

The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made: Acheson, Bohlen,... Study Guide

**The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made:
Acheson, Bohlen,... by Walter Isaacson**

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Plot Summary

The *Wise Men, Six Friends and the World They Made* is written by Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas. It is the fascinating story of six men: George Kennan, Dean Acheson, Charles Bohlen, Robert Lovett, Averell Harriman and John McCloy. The six men became friends during their school days or in the beginning of their careers and they remained friends throughout their lives.

These six men became known as The Wise Men. They were all instrumental in the formulation of United States foreign policy during and after World War II. They each had their own area of expertise and principles. They did not always agree with one another but were never afraid to state their opinions. Because of this, they were each respected by the different Presidents who valued their input.

The six men were well educated at the best schools - Yale, Princeton and Harvard. All of these schools fostered a commitment to public service which each of the men felt. They served various Presidents on and off for their entire lives. After school, they each went their separate ways.

William Averell Harriman was the son of the owner of the Union Pacific Railroad and born into immense wealth. He went into business after his graduation from Yale. Harriman made his first trip to tsarist Russia as a child and would make many more in his life. Because of his business contacts and dealings with the Soviets, he became Roosevelt's special envoy to Churchill and Stalin. He functioned as a roving diplomat throughout his life.

Dean Acheson first met Harriman during their days at Yale and after Yale, attended Harvard Law. He became the Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs just prior to World War II and Secretary of State under Harry Truman. He helped to formulate the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine and was an influential adviser to Presidents throughout his life.

Charles Eustis Bohlen was a Harvard graduate. George Frost Kennan was a Princeton graduate. Both made their careers in the Foreign Service and became experts in Soviet Affairs.

Robert Abercrombie Lovett graduated from Yale and Harvard Law. He worked for Secretary of War Stimson during the war and then returned to the private sector. John Jay McCloy was a graduate of Amherst and Harvard Law. Although both men were in the private sector after World War II, they were very influential and their opinions well respected.

These six men helped formulate and shape the foreign policy of the United States from World War II through the Vietnam era. They were active in the various negotiations that shaped the post World War II world.

Architects and Chapter 1

Architects and Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

Averell Harriman was ambassador to Russia and had doubts about the Franklin Roosevelt views that the United States and Russia could be allies after World War II. He went to Washington for consultation leaving George Kennan in charge. John McCloy was the Assistant Secretary of War and believed the United States should not become isolationist after the war. Robert Lovett was the Assistant Secretary of War and preparing to leave for Europe and Asia. Dean Acheson was Assistant Secretary of State and had faith in Truman as president.

These six men had been friends from their school days and careers on Wall Street and government and were now at the forefront of American policy. They were the American establishment and known as The Wise Men; their goal was to limit the spread of Soviet Communism.

Chapter One is about the early years of four of the six men. Harriman and Acheson met at Groton prep school. Harriman was the son of a wealthy railway tycoon and grew up in New York. He traveled widely as a child.

Acheson was the son of a New England minister and grew up in Middletown, Connecticut. He attended Groton where he met Harriman.

Chip Bohlen came from Grindstone Island, New York. His family also had a summer home in Aiken, South Carolina and they traveled to Paris every year.

Robert Lovett grew up in Huntsville, Boston and New York where his father was an executive for E.H. Harriman. He met Averell when they were children. Lovett's father ran the Union Pacific after the death of E.H. Harriman. After achieving an outstanding academic record at The Hill School in Philadelphia, Lovett then attended Yale.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

John McCloy was born and raised in Philadelphia. His father died when he was six years of age and he was raised by his mother who had ambitions for him. He secured summer jobs with many of his mother's wealthy clients. Having attended school at Maplewood and The Peddie School in New Jersey, McCloy went on to Amherst. He tutored the children of the wealthy during summers. This was his mother's way of ensuring that he made the right social contacts. He left Harvard Law School to enlist in the Army.

George Kennan was from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where his father practiced tax law. He attended St. Johns Military Academy near Milwaukee and then Princeton. George spent a year in Europe with Constantine Messolonghitis.

Before World War I, the East Coast schools were very elite. The most elite club at Yale, Skull and Bones, was secret and prestigious. Harriman became a member in 1912. He was also very active in sports, a prerequisite for Skull and Bones membership. Sports were emphasized more than academic performance. Harriman spent six weeks at Oxford learning English rowing techniques and then coached the Yale team. Harriman did not serve in the military in World War I. He instead purchased a ship building company. He was married with two children at the time.

Acheson belonged to many clubs at Yale, which he entered in 1911. He was on the crew team coached by Harriman and joined the Scroll and Key club, which was less prestigious than Skull and Bones. After Harvard Law School, Acheson worked as an assistant United States Attorney in New York and then returned to teach law at Harvard.

Lovett was Phi Beta Kappa at Yale where he formed the Naval Reserve Flying Corps. The unit saw active service with Britain's Royal Naval Air Service in 1917. He received his Yale degree in absentia during the war and was elected to Skull and Bones.

Chip Bohlen joined Harvard's Sphinx-Kalumet club, the most prestigious club in the Porcellian, to which he was elected. He majored in modern European history and developed an interest in Marxism and the Bolshevik experiment. After graduation, Bohlen worked on a cargo ship and saw the world.



Chapter 3-4

Chapter 3-4 Summary and Analysis

After World War I, America entered a period of isolationism. Harriman and Lovett, both understanding the importance of trade and global involvement, made careers on Wall Street. Harriman expanded his shipping interests and founded the investment banking house of W.A. Harriman & Company in 1919. His Hamburg American Company began talks with the Soviets in 1922 about establishing a joint shipping company which became operational a few months later. He negotiated deals with Trotsky in Moscow. In Russia, he traveled by private rail car.

