



The Kennan Diaries

By George F. Kennan

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A landmark collection, spanning ninety years of U.S. history, of the never-before-published diaries of George F. Kennan, America's most famous diplomat.

On a hot July afternoon in 1953, George F. Kennan descended the steps of the State Department building as a newly retired man. His career had been tumultuous: early postings in eastern Europe followed by Berlin in 1940–41 and Moscow in the last year of World War II. In 1946, the forty-two-year-old Kennan authored the “Long Telegram,” a 5,500-word indictment of the Kremlin that became mandatory reading in Washington. A year later, in an article in *Foreign Affairs*, he outlined “containment,” America’s guiding strategy in the Cold War. Yet what should have been the pinnacle of his career? an ambassadorship in Moscow in 1952? was sabotaged by Kennan himself, deeply frustrated at his failure to ease the Cold War that he had helped launch.

Yet, if it wasn’t the pinnacle, neither was it the capstone; over the next fifty years, Kennan would become the most respected foreign policy thinker of the twentieth century, giving influential lectures, advising presidents, and authoring twenty books, winning two Pulitzer prizes and two National Book awards in the process.

Through it all, Kennan kept a diary. Spanning a staggering eighty-eight years and totaling over 8,000 pages, his journals brim with keen political and moral insights, philosophical ruminations, poetry, and vivid descriptions. In these pages, we see Kennan rambling through 1920s Europe as a college student, despairing for capitalism in the midst of the Depression, agonizing over the dilemmas of sex and marriage, becoming enchanted and then horrified by Soviet Russia, and developing into America’s foremost Soviet analyst. But it is the second half of this near-century-long record—the blossoming of Kennan the gifted author, wise counselor, and biting critic of the Vietnam and Iraq wars—that showcases this remarkable man at the height of his singular analytic and expressive powers, before giving way, heartbreakingly, to some of his most human moments, as his energy, memory, and finally his ability to write fade away.

Masterfully selected and annotated by historian Frank Costigliola, the result is a

landmark work of profound intellectual and emotional power. These diaries tell the complete narrative of Kennan's life in his own intimate and unflinching words and, through him, the arc of world events in the twentieth century.

16 pages of photographs

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The Kennan Diaries by George F. Kennan Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Few American diplomats and historians were as prominent and as honored as George Kennan, whose posthumous profile remains high due to the 2011 biography by John Lewis Gaddis and now this edition of diaries Kennan kept during his longlifetime. They reveal, among other things, that he was anything but satisfied by the outward-appearing success of his life and career(s); a querulous tone about the courses of both permeates his private writing. If complaint is one characteristic of the entries, melancholy is another as Kennan confesses unhappiness with many things, from sexuality to American society and democracy to the U.S. Department of State. Perhaps psychic candor motivated his diary-keeping (though Kennan writes quite guardedly about his probable infidelities), but as important an impulse was his desire that his ideas, philosophical and political, be published. Kennan, of course, did this in a best-selling book (*Around the Cragged Hill*, 1993), but in this format his ideas appear in unrefined though typically trenchant form. Readers familiar with Kennan's place in the hardheaded arena of international relations may be surprised to meet the fragile and often despairing personality in these diaries but will respect the searching honesty with which he examined his experiences of witnessing the turbulent twentieth century. --Gilbert Taylor

Review

George Kennan's diaries are arguably the most remarkable work of sustained self-analysis--and certainly self-criticism--since *The Education of Henry Adams*. Frank Costigliola has assembled them with great skill and sensitivity. --John Lewis Gaddis, author of *George F. Kennan: An American Life*

Frank Costigliola's superb edition of George Kennan's diaries is a major addition to the literature on America's role in the twentieth-century world. It reminds us of why Kennan should be remembered as one of America's most astute commentators on the limits of our power and influence abroad. --Robert Dallek, historian and author of *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963*

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The Kennan Diaries are a vivid journey into the private thoughts and often contrary opinions of the diplomat whose influence permeated U.S. Cold War foreign policy. Eloquent and perceptive, Kennan left a moving personal record of the historic events he experienced and helped shape. --Henry A. Kissinger, former Secretary of State"

An informed mind, a clarity of expression, candor in a private diary all are present in George Kennan's fascinating commentary on a period when the tectonic plates of the world changed. Read, enjoy, agree or disagree, and be stimulated to think. --George P. Shultz, former Secretary of State"

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The diaries provide a window onto the intellectual and emotional life of the great American diplomat and

thinker who had a more profound influence on American foreign policy than he recognized. [They] make fascinating reading. --Jack F. Matlock Jr., former ambassador to the Soviet Union and author of *Autopsy on an Empire*"

[T]he publication of *The Kennan Diaries* is a major event. University of Connecticut historian Frank Costigliola has ably culled Kennan's herculean, 20,000-page private diary (which he kept for 88 years and which is now housed at Princeton University's Mudd Library) into an erudite, reader-friendly volume. --Douglas Brinkley"

The Kennan Diaries is an illuminating, fascinating and sometimes disturbing book. --Fareed Zakaria"

Costigliola has done a service to policy-makers and students of foreign policy and history by organizing this rich trove of wisdom and experience from one of the greatest minds in the history of U.S. foreign affairs. --Edward A. Turzanski"

Valuable insight Intellectually and literarily compelling. --Edward A. Turzanski"

Irresistibly readable Mr. Kennan has come through one last time with a book that illuminates in intricate and imaginative ways not only his times, but himself. --James A. Warren"

Fascinating. --David Greenberg"

About the Author

George F. Kennan was America's most acclaimed Cold War diplomat as well as a prize-winning historian and author.

Frank Costigliola is an author and historian at the University of Connecticut specializing in U.S. foreign relations in the twentieth century.

Users Review

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Alberto Redden:

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