

Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” Speech
A History Lesson by Jannette Milligan

MAJOR OBJECTIVE: Introduce the major issues of the Cold War through a speech given by former British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill.

LESSER OBJECTIVE 1: Clearly establish the value of leadership acutely aware of history and using it to determine future policy.

This Lesson Plan includes:

- A. An edited version of the speech at Fulton, Missouri (it is edited for length in order to make it easier to use in class). The full text of the speech may be found on The Churchill Centre’s website winstonchurchill.org. See [here](#). A link to the BBC Audio is also there. Note that Churchill entitled the speech “The Sinews of Peace.”
- B. An annotated version for teacher use, which explains the details and references of the speech.
- C. A summary of the main points of the speech.
- D. A background on the major events leading up to the speech, beginning with the 1945, Spring Offensives in Europe and the Yalta Agreement of February.
- E. A background on the major events following the speech, in Europe, beginning with the Berlin Blockade through the commencement of the Arms Race. These events are the major events of the Cold War.
- F. Suggestions for teaching the speech in class.
- G. Suggestions for assessing what students have learned from the speech and furthering student knowledge of the origins of the Cold War.

Churchill's "Iron Curtain" Speech

The beginning of the Cold War: *On March 5, 1946, Winston Churchill, former Prime Minister of Great Britain, delivered a speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, in which he gave public recognition to the division that had arisen between the former Allies from World War II. The Soviet Union had pursued different goals from the Western Allies – the United States and Great Britain – causing political tensions in Europe and elsewhere. This speech is known as the "Iron Curtain" speech (and also by the title "Sinews of Peace").*

From Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain" Speech in Fulton, Missouri (1946)

EUROPE DIVIDED

A shadow has fallen upon the scenes so lately lighted by the Allied victory. Nobody knows what Soviet Russia and its Communist international organization intends to do in the immediate future, or what are the limits, if any, to their expansive and proselytizing tendencies. I have a strong admiration and regard for the valiant Russian people and for my war-time comrade, Marshal Stalin. There is sympathy and good will in Britain – and I doubt not here also – toward the peoples of all the Russias and a resolve to persevere through many differences and rebuffs in establishing lasting friendships. We understand the Russians need to be secure on her western frontiers from all renewal of German aggression. We welcome her to her rightful place among the leading nations of the world. Above all we welcome constant, frequent, and growing contacts between the Russian people and our own people on both sides of the Atlantic. It is my duty, however, to place before you certain facts about the present position in Europe – I am sure I do not wish to, but it is my duty, I feel, to present them to you.

From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of central and eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in the Soviet sphere and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and increasing measure of control from Moscow. Athens alone, with its immortal glories, is free to decide its future at an election under British, American and French observation. The Russian dominated Polish government has been encouraged to make enormous and wrongful inroads upon Germany, and mass expulsions of millions of Germans on a scale grievous and undreamed of are now taking place. The Communist parties, which were very small in all these eastern states of Europe, have been raised to pre-eminence and power far beyond their numbers and are seeking everywhere to obtain totalitarian control. Police governments are prevailing in nearly every case, and so

far, except in Czechoslovakia, there is no true democracy. Turkey and Persia are both profoundly alarmed and disturbed at the claims which are made upon them and at the pressure being exerted by the Moscow government. An attempt is being made by the Russians in Berlin to build up a quasi-Communist party in their zone of occupied Germany by showing special favors to groups of Left-Wing German leaders. At the end of the fighting last June, the American and British armies withdrew westward, in accordance with an earlier agreement, to a depth at some points 150 miles on a front of nearly 400 miles to allow the Russians to occupy this vast expanse of territory which the western democracies had conquered. If now the Soviet government tries, by separate action, to build up a pro-Communist Germany in their areas this will cause new serious difficulties in the British and American zones, and will give the defeated Germans the power of putting themselves up to auction between the Soviets and western democracies. Whatever conclusion may be drawn from these facts – and facts they are – this is certainly not the liberated Europe we fought to build up. Nor is it one which contains the essentials of permanent peace.

The safety of the world, ladies and gentlemen, requires a new unity in Europe from which no nation should be permanently outcast.