Harriman always liked meeting the famous and powerful because he enjoyed the conversations he had with them. He was opposed to Communism but found it profitable to trade with the Soviets. Eventually he took the advice of Winston Churchill and stopped doing business with the Russians.

Harriman was introduced to cafe society by his second wife Marie, who he married in 1930. She collected artwork and opened a gallery on East 57th Street.

Bob Lovett returned to New York after law school at Harvard. In 1919, he married Adele Brown and they built a town house on East 83rd Street. Their friends included many artists and writers. They had a happy marriage until Adele's death in 1986.

In 1933, Harriman merged his investment banking house with Brown Brothers & Company to form Brown Brothers Harriman. Lovett worked for the firm handling the currency operations. They also worked together with Judge Lovett to revamp the Union Pacific Railroad.

Harriman began part time work for the government in 1922 when he volunteered for the New Deal programs.

Chapter Four examines the law careers of McCloy and Acheson. McCloy joined the law firm of Cravath, Henders & de Gersdorff where he came into contact with Harriman and Lovett. All of them were involved in international dealings and McCloy spent a great deal of time in Europe. He married Ellen and they left for Paris where he headed the firm's Paris office. In 1955, they moved to Washington where McCloy handled the big Bethlehem Steel case involving German espionage.

Acheson began his law career in Washington with Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis. After two years of clerking for Brandeis, he joined the law firm of Covington & Burling where he worked on a case involving the Norwegian government claim against the United States.

Acheson and his wife Alice lived in Georgetown; they also had a farm in Sandy Spring, Maryland. Dean belonged to numerous clubs and when he worked for the Attorney

General's office under Roosevelt, he resigned rather than compromise his principles. Roosevelt offered him various positions but he turned them down.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

George Kennan couldn't afford law school and entered the Foreign Service. Chip Bohlen passed the Foreign Service exam. He already knew the value of having the right connections and Kennan learned as soon as he arrived in Washington.

Bohlen was sent to Prague. He performed well and was said to have had potential but had problems with report writing. Kennan, who was sent to Germany, was a good writer. Bohlen enjoyed life in Europe while Kennan did not.

A program was formed to train Soviet specialists at European universities and then station them somewhere in the surrounding countries. Bohlen was sent to study in Paris. Kennan studied in Berlin for two years and was then sent to Riga. At this time, the Soviet Specialists could not go to Russia. They had to go to one of the surrounding countries.

Bohlen was comfortable among the Russian people. Kennan had a more difficult time. The major issue confronting the Soviet Specialists involved the establishing of diplomatic relations with Russia. Kennan opposed formal recognition. In 1933, both Bohlen and Kennan were in Washington when President Roosevelt met with Maxim Litvinov, the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs. Both worked on reports for the talks. The talks resulted in establishing diplomatic relations. William Bullitt was the United States Ambassador and he selected Kennan and Bohlen for positions in Moscow.

The staff had to find, furnish and organize the American Embassy in Moscow. They were encouraged to travel as much as possible. A group rented a dacha which they all shared for getaways. They were all happy until the purges in 1934. After that, Bohlen and Kennan alternated their service between Washington and Moscow instead of both being in the same place. The Russian Desk at the State Department worked with businessmen like Harriman who had business interests in Russia.

In 1940, the Germans and Russians signed an agreement to divide Poland. The Nazis were expanding across Europe at this time.

Chapters 6-7

Chapters 6-7 Summary and Analysis

America entered a period of isolationism after World War I. When Nazism began to spread across Europe, men like William Stimson urged the country to rearm and come out of isolationism. At the age of seventy-three, he became Roosevelt's Secretary of War. He summoned McCloy to work for him on German espionage.

In May 1940, Lovett was on the last of his European tours for Brown Brothers. At this time, Acheson also opposed isolationism and worked to implement Roosevelt's Lend Lease program. Acheson became the Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs for Hull.

Harriman accepted a position as transportation adviser to the National Defense Advisory Commission at a token salary of one dollar a year. He was sent to London to ascertain how the United States could help Britain. While he was there, the Japanese attacked on Pearl Harbor.

Chapter Seven focuses on the War Department and McCloy and Lovett. McCloy and Lovett were both on Stimson's staff and he called them the Heavenly Twins; they worked there until 1945. Both men were good in dealing with Congress. McCloy was assigned to relocate Japanese Americans to camps, a project whose moral implications he wrestled with for years. He did what he could to help them. The construction of the Pentagon was another project in which McCloy was involved. He earned the reputation of being a fixer.

Lovett was involved with the production of armaments. Robert McNamara worked for him.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

When Churchill and Roosevelt met in 1941, they produced the Atlantic Charter promoting free trade and free people. Roosevelt had to make concessions to Stalin and Harriman was sent to Moscow along with Lord Beaverbrook. Hitler and Stalin had become enemies. Churchill and Roosevelt negotiated an armaments supply deal under Lend-Lease.

The negotiations with the Soviets and the discovery of ten thousand Polish officers massacred by the Soviets began to change Harriman's views. He started to believe that the Americans must be sterner in their dealings with Moscow or there would be problems later.

