

[Back to index](#)**TELEVISION AND HISTORY – THE COLD WAR : SELECTED CRITICAL COMMENTARIES.****The Cold War : Martin Smith/Jeremy Issacs (1998)**

Following very much in the footsteps of previous grand-scale historical documentaries, such as *The World at War* and *People's Century*, the much advertised, and in some circles at least, much anticipated, *Cold War*, a 24 part series charting the politics of the postwar world, launched in the UK (BBC) and the US (CNN) in the Autumn of 1998.

The producers, Martin Smith and Jeremy Issacs, wanted to "tell a universal, not a partisan story", and to tell it "simply and directly", trying to "get it right and present you with a guide you can trust", to which end, "We check testimony and every fact against a valid source and an objective record." In doing so, the team working on the series set out to obtain "the most vivid and relevant interviewees and archive film and to ensure that viewing each film is a rewarding and engaging experience." : in which task they were ably assisted by the three main historical consultants to the programmes – Lawrence Freedman (UK), John Lewis Gaddis (USA) and Valdislav Zubok (Russia).

In the following commentaries, undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University of Birmingham, following courses that expressly examine the role of film and television in the construction of history, review two *Cold War* episodes. The following reviews engage not only with the specifics of the content and production of particular episodes, but also, on occasion, with the overall ethos of the series, and with broader considerations of history, media, objectivity and validity. I would like to thank Dr. W. Scott Lucas and his undergraduate and postgraduate students for their assistance in this review project.

Episode 2:
The Iron Curtain 1945-1947
Cold War links

Episode 6:
Reds, 1947-53