It is impossible not to comprehend – twice we have seen them drawn by irresistible forces in time to secure the victory but only after frightful slaughter and devastation have occurred. Twice the United States has had to send millions of its young men to fight a war, but now war can find any nation between dusk and dawn. Surely we should work within the structure of the United Nations and in accordance with our charter. That is an open course of policy.

COMMUNIST FIFTH COLUMNS

In front of the iron curtain which lies across Europe are other causes for anxiety. In Italy the Communist party is seriously hampered by having to support the Communist trained Marshal Tito's claims to former Italian territory at the head of the Adriatic. Nevertheless the future of Italy hangs in the balance. Again one cannot imagine a regenerated Europe without a strong France. All my public life I have worked for a strong France. I never lost faith in her destiny, even in the darkest hours. I will not lose faith now. However, in a great number of countries, far from the Russian frontiers and throughout the world, Communist fifth columns are established and work in complete unity and absolute obedience to the directions they receive from the Communist center. Except in the British Commonwealth and in this United States, where Communism is in its infancy, the Communist parties or fifth columns constitute a growing challenge and peril to Christian civilization. These are somber facts for any one to have to recite

on the morrow of a victory gained by so much splendid comradeship in arms and in the cause of freedom and democracy, and we should be most unwise not to face them squarely while time remains.

The outlook is also anxious in the Far East and especially in Manchuria. The agreement which was made at Yalta, to which I was a party, was extremely favorable to Soviet Russia, but it was made at a time when no one could say that the German war might not extend all through the summer and autumn of 1945 and when the Japanese war was expected to last for a further eighteen months from the end of the German war. In this country you are all so well informed about the Far East, and such devoted friends of China, that I do not need to expatiate on the situation there.

I have felt bound to portray the shadow which, alike in the West and in the East, falls upon the world. I was a minister at the time of the Versailles treaty and a close friend of Mr. Lloyd George. I did not myself agree with many of that situation, and I find it painful to contrast it with that which prevails now. In those days there were high hopes and unbounded confidence that the wars were over, and that the League of Nations would become all-powerful. I do not see or feel the same confidence or even the same hopes in the haggard world at this time.

WAR IS NOT INEVITABLE

On the other hand I repulse the idea that a new war is inevitable; still more that it is imminent. It is because I am so sure that our fortunes are in our own hands and that we hold the power to save the future, that I feel the duty to speak out now that I have an occasion to do so. I do not believe that Soviet Russia desires war. What they desire is the fruits of war and the indefinite expansion of their power and doctrines. But what we have to consider here today, while time remains, is the permanent prevention of war and the establishment of conditions of freedom and democracy as rapidly as possible in all countries. Our difficulties and dangers will not be removed by closing our eyes to them. They will not be removed by mere waiting to see what happens; nor will they be relieved by a policy of appeasement. What is needed is a settlement and the longer this is delayed the more difficult it will be and the greater our dangers will become. From what I have seen of our Russian friends and allies during the war, I am convinced that there is nothing they admire so much as strength, and there is nothing for which they have less respect than for military weakness. For that reason the old doctrine of a balance of power is unsound. We cannot afford, if we can help it, to work on narrow margins, offering temptations to a trial of strength. If the western democracies stand together in strict adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter, their influence for furthering these principles will be immense and no one is likely to molest

them. If, however, they become divided or falter in their duty, and if these all-important years are allowed to slip away, then indeed catastrophe may overwhelm us all.

Last time I saw it all coming, and cried aloud to my fellow countrymen and to the world, but no one paid any attention. Up till the year 1933 or even 1935, Germany might have been saved from the awful fate which has overtaken her and we might all have been spared the miseries Hitler let loose upon mankind. There never was a war in all history easier to prevent by timely action than the one which has just desolated such great areas of the globe. It could have been prevented without the firing of a single shot, and Germany might be powerful, prosperous and honored today, but no one would listen and one by one we were all sucked into the awful whirlpool. We surely must not let that happen again. This can only be achieved by reaching now, in 1946, a good understanding on all points with Russia under the general authority of the United Nations Organization and by the maintenance of that good understanding through many peaceful years, by the world instrument, supported by the whole strength of the English-speaking world and all its connections.