Both Harriman and Acheson believed in providing post war aid to war torn economies but the Soviets wanted control of anything within their borders. Harriman finally agreed to become the United States Ambassador to Russia in 1943, an appointment he had refused in the past. Harriman worried about the freedom of Poland after the war but Roosevelt wasn't concerned. In June 1949, Kennan was sent to Moscow as a counselor. Harriman had wanted Bohlen but he worked for Harry Hopkins as chief of the State Department's Soviet Section.

The situation in Poland worsened and there was an uprising in Warsaw against the Nazis. One quarter of the Warsaw population died before Stalin agreed to respond to the situation. The uprising was staged by the London Poles who opposed Stalin.

In 1944, there was dissension over what to do with post-war Germany and thoughts of removing its industrial base. Wall Street favored a revived Germany because of the business opportunities. Harriman, McCloy, Stimson, Lovett and Acheson favored a revived Germany as a way of revitalizing the rest of Europe. Different plans were examined.

In Fall 1944, it was becoming clear that the Soviets planned to control the post-war countries around them by insisting they have friendly governments. Churchill was secretly discussing the issue with Stalin. Harriman sat in on the talks but had no authority to negotiate for the United States. Harriman and others worried about the establishment of police states especially since the Red Army already controlled most of Eastern Europe. Harriman proposed the forerunner of what became the Marshall Plan which represented American spheres of influence to counter the Soviets, even though this was not its intention. Roosevelt died before he could discuss the issue with Harriman.

Chapters 9-10

Chapters 9-10 Summary and Analysis

Harry Truman became president after Roosevelt's death. Roosevelt had made decisions on his own while Truman made it clear that he would rely on his staff for input. He had to deal with many important issues that first month as the war in Europe was ending and the rift with the Soviets was becoming more public.

Harriman wanted to return to Washington to brief Truman but was told to remain in Moscow. He talked Stalin into sending Foreign Minister Molotov to the opening of the United Nations so he could accompany him.

Bohlen got along well with Truman and worked with Stettinius to brief him about the problems with the Soviets. Harriman also briefed the new President. At the meeting with Molotov, Truman made it clear that the United States wanted Stalin to adhere to the terms of the Yalta agreement.

At the opening of the United Nations in San Francisco, it was obvious that the rift between the United States and the Soviet Union was widening, but people still believed that they could work out their differences.

The Soviets were tightening their control in Eastern Europe and the Americans were trying to stall dealing with the situation until they tested the atomic bomb. At this time, the United States did not want to be portrayed as part of the block led by Great Britain against Russia. Stalin assured the Americans that they only wanted their security buffer of friendly countries and had no plans to expand beyond them. Hopkins, who was ill with cancer, traveled to Moscow and negotiated a coalition government for Poland.

McCloy was touring occupied Germany when he learned of Roosevelt's death. Most officials agreed that the part of Germany under Western control should be strong and used to prevent the spread of Communism. They didn't want the German industrial base dismantled and shipped to Soviet Russia.

The Potsdam meetings were the third and last meetings of the Grand Alliance. Germany's fate was decided and the United States team began to formulate policy for the post-war world. While waiting at Potsdam, they learned of the success of the New Mexico nuclear test. Talks included post-war control of nuclear weapons.



Chapters 11-12

Chapters 11-12 Summary and Analysis

The atomic bomb was dropped August 6, 1945 on Hiroshima. Three days later, a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. Japan surrendered the next day. Acheson resigned since he was anxious to return to private life, but his resignation was not accepted. He became Under Secretary of State.

Meetings and discussions took place regarding the domestic and international control of atomic energy. The initial thinking was that the United States could share control of nuclear weapons with the Soviets, even though they did not yet have the bomb. Kennan recommended the formation of an agency to gather intelligence on the Soviets. He did not favor sharing atomic control with the Soviets.

Harriman met with Stalin at his Black Sea dacha. He wanted to learn Stalin's post-war intentions and found that Stalin favored the Soviets following their own unilateral policies. The United States did not want the Soviets to be involved in Japan and there were many discussions about the subject. The Soviets were given no authority in the end.

McCloy opposed United States isolationism believing that it contributed to the situation in Europe. He returned to private life and a position with Milbank, Tweed. Lovett also returned to the private sector, resuming his position with Brown Brothers Harriman.

Bohlen became the Soviet expert at the State Department and was very concerned with the kinds of governments being established in the Eastern European countries. Stalin agreed to a United Nations commission on atomic control but refused to relent on Eastern Europe.

In Chapter Twelve, Harriman warned against the Soviet views and plans and stated that the incompatibility between the two systems could lead to another war. The Soviets were not interested in international cooperation. Bohlen believed that the world was being divided into two hostile camps.

By the summer of 1946, Acheson was advocating dealing firmly with the Soviets when they acted aggressively. He believed that the only way to keep the Soviets from spreading to Turkey and the Middle East was to let them know that aggression would result in war with the United States. This view would eventually lead to the Truman Doctrine and the policy of containment.

Harriman left Moscow and became the Secretary of Commerce.

Chapters 13-14

Chapters 13-14 Summary and Analysis

Britain was beginning to let go of its colonial empire. The British could no longer fulfill the role of maintaining the balance of power in the world and it was obvious to Acheson that America must fill the void. The United States was now the strongest world power. Acheson agreed to work with Marshall.

Acheson and Marshall supported a program of aid to Greece and Turkey. They wanted to make it known that the United States would not support the spread of totalitarianism. The report that Acheson's group wrote in support of this approach became known as the Truman Doctrine, which caused a lot of dissent in the country. In spite of the problems, the Greek-Turkish aid package was approved by Congress.

