United States in an attempt to halt decline.

In light of these circumstances, the thoughtful observer of Russian-American relations will find no cause for complaint in the Kremlin's challenge to American society. He will rather experience a certain gratitude to a Providence which, by providing the American people with this implacable challenge, has made their entire security as a nation dependent on their pulling themselves together and accepting the responsibilities of moral and political leadership that history plainly intended them to bear²⁹

Kennan's push for the American people to actively work towards overcoming the West's challenge of communism demonstrates his belief that the American people from statesmen to citizen has a major role to play in combating decline. However, this does not necessarily mean he

²⁹ Kennan, "Sources of Soviet Conduct"

believed in mass democracy or egalitarianism, rather he seemed to believe that the involvement of the American people was a necessary compromise for combating communism in the west.

While Kennan does differ from Spengler in his more democratic beliefs surrounding cultural psychology, he was by no means a supporter of mass democracy. As Spengler pushed for the West's aristocrats to lead the masses into working towards the West's preservation as shown with his discussion of characters like Cecil Rhodes and Mussolini as the ideal "Caesars" for the West's final phase, Kennan believed a benevolent dictator may be necessary to protect the West from itself. Over the course of his life, Kennan grappled with what he believed the ideal form of government could be.

This internal conflict is evident in Kennan's beliefs surrounding democracy as his views were often contradictory with his work as a statesman. He spent the majority of his life attempting to preserve Western democracy while simultaneously resenting it. He shared Spengler's belief that egalitarianism was doomed to bring about nothing more than chaos and destruction and that a nation could only persist when governed by an elite body that took the form of a dictatorship or a representative elite. As the United States continued to push for more equal rights such as strengthening the rights of women and minorities, his outlook became more pessimistic.

Kennan concludes "The Long Telegram" with: "Finally we must have courage and self-confidence to cling to our own methods and conceptions of human society. After all, the greatest danger that can befall us in coping with this problem of Soviet communism, is that we shall allow ourselves to become like those with whom we are coping." While on the surface, Kennan may be warning about the dangers of any form of authoritarianism, he seems to be much more concerned with a specific type of authoritarianism that feeds off of indifferent masses. Since his early days as a foreign policy analyst, Kennan demonstrates an active concern surrounding

Soviet dictatorship but is willing to support an undemocratic government as long as it coincides with its own nation's principles and values. Despite Kennan's active work towards dismantling Prussianism and combating global authoritarianism throughout his service working for the United States military during World War II, he actively supported hierarchical and aristocratic governments. His anti-democratic views, while rooted in other thinkers he was influenced by like Burke and Gibbons, stems from ideas pushed by Spengler throughout his many works.

Kennan grappled with the traditional democratic values of the United States over the course of his life. He wrote about the failures of democracy and his beliefs that both capitalist and socialist policies will only exacerbate them further. Kennan believed the only viable solutions to preserving the west was either a benevolent romantic dictator, that would inspire the common man while simultaneously operating outside their authority or a landed aristocracy that would govern the state. "if any democracy survives it will be, as in Latin America, a romantic-Garibaldian type of democracy, founded on the interaction of an emotional populace and a stirring, heroic type of popular leader."³⁰ Both of these solutions directly mirror Spengler's concepts of a Caesar figure and a Prussianist elite ruling class.

Kennan's views surrounding a landing aristocracy governing the United States can be seen best in his 1938 essay titled, "The Prerequisites"³¹ where he argues that the ideal form of government for the United States is a panel of oligarchs, referred to as the "Council of State." These oligarchs would be selected by the President and operate practically outside of any democratic oversight. This "Council of State" functions exactly as a Prussian government would under a chancellor where a select group of noblemen would run the state and the general masses

³⁰ George F. Kennan and Frank Costigliola, *The Kennan Diaries* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015), 336.

³¹George F Kennan, ms, *The Prerequisites: Notes on the Problems of the United States in 1938* (1938).

would have little to no say in the activities of the government beyond the executive. Over the course of Kennan's life, he would continually change his standards how democratic a society should be within his ideal aristocracy. These resulted in proposed governing methods such as an aristocracy of appointed advisors to a representative democracy with the same voting laws as the 18th century United States. Yet, while his ideas surrounding the ideal government changed throughout his life, Kennan always believed that, since a landed elite could not emerge due to the general principles of the United States, a dictator (or as stated previously a romantic Garibaldi-esque figure) was necessary for the preservation of the United States.

These views persisted over the course of Kennan's career. In 1957, during the period between his work as ambassador to the Soviet Union to Yugoslavia, he penned, "The truth is that democracy in the Western world could be saved from itself only by 50 years of benevolent dictatorship which would, like a doctor, restore the patient to a reasonable state of vigor and then put him on his own again."³² While this passage was only written in his personal diaries, it shows Kennan's prevailing belief that the only solution to preserving the west is some form of Spenglerian Caesarism.