Let no man underrate the abiding power of the British Empire and Commonwealth. Because you see the forty-six millions in our island harassed about their food supply, of which they grew only one half, even in war time, or because we have difficulty in restarting our industries and export trade after six years of passionate war effort, do not suppose that we shall not come through these dark years of privation as we have come through the glorious years of agony, or that half a century from now you will not see seventy or eighty millions of Britons spread about the world and united in defense of our traditions, our way of life and of the world causes we and you espouse. If the population of the English-speaking commonwealth be added to that of the United States, with all that such co-operation implies in the air, on the sea and in science and industry, there will be no quivering, precarious balance of power to offer its temptation to ambition or adventure. On the contrary, there will be an overwhelming assurance of security. If we adhere faithfully to the charter of the United Nations and walk forward in sedate and sober strength, seeking no one's land or treasure, or seeking to lay no arbitrary control on the thoughts of men, if all British moral and material forces and convictions are joined with your own in fraternal association, the highroads of the future will be clear, not only for us but for all, not only for our time but for a century to come.

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Annotated for Teacher Reference

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From Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain" Speech in Fulton, Missouri (1946):

EUROPE DIVIDED

A shadow has fallen upon the scenes so lately lighted by the Allied victory. Nobody knows what Soviet Russia and its Communist international organization¹ intends to do in the immediate future, or what are the limits, if any, to their expansive and proselytizing tendencies. I have a strong admiration and regard for the valiant Russian people and for my war-time comrade, Marshal Stalin.² There is sympathy and good will in Britain – and I doubt not here also – toward the peoples of all the Russias³ and a resolve to persevere through many differences and rebuffs in establishing lasting friendships. We understand the Russians need to be secure on her western frontiers from all renewal of German aggression.⁴ We welcome her to her rightful place among the leading nations of the world. Above all we welcome constant, frequent, and growing contacts between the Russian people and our own people on both sides of the Atlantic. It is my duty, however, to place before you certain facts about the present position in Europe – I am sure I do not wish to, but it is my duty, I feel, to present them to you.

From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.⁵ Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of central and eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in the Soviet sphere and all are subject in one form or another, not only to

¹ This is a reference to COMINTERN, the Communist International, which was founded in 1919 for the purpose of promoting worldwide communist revolution. It was funded and backed by the Soviet Union.

² "Marshal" is a military term used by some countries that usually refers to the head of the armed forces. Josef Stalin led the Soviet Union from 1927 to his death in 1953. During World War II, he was a part of the "Big Three," along with Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, whose countries were "co-belligerents" opposed to the Axis powers.

³ This is a reference to the vastness of the Soviet state, which included various regions, several of which include the name Russia.

⁴ Keep in mind that Germany invaded Russia in 1914, then again in 1941. Russia suffered terrible casualties in both wars.

⁵ Here is the famous phrase, "iron curtain," which came to characterize the division of Europe into Communist and non-Communist zones.

Soviet influence but to a very high and increasing measure of control from Moscow. Athens alone, with its immortal glories, is free to decide its future at an election under British, American and French observation.⁶ The Russian dominated Polish government has been encouraged to make enormous and wrongful inroads upon Germany, and mass expulsions of millions of Germans on a scale grievous and undreamed of are now taking place.⁷ The Communist parties, which were very small in all these eastern states of Europe, have been raised to pre-eminence and power far beyond their numbers and are seeking everywhere to obtain totalitarian control. Police governments are prevailing in nearly every case, and so far, except in Czechoslovakia, there is no true democracy.⁸ Turkey and Persia are both profoundly alarmed and disturbed at the claims which are made upon them and at the pressure being exerted by the Moscow government.⁹ An attempt is being made by the Russians in Berlin to build up a quasi-Communist party in their zone of occupied Germany by showing special favors to groups of Left-Wing German leaders.¹⁰ At the end of the fighting last June, the American and British armies withdrew westward, in accordance with an earlier agreement, to a depth at some points 150 miles on a front of nearly 400 miles to allow the Russians to occupy this vast expanse of territory which the western democracies had conquered.¹¹ If now the Soviet government tries, by separate action, to build up a pro-Communist Germany in their areas this will cause new serious difficulties in the British and American zones, and will give the defeated Germans the power of putting themselves up to auction between the Soviets and western democracies. Whatever conclusion may be drawn from these facts – and facts they are – this is certainly not the liberated Europe we fought to build up. Nor is it one which contains the essentials of permanent peace.