Kennan became the chief planner for the State Department. He had to deal with the issue of European recovery. The United States would supply massive economic aid to Europe for economic recovery purposes. Acheson, Bohlen, McCloy, Harriman and others were involved in devising the plan. The men all felt a duty to do so. Much of their dedication had to do with their upbringing and schooling. They wanted the plan presented as a humanitarian gesture and not as an anti-Communist measure. The Soviets were invited to join because the experts knew that they couldn't afford to accept.

Lovett had returned to government by this time and was skeptical about Soviet involvement. The Soviets did decline which meant that Eastern European countries couldn't receive aid. Lovett replaced Acheson as Under Secretary.

In Chapter Fourteen, Marshall criticized Kennan for drawing too much publicity. He was having public misunderstandings with columnist Walter Lippmann and the Communist Party was causing unrest in Europe at the time.

McCloy becomes president of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The World Bank is eight months old at the time. McCloy believes strongly in private investment in Europe.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary and Analysis

In February 1948, problems began in Czechoslovakia. A Soviet puppet government was installed after the death of Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk and the fear of war was prevalent.

American ships began to travel to Europe with technology, goods and produce. Harriman was selected to administer the Marshall Plan in Europe and was given the title of United States Special Representative in Europe.

Kennan's suggestions for a covert operations agency were heard and the CIA was created. Neither Bohlen nor Kennan wanted to see the Soviets provoked. The Vandenburg Resolution was passed by Congress and this created the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Truman's advisers, Marshall, Forrestal, Lovett, Kennan, Bohlen and Acheson were against the formation of the State of Israel which they viewed as a risk to United States security. They didn't want the Arabs antagonized or a threat to the United States oil supply. Truman supported the State of Israel.

In 1948, there were problems in Germany. The Berlin Blockade began as the Soviets cut off Berlin. The Americans wanted to stay in Berlin but needed to figure out how. If they sent in troops, the Russians could just take out bridges and strand them. The United States forces prepared for war as an airlift brought food and supplies to Berlin.

Acheson became Secretary of State and the United States watched the effectiveness of its policies in Europe. Bohlen became the United States Ambassador to France in 1949. The day Acheson took office, Chiang Kai-shek and his forces left mainland China. Acheson considered recognizing the Red Chinese but Truman opposed the idea. France also began to have problems with Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam at this time. The United States started giving France financial aid to fight Communism in Vietnam.



Chapter 16-17

Chapter 16-17 Summary and Analysis

In September 1949, Russia detonated a nuclear bomb. Nuclear disarmament became an interest of Kennan. At this time, Paul Nitze was Kennan's deputy planner. Scientists responded to the Russian bomb by saying that the United States should build a bigger bomb. Acheson was part of a three man commission to study the issue. Kennan believed that a super bomb would escalate the arms race. Nitze was convinced that more defense spending was a necessity as a deterrent to Soviet expansion.

In January 1950, Alger Hiss was convicted of perjury for lying about giving classified documents to a Russian agent. Wisconsin Senator Joe McCarthy began to investigate communists in the State Department. Acheson damaged his credibility by defending Hiss and others.

Intelligence reports stated that the Soviets were building a nuclear arsenal and this fed fears of war in 1955. Acheson, Lovett, Nitze and Harriman updated NSC-68 for the incoming Eisenhower Administration in 1952. They emphasized stemming the spread of communism, but they overestimated Soviet strength.

Chapter Seventeen deals with the North Korean invasion of South Korea on June 24, 1950. On June 30, Truman gave the order to United States troops to engage the North Koreans without consulting Congress.

McCloy helped to form the European Coal and Steel Community, the forerunner of the Common Market. They rearmed Germany to provide for a stronger Europe.

Dean Rusk favored allowing United States troops to cross into North Korea. Acheson was also in agreement. Plan CHROMITE was formulated and Harriman helped gain defense backing.

Chapters 18-19

Chapters 18-19 Summary and Analysis

In October 1950, Chinese Communist troops entered the Korean conflict. General Douglas MacArthur commanded the troops there and had disagreements with the people at the State Department. MacArthur's offensive was met by 300,000 Communist Chinese who caused the Americans to retreat. The Americans were trapped.

Acheson called on Kennan for help with the situation. Acheson was having problems with a Congress that wanted his resignation.

MacArthur wanted an all out offensive against the Chinese. The group at State tried to have MacArthur use caution in his public statements. There were more people, like Lovett, wanting MacArthur removed which soon happened.

Kennan, at this time, was enjoying academic life at Princeton. He accepted the position as Ambassador to the Soviet Union. He found Russian security tighter than it had been in the 1930s and 1940s. As a result of a comment in which he compared Stalin to Hitler, he was declared persona non grata in Russia.

Lovett became Secretary of Defense in 1951.

Chapter Nineteen begins with the United States public wanting a tough stance against the Communists. After the election of Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles became the Secretary of State. Acheson and Harriman didn't like Dulles. The group of men who had been so influential in policy making were now out of power.

Eisenhower named Chip Bohlen as the Ambassador to Moscow. McCloy returned to work on Wall Street. He would remain in the private sector except to briefly serve under Kennedy. He helped the country in his private sector role.

Stalin died and changes took place in Moscow. Bohlen was relieved of his Moscow post and became ambassador to the Philippines. He was maneuvered out by Dulles.