While Kennan was ardently anti-democratic, his views were for the most part hidden from public life. Few of his writings actively spoke out against democracy. Those that did were hidden from the public. Over the course of his life, writings like "The Prerequisites" which argued against increasing suffrage and returning to a less democratic republic, although now found in the Princeton archives, were initially kept hidden from the public, so as not to hinder his reputation.³³

³² George F. Kennan and Frank Costigliola, *The Kennan Diaries*, 403.

³³ David Engerman, "George Kennan, A Conservative's Conservative," *Chicago Tribune*, August 22, 2021, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2005-03-22-0503220317-story.html>.

Numerous Kennan scholars such as Gaddis and Thompson argue that his anti-democratic views appear almost out of nowhere and attribute them more to his personal life and cynical attitude rather than his intellectual biography.³⁴³⁵ Thompson would go far enough to refer to Kennan as like the oracle of Delphi, where some of his thoughts were prophetic (his foreign policy views and assessment of NATO) while others were completely gibberish and nonsensical (his views surrounding American democracy).³⁶ While his troubled personal life was surely a factor in determining his disposition towards the various institutions he was surrounded by and the thinkers he may have been pushed towards, his ideas were built upon the philosophical and political concepts pushed by Spengler. Kennan's desire for a council of aristocrats to govern the state directly mirrors Spengler's Prussianism. Additionally, Kennan views Spengler's Caesar as the only worthwhile leader that can and should come to power in the west. Like Spengler, Kennan believed that since a Prussianist government is not attainable under the circumstances established from World War I for the West, a Caesar must rise to power to help soften the decline of the West.

George F. Kennan's views on both domestic and foreign policy owe a huge debt to the works of Oswald Spengler. Domestically, Kennan's views surrounding democracy were heavily influenced by Spengler's conception of Prussianism as shown by his negative views surrounding democracy and his beliefs on the form of government that should be instituted over democracy. Kennan's groundbreaking foreign policy theory, containment, owes a great debt to Spengler's conception of civilizational cultural decline. As discussed, Kennan based his theory on the best

³⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

³⁵ Nicholas Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War* (New York: Picador, 2010).

³⁶ "The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War," *New Books in National Security* (Spotify, February 18, 2010).

method of combating socialism through actively preventing the decline of the west through cultural institutions and morale rather than simply battling Russia on the world stage.

Conclusion

Spengler, who cited Nietzsche as one of his two major influences, dedicated his life's work to actualizing the concept proposed by Nietzsche in his work the *Will to Power*. Spengler, clearly building on Nietzsche's conception of history as written in *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* where he wrote, "The unhistorical and the historical are equally necessary for the health of an individual, a people and a culture."³⁷ Spengler's works are dedicated to fulfilling this mission; he analyzes the historical so it may include the eternal principles proposed by Goethe in his philosophical, scientific, and artistic works. He utilized a macrocosmic worldview of civilization to illustrate the likeliness of major cultures and civilizations to rise and fall. His works not only analyzed history from this perspective but also utilized this perspective to help understand the political events of his time. While his methods and concepts were utilized by German nationalists, his followers go far beyond them. These disciples have utilized his concepts surrounding cultural pessimism for their own ideology and agenda.

Kennan followed the teachings of Spengler throughout his long career as a statesman. He actively referenced the cultural soul as a concept in the majority of his work. He opposed democracy and capitalism and viewed them as directly leading to socialism. Additionally, he viewed Prussianism as the best solution to stave off the decline and collapse of Western Civilization in the post-war era. The roots of theories surrounding foreign policy as well as his

³⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (Indianapolis: Hackett, n.d.).

method of analyzing global politics can be seen directly in the works and philosophy of Oswald Spengler.

Today, Spengler is often viewed as a darling to the far right and is mostly analyzed by intellectual historians and political dissidents. Many view his successors as political scientists and historians who utilized his analysis of cultural history as nothing more than a jumping off point. However, Spengler's work has a significantly deeper impact on both American life and the world than simply a method of historiography, political analysis, and reading material for a select few. Major political figures beyond those discussed over the course of this essay have utilized Spengler as their foundation including: Adolf Hitler, Malcom X, Richard Nixon, and more. Additionally, Spengler has influenced major academics across many fields including: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Samuel P. Huntington, Arnold J. Toynbee, Carol Quigley, and more. Additionally, authors such as: H.P. Lovecraft, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Henry Miller credited Spengler and his works as incredibly valuable to their own intellectual development. While Spengler may be brushed aside as nothing more than an outdated figure whose effect on history stops at the early 20th century, his ideas must be understood to properly analyze today's circumstances.

Today, political scientists, civil servants, and pundits involved in current affairs are forced to confront numerous policies and long-term agendas that are the direct result of Spengler and his followers. Policy agendas affecting both domestic and foreign policy have been built on the ideas purported by these figures and more importantly function as the basis of all future policies to be enacted. While many desire change in American foreign policy, this cannot be done without understanding the intellectual roots of modern American foreign policy, why, and how they have emerged overtime.

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