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⁶ Greece was the only country east of the Stettin-Trieste line that had not already fallen to Communism at this time. British and later American aid to Greece helped it to remain free of Communism.

⁷ Border changes after the war resulted in Germany's loss of all land east of the Oder River to Poland. The Polish government then expelled the Germans from Poland's new territory.

⁸ A "police government" refers to one in which a powerful executive also controls the legislative branch, whose dictates are enforced by various forms of secret police (police forces which had broad powers to enforce the will of the government).

⁹ During and immediately after World War II, the Soviet Union was active in both Turkey and Persia (later named Iran).

¹⁰ The Soviets had a zone of occupation in the area around Berlin. Their efforts eventually resulted in the creation of the German Democratic Republic, commonly known as East Germany, in 1949. It was a Soviet satellite.

¹¹ British, American, and Soviet armies met at the Elbe River in April 1945. After the end of the war, some adjustments were effected in the establishment of the zones of occupation, resulting in the border changes that Churchill mentions here.

States has had to send millions of its young men to fight a war, but now war can find any nation between dusk and dawn. Surely we should work within the structure of the United Nations and in accordance with our charter.¹² That is an open course of policy.

COMMUNIST FIFTH COLUMNS

In front of the iron curtain which lies across Europe are other causes for anxiety.¹³ In Italy the Communist party is seriously hampered by having to support the Communist trained Marshal Tito's claims to former Italian territory at the head of the Adriatic.¹⁴ Nevertheless the future of Italy hangs in the balance. Again one cannot imagine a regenerated Europe without a strong France. All my public life I have worked for a strong France. I never lost faith in her destiny, even in the darkest hours. I will not lose faith now. However, in a great number of countries, far from the Russian frontiers and throughout the world, Communist fifth columns are established and work in complete unity and absolute obedience to the directions they receive from the communist center.¹⁵ Except in the British Commonwealth and in this United States, where Communism is in its infancy, the Communist parties or fifth columns constitute a growing challenge and peril to Christian civilization. These are somber facts for any one to have to recite on the morrow of a victory gained by so much splendid comradeship in arms and in the cause of freedom and democracy, and we should be most unwise not to face them squarely while time remains.

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¹² The United Nations Organization was founded at the end of World War II. It replaced the defunct League of Nations, which had proved to be a failure in the 1930s. Churchill hoped that the UN would be stronger and therefore better able to preserve peace than the League of Nations had been. He looked to the United States to play a major role in the institution.

¹³ "In front" means west of the iron curtain. The governments of Italy and France, in particular, were confronted by Communist activity, as were those of Turkey and Persia. China, of course, was in the midst of a renewed civil war that was eventually won by the Communists in 1949.

¹⁴ Josef Broz Tito was a Yugoslav resistance fighter against the Germans in the war. He was also a Communist and later became the leader of Yugoslavia, ruling until his death in 1980. The reference here is to conflict between Italy and Yugoslavia over land at the north end of the Adriatic Sea.

¹⁵ fifth column – definition: 1. a group of people who act traitorously and subversively out of a secret sympathy with an enemy of their country. 2. (originally) Franco sympathizers in Madrid during the Spanish Civil War: so called in allusion to a statement in 1936 that the insurgents had four columns marching on Madrid and a fifth column of sympathizers in the city ready to rise and betray it (dictionary.com).

¹⁶ Manchuria is a northern province of China. After the war, there was concern that the Soviet Union would control it.

German war. In this country you are all so well informed about the Far East, and such devoted friends of China, that I do not need to expatiate on the situation there.

I have felt bound to portray the shadow which, alike in the West and in the East, falls upon the world. I was a minister at the time of the Versailles Treaty and a close friend of Mr. Lloyd George.¹⁷ I did not myself agree with many of that situation, and I find it painful to contrast it with that which prevails now. In those days, there were high hopes and unbounded confidence that the wars were over, and that the League of Nations would become all-powerful. I do not see or feel the same confidence or even the same hopes in the haggard world at this time.¹⁸

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On the other hand I repulse the idea that a new war is inevitable; still more that it is imminent. It is because I am so sure that our fortunes are in our own hands and that we hold the power to save the future, that I feel the duty to speak out now that I have an occasion to do so. I do not believe that Soviet Russia desires war. What they desire is the fruits of war and the indefinite expansion of their power and doctrines. But what we have to consider here today, while time remains, is the permanent prevention of war and the establishment of conditions of freedom and democracy as rapidly as possible in all countries. Our difficulties and dangers will not be removed by closing our eyes to them. They will not be removed by mere waiting to see what happens; nor will they be relieved by a policy of appeasement. What is needed is a settlement and the longer this is delayed the more difficult it will be and the greater our dangers will become. From what I have seen of our Russian friends and allies during the war, I am convinced that there is nothing they admire so much as strength, and there is nothing for which they have less respect than for military weakness. For that reason the old doctrine of a balance of power is unsound.¹⁹ We cannot afford, if we can help it, to work on narrow margins, offering temptations to a trial of strength. If the western democracies stand together in strict adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter, their influence for furthering these principles will be immense and no one is likely to

¹⁷This was one of the treaties ending World War I. David Lloyd George was Prime Minister of Great Britain (Liberal Party) during the Paris Peace Conference, which produced the treaties.

¹⁸ This references the widely-held belief that World War I was the “War to end all wars,” and that the treaties would produce peace. However, the treaties, especially the Treaty of Versailles which affected Germany, led directly to World War II. Churchill’s concern is that the end of World War II will not produce a lasting peace, either.

¹⁹ “Balance of power” here refers to Britain’s traditional policy of maintaining peace in Europe (i.e. “balancing power”) by allying with the weaker side. He suggests that this policy will no longer work to restrain Russia’s territorial ambitions and that a new policy must be found, namely the alliance of all the western democracies as a deterrent to Russia.

molest them. If, however, they become divided or falter in their duty, and if these all-important years are allowed to slip away, then indeed catastrophe may overwhelm us all.

Last time I saw it all coming, and cried aloud to my fellow countrymen and to the world, but no one paid any attention.²⁰ Up till the year 1933 or even 1935, Germany might have been saved from the awful fate which has overtaken her and we might all have been spared the miseries Hitler let loose upon mankind. There never was a war in all history easier to prevent by timely action than the one which has just desolated such great areas of the globe. It could have been prevented without the firing of a single shot, and Germany might be powerful, prosperous and honored today, but no one would listen and one by one we were all sucked into the awful whirlpool. We surely must not let that happen again. This can only be achieved by reaching now, in 1946, a good understanding on all points with Russia under the general authority of the United Nations Organization and by the maintenance of that good understanding through many peaceful years, by the world instrument, supported by the whole strength of the English-speaking world and all its connections.

Let no man underrate the abiding power of the British Empire and Commonwealth. Because you see the forty-six millions in our island harassed about their food supply, of which they grew only one half, even in war time, or because we have difficulty in restarting our industries and export trade after six years of passionate war effort, do not suppose that we shall not come through these dark years of privation as we have come through the glorious years of agony, or that half a century from now you will not see seventy or eighty millions of Britons spread about the world and united in defense of our traditions, our way of life and of the world causes we and you espouse. If the population of the English-speaking commonwealth be added to that of the United States, with all that such co-operation implies in the air, on the sea and in science and industry, there will be no quivering, precarious balance of power to offer its temptation to ambition or adventure.²¹ On the contrary, there will be an overwhelming assurance of security. If we adhere faithfully to the charter of the United Nations and walk forward in sedate and sober strength, seeking no one's land or treasure, or seeking to lay no arbitrary control on the thoughts of men, if all British moral and material forces and convictions are joined with your own in fraternal association, the highroads of the future will be clear, not only for us but for all, not only for our time but for a century to come.

²⁰ "Last time" is a Churchill's reference to the 1930s, when he argued that Germany's rise to power would result in war. Churchill was one of the few people who publicly raised concerns about Germany. He is saying that we should not make the same mistake in allowing a new power – Soviet Russia – to dominate Europe.

²¹ The term "commonwealth" refers to dominions of the British Empire, such as Canada and Australia.

Summary of Main Points

NOTE: The speech included with this lesson has been edited for length in order to adapt it to the time constraints of the classroom. If teachers wish to view