Chapter 20-21

Chapter 20-21 Summary and Analysis

Acheson tried to block Kennedy from receiving the 1960 Presidential nomination. Kennedy consulted him after the election regarding the positions of State, Treasury and Defense. Acheson turned down the position of Ambassador to NATO. Kennedy offered the positions of State, Treasury or Defense Secretary to Lovett who refused for health reasons. Acheson, Lovett and McCloy all backed Rusk for Secretary of State. McCloy agreed to be a special adviser for arms control. Bohlen became the State Department's Soviet expert for Rusk.

Bohlen, Kennan and Harriman advised Kennedy to convene a summit meeting with Khrushchev. Harriman took an extensive tour of the Soviet Union and met with Khrushchev. He concluded that it would be possible to negotiate with Khrushchev. Harriman became a Roving Ambassador in the Kennedy Administration.

In Chapter Twenty One, Harriman is sent to Laos in preparation for talks in Geneva. He visited Laotian Prince Souvanna in India.

Acheson functioned as an adviser on Berlin and Germany filling a void that existed in the State Department. He believed that the United States should mobilize and not negotiate which brought him into conflict with Harriman. His hard line was too risky for Kennedy even though Vice President Johnson agreed with him.

The Russian leader made it clear that the Russians wanted the United States out of Berlin. They built the Berlin Wall as the two superpowers grew closer to war. Acheson believed that once the wall was built the United States had lost Berlin.

Harriman negotiated an agreement guaranteeing the neutrality of Laos in July 1962. He was the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs.

On October 15, 1962, CIA reconnaissance photographs indicated the presence of missiles in Cuba. McCloy, Acheson, and Lovett were part of the policy team known as the Executive Committee, or ExCom, for the missile crisis. Bohlen, who was named Ambassador to France, also discussed Cuba with Kennedy and said he wished he had talked him out of the Bay of Pigs invasion. Kennedy wanted him to be part of ExCom but Bohlen says that any change in his plans would lead to speculation that the Americans knew about the missiles in Cuba. Lovett was also called in to consult and favored a blockade over air strikes. Negotiators ended the crisis.

Khrushchev agreed to resume talks on a nuclear test ban in July 1963. Harriman was selected as negotiator. Andrei Gromyko was selected as negotiator for the Soviets. They negotiated the treaty in less than two weeks.

The situation in Vietnam began to worsen. American involvement was deepening. Harriman lost his position over the authorization of a coup in Vietnam.



Chapter 22-23

Chapter 22-23 Summary and Analysis

Johnson had more of a hard line attitude toward Vietnam than Kennedy did. He relied on both Acheson and McCloy for advice. The United States was involved in Vietnam and had to stay until the end. The Wise Men advised sending in ground troops.

Rusk knew that the Chinese would intervene in Vietnam just as they had in Korea. In 1965, the United States began bombing the North.

Harriman was trying to bring some attention to the problems in Africa. He traveled to Russia to meet with Aleksei Kosygin who told him that the Russians would not act as mediator with Hanoi. Johnson sent him on a trip to spread the word that the United States wanted peace negotiations. Harriman told a group of senators that the North Vietnamese would only come to the bargaining table if they were forced.

In Chapter Twenty Three, Harriman is placed in charge of all diplomatic efforts to end the war in the summer of 1966. They believed that the United States couldn't win militarily and must negotiate. All of their peace efforts failed. Harriman still believed in a negotiated peace but Johnson feared a right wing reaction if they negotiated a peace.

There were protests against the war and 74 year-old Acheson had problems understanding this. At one point he walked out of a meeting with the President and was called back. Acheson demanded to be fully briefed on the situation.

Clark Clifford became Secretary of Defense on March 1. He became an ardent hawk like Johnson, even though he told Johnson that the United States couldn't win the war. The Tet offensive represented a setback. Clifford suggested that Johnson call a meeting with The Wise Men, the group from the preceding November. They concluded that the United States must get out of Vietnam and soon after, Hanoi accepted the invitation to discuss negotiations.

Harriman was the chief negotiator and Cyrus Vance was sent to help. The talks and the fighting dragged on and it wasn't until right before Nixon's inauguration that the South Vietnamese decided to join the talks.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary and Analysis

The anti-war protests escalated by Spring 1970.

The Nixon Administration was Republican. When Nixon expanded the bombing, Acheson disagreed with him. Congress was becoming more active in the Vietnam debate which enraged Acheson.

Bohlen retired from the Foreign Service in 1969 at the age of 64. In 1973, he was dying of cancer. Kennan visited him before he died on January 1, 1974.

Kennan, like Acheson didn't like Congress interfering in foreign affairs. Kennan supported a policy of no first use of nuclear weapons and he remained friends with Nitze.

Harriman still believed in diplomacy and the power of negotiations. A new class of foreign policy specialists, like Kissinger and Brzezinski, now existed. Harriman did not agree with Brzezinski on the issues or methods. Harriman visited the Soviet Union for the last time in 1983. He was 92 two years of age.

McCloy left banking in 1960 and became a senior partner at Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy. He represented the oil companies and advised them in their dealing with OPEC. His firm also represented the family of the Shah of Iran.

Bob Lovett left government in the 1970s but was still working at his Wall Street office at the age of 89.

These are the men who were all active in the formulation of nonpartisan foreign policy. This was the group who sought to salvage Europe and protect the West from the threat of Communism. The small group accomplished more than others who came after them.

Characters

William Averell Harriman

William Averell Harriman was the son of railway tycoon Edward Henry Harriman who had migrated to America from London. His mother was Mary Averell Harriman. He was born on November 15, 1891. He had a sister named Mary and a brother named Roland. Averell was active in many sports and was always very competitive. Born into immense wealth, he was always taught that money should work for the good of society. He grew up in New York City with time spent at Arden, the family estate on the Hudson, located near West Point. He was educated at the exclusive Groton prep school and then Yale. He coached the crew team and became a member of Skull and Bones. Harriman formed his own shipping line and merchant bank after school. He entered government as part of the New Deal and became a special envoy to Churchill and Stalin for President Roosevelt. He had made his first trip to Russia as a child in 1899 when it was still ruled by the tsar. He spent a lot of time negotiating various issues with Stalin and negotiated his own private mineral concession issues with Trotsky. He was also involved in negotiating a limited test-ban treaty with Khrushchev. He married Kitty Lanier Lawrence in 1915 and had two daughters, Mary and Kathleen. He began doing business with the Russians in 1922. Divorced from Kitty in 1929, he married Marie Norton Whitney in 1930. In 1973, Pamela Churchill became his third wife. During his years in Moscow, his daughter Kathleen acted as his hostess. He held many positions during his years in government and was selected as United States Special Representative to Europe to administer the Marshall Plan. He always had the capacity to change and adapt to situations. He died in July 1986.

Dean Acheson

Dean Acheson was born on April 11, 1893. He was the son of a minister, the Reverend Edward Acheson. He was born in Middletown, Connecticut and raised in comfortable circumstances. He was the oldest of three children and sang in the choir at his father's church. Until the age of nine, he was educated by a governess and at a small private school. He then attended Hamlet Lodge boarding school in Pomfret, Connecticut and then Groton. He didn't like Groton and didn't do well academically. Dean entered Yale in 1911 and met Averell Harriman who coached the crew team. He is elected to Scroll and Key Club. After Yale, he attended Harvard Law School where he studied with Felix Frankfurter. He worked as an assistant United States Attorney in New York after graduation and then taught law at Harvard. Acheson served in the Navy in World War I. He married Alice Stanley whom he met while at Yale. After law school he spent two years as a clerk for Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis and then joined the law firm of Covington and Burling.

Just prior to World War II, he accepted a position as Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs. After World War II, he wanted to return to private life but instead



became Under Secretary of State and helped to formulate the Marshall Plan and also the Truman Doctrine. He was Secretary of State in the Truman administration and then returned to private life as a lawyer. He functioned as adviser for President Kennedy who considered him to be an expert on Germany. Kennedy asked him to devise a strategy for dealing with the Russians in Berlin.

Robert Abercrombie Lovett

Robert Abercrombie Lovett was the son of Judge Robert Scott Lovett and Lavinia Chilton Abercrombie. Born on September 14, 1895, he was their only child. He grew up in Huntsville, Boston and New York. He attended Hamilton Military Institute and then the Hill School in Philadelphia and then Yale. He was a member of Skull and Bones. He returned to New York after Harvard Law and married Adele Brown in 1919. He worked for Secretary of War Stimson during World War II and then returned to his position with Brown Brothers Harriman. He served on the boards of various companies and became a trustee of the Carnegie Foundation and Rockefeller Foundation. He died on May 7, 1986.

John Jay McCloy

John Jay McCloy was born on March 31, 1895 in Philadelphia to John and Anna May McCloy. His father died when he was six years of age and he was raised by his mother who was a hairdresser. He was educated at Maplewood school, The Peddie School in New Jersey and then attended Amherst. His Harvard Law School education was interrupted by Army service. He met Harriman and Lovett through his work at the Wall Street law firm of Cravath, Henderson & de Gersdorff. McCloy married Ellen Zinsser in 1930 and they moved to Paris where he headed the Paris office. McCloy returned to the private sector with the change of administration in 1952. He served on many boards and became chairman of the Ford Foundation.

Charles Eustis Bohlen

Charles Eustis Bohlen, known as Chip, was born on August 30, 1904 at Grindstone Island, New York. He was the son of Charles and Celestine. Summers were spent at the family summer home in Aiken, South Carolina. He was educated at St. Paul's in Concord, New Hampshire from which he was expelled. He then attended Harvard and was elected to the prestigious Procellian Club. After Harvard, he entered the Foreign Service. Married to Avis, he served in both Washington and Moscow and other places in the world. He served in both the Truman and Eisenhower and other administrations. He retired in 1969 and died of cancer on January 1, 1974.



George Frost Kennan

George Frost Kennan was born on February 16, 1904 to Kossuth and Florence Kennan in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His mother died and his father married Louise Wheeler when he was five years of age. He was educated at St. John's Military Academy and Princeton. Kennan entered the Foreign Service where he stayed until 1953. He married Annelise Sorenson who he met in Berlin.

Harry S. Truman

Harry S. Truman was from Missouri. As Vice President, he became President upon Roosevelt's death. He relied on the policy advisers to help him formulate foreign policy. Truman made the decision about the use of the atomic bomb and relied on his staff in the formulation of post World War II policy.

Franklin Roosevelt

Franklin Roosevelt was President of the United States during the outbreak of World War II. He was able to draw on the advice of the group known as the Wise Men in the formulation of United States foreign policy even though he formulated most foreign policy on his own. He died in April 1945.

Henry L. Stimson

Henry L. Stimson became Secretary of War in the Roosevelt Administration. He had been a United States Attorney when he first met McCloy. Stimson, whose father was a surgeon, was a graduate of Andover, Yale and Harvard Law.

Lyndon Johnson

Lyndon Johnson assumed the Presidency in 1963 after the death of John Kennedy. In addition to escalating the war in Vietnam, he also tried to negotiate with the North Vietnamese, to no avail. He also relied on the Wise Men for advice.



Objects/Places

Washington DC

Washington DC is located on the east coast of the United States and is the nation's capital.

Paris

Paris is the capital of France which is located in Western Europe.

Berlin

Berlin is the capital of the Western European country of Germany.

Moscow

Moscow is the capital of Russia and the center of control for the entire Soviet Union.

Spaso House

Spaso House is the residence of the United States Ambassador in Moscow.

Arden

Arden is the New York estate of the Harriman family located on the Hudson River.

Vietnam

Vietnam is the country in Southeast Asia where the United States fought against the establishment of a Communist regime.

Wall Street

Wall Street is located in Manhattan and is the heart of the United States financial district.



Yale University

Yale University is located in New Haven, Connecticut.

Harvard University

Harvard University is located in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Princeton University

Princeton University is located in Princeton, New Jersey.

Themes

Containment of Communism

A dominant theme of the book is the Cold War and the fight against Communism.

The United States and the Soviet Union were allies during World War II. Although Roosevelt and Harriman found Stalin difficult, they didn't really begin to have problems until the end of the war. The two nations disagreed about the future of Eastern Europe. Russia wanted a buffer of friendly governments around its borders. The United States did not want the Eastern European countries to become police states with puppet governments. They also did not want to see the spread of Communism. The group did not want to see a weak Germany or see the industrial base dismantled and sent to the Soviet Union. Once Germany was divided, they could see a strong and prosperous Germany as a bulwark against Communism. The group formulated the Marshall Plan as a means to European recovery from the devastation of World War II. What the Marshall Plan really did was to divide Europe into two camps. It wasn't meant to be used as an anti-Communist measure even though that was what it turned out to be. The United States tried to contain the spread of Communism in other parts of the world, namely Korea and Vietnam. By the end of World War II, they decided to take a tough stance against the Communists to contain the spread of Communism. This resulted in military action in some parts of the world and brought the world to the brink of war at times.

Commitment to Public Service

Commitment to public service is another theme of the book.

Each of the men felt the urge to serve their nation in this way. Part of this came from their education at schools like Harvard, Yale and Princeton. These schools promoted their own culture at the time the six men attended, and part of this culture was the commitment to public service. The private sector offered better opportunities for making money than the public sector and all but Kennan and Bohlen opted for private sector employment. Kennan and Bohlen entered the Foreign Service after school where Kennan stayed until 1953 and Bohlen remained until 1969. All of the men worked for government during the war years which was not unusual. Harriman and Acheson worked for the government on and off for their entire lives. They became knowledgeable about different areas and helped shape post World War II policies and the world. Men like Lovett who became private citizens after the war were always available to serve. They became very influential in the different administrations. While they could all have made a great deal more money in the private sector, the money wasn't as important as the service they were performing. The group of six men met early in their careers and became life long friends. While they didn't always agree, they always respected one another's opinions.



Relationships

Relationships is a third theme of the book and there are many different relationships that can be examined. First and foremost is the relationship between the six men.

They met either in school or early in their careers and they remained friends throughout their lives. They worked on different projects together and helped to shape their post World War II world. They didn't always share the same opinions or beliefs. They acted on the basis of their own principles and beliefs and tried to do what was best for America in each situation. None of the men was afraid to state their views. Each of the men respected the others and knew that any criticism was constructive. They would listen to each other's positions because they knew that the positions came from research and careful thoughts. Their different views allowed for meaningful discussions and this was what led to the formulation of the foreign policy of the United States. Not only did each of the men respect the others, the group as a whole was respected and their advice was valued by almost all of the Presidents. This is why they became known as the Wise Men. They took the time to make themselves informed about the different situations and issues so they spoke from knowledge. Much of their advice to Presidents was based on their experience over the years.

Style

Perspective

The *Wise Men, Six Men and the World They Made*, is written in the third person point of view with the authors, Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, functioning as narrators. This approach allows the authors to present the historical and background information that the reader requires. Since the book covers the period from World War II through the Vietnam War era, there is quite a bit of history involved and the authors present the material in a matter of fact manner. There is also plenty of dialogue among the characters of the book so the reader is able to see how they interact and reach the conclusions that they reach. The book is written from the perspective of the authors who present the facts and show how the Wise Men were friends and colleagues.

Both of the authors are well qualified to write a book of this kind. Both are journalists and Harvard educated. Walter Isaacson was named a Rhodes scholar at Pembroke College, Oxford and managing editor of Time magazine. He has also written biographies of Henry Kissinger Benjamin Franklin. Evan Thomas attended the University of Virginia Law School after Harvard and is the managing editor and bureau chief of Newsweek. He has also authored *The Very Best Men*, *The Men to See* and a biography of Robert F. Kennedy.

Tone

Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas write *The Wise Men* in an objective tone. They present the facts as they occur without making any judgments of their own. When examining how foreign policy was determined, they allow the dialogue of the characters to explain the pros and cons of the different situations. The various characters express their opinions; the authors do not. Any of the analysis of the different situations is the analysis of the characters and not the analysis of the authors. The authors do not judge whether the policies implemented were right or wrong. They let the characters do this by quoting their comments of what they believed was right or wrong with the positions they promoted or the policies they made. Whenever there is a criticism of a policy or an opinion, it is the criticism of one of the characters. This approach works very well for the book. The reader can see the pros and cons of the different positions and how they formulated the policy that shaped the post World War II world. The reader can see the kinds of input that went into the different policy decisions and what was accepted or rejected and why. The reader can draw his/her own conclusions about the policy. The authors' intentions were not to criticize the policy but to explain who the Wise Men were and how they worked together to formulate policy.

Structure

The Wise Men is divided into three sections: One is Gathering, Two is Creation and Three is Wise Men. There are 24 chapters in the three parts, each with a chapter number and title. The chapters vary in length from 12 to 43 pages. There is a 22 page section at the beginning entitled Architects of the American Century. This section introduces the six men and presents some biographical information about them and explains why they were important for the formulation of United States foreign policy.

The book contains two photo sections. The first is in the Architects of the American Century section and presents a photo of each man with his bio. The other is later in the book and shows numerous people who are mentioned in the book. Both of these are positive additions because they allow the reader to associate a name with a face.

There is a Table of Contents at the front of the book that gives the chapter number, title and page number. At the back of the book there is an Acknowledgments section where the authors explain how they obtained their material and thank the people involved. There is a detailed Notes section, broken down by chapter, where the authors expand on various information in the book. The detailed Sources section shows the depth of the author's research as does the Photo Credits and Illustrations in Text section. There is also a detailed Index that makes it easy for the reader to look up information.

Quotes

"But by breeding and training, this handful of men and a few of their close colleagues knew that America would have to assume the burden of a global role. Out of duty and desire, they heeded the call to public service. They were the original brightest and best men whose outsized personalities and forceful actions brought order to the postwar chaos and left a legacy that domin'ates American policy to this day.
Architects, pg. 19

"As America entered a new competitive era, the right college education became as important as birth or prep schools in determining a person's social status." Chapter 2, pg. 72

"Europe was industrially devastated and mired in debt; America was throbbing with revitalized factories and in need of new markets. The situation was ripe for financiers interested in foreign investment and trade, internationalists such as Harriman and Lovett who understood America's historic ties to Europe and felt comfortable with her growing involvement in global affairs." Chapter 3, pg. 98

"Along with careers in international law and finance, service in the diplomatic corps offered young men a chance to become part of the country's foreign policy elite."
Chapter 5, pg. 143

"Situated somewhere between these two poles there has stood, through most of the twentieth century, a group of hard-nosed internationalists. They tend to come from Wall Street and State Street, and thus understand well the importance of a prosperous and open global economy." Chapter 6, pg. 179

"Eventually, as the war progressed and the peace loomed, all of them would become increasingly concerned with the same issue, one that would have a direct bearing on their postwar outlook: America's stormy relationship with her Soviet allies." Chapter 8, pg. 211

"They converged at the White House on the afternoon of Monday, April 23, five days after Harriman's return. The purpose of the session was to help the President prepare for his meeting with Molotov; what in fact occurred, however, set the fundamental tone of the new Administration's Soviet policy." Chapter 9, pg. 265

"Yet these men, and most who served in Moscow with them, agreed on one essential point in 1946: because of what they knew firsthand about the nature of the Soviet Union, its fanatic ideology and even more fanatic dictator, it would not be a fit ally for the West, and in fact would be a dangerous adversary." Chapter 11, pg. 381

"Yet to a small, tightly knit group of men in postwar Washington the restoration of Europe seemed not only right, but natural, even obligatory. They saw the world



differently, and they felt within themselves the duty and power to save it." Chapter 13, pg. 406

"There is no equivalent in today's foreign policy bureaucracy to Harriman's position or his power. The immensity and urgency of the task demanded a benevolent despot, and Harriman's authority was unquestioned in Washington as well as in the sixteen European capitals dependent on ERP's beneficence." Chapter 15, pg. 442

"He was damaged goods; he had exhausted his moral capital. By showing his courage in the defense of Hiss, he lost some of his ability to protect other State Department officials far more innocent of Communist ties than Hiss. Acheson was true to himself, and brave. But integrity can be an oddly selfish quality," Chapter 16, pg. 495

"For Acheson, as well as the other architects of America's role in the postwar world, these would be years of exile. After seven years of extraordinary global power, these men suddenly found themselves engaged in lonely scholarship or attending to the narrow concerns of private clients, a lucrative but not altogether rewarding existence." Chapter 19, pg. 563

"The missiles could not remain in Cuba. The Soviets were testing Kennedy, and he had to respond, quickly and firmly. If need be, an air strike should be launched and the island invaded by American troops." Chapter 20, pg. 620

"When President Kennedy sent LBJ to Vietnam, the Vice-President declared, "The basic decision in Southeast Asia is here. We must decide whether to help these countries to the best of our ability or throw in the towel in the area and pull our defenses back to San Francisco." Chapter 22, pgs. 642-643

"For better or worse, they were positioned by the chance of history to have consequence far beyond their individual identities. Secure in their common outlook, empowered by the bonds of trust, they met the challenge of a demanding new age. In their sense of duty and shared wisdom, they found the force to shape the world." Chapter 24, pg. 741

Topics for Discussion

The six men known as The Wise Men all met when they were young. How did each of the men begin their careers of government service?

What are the views of Harriman and the others regarding doing business with Soviet Russia?

What is the feeling about Germany and Poland at the end of World War II? How did the United States and Soviet Union differ? What compromises did they make and why?

What was the purpose of the Marshall Plan? In what way did it serve to split post World War II Europe?

Does the group of six always agree in their policies? Give examples. Why are they so well respected?

How did the group of six men become known as the Wise Men?

What role do each of the six men play in foreign policy throughout their lives? Why didn't it matter if they were in government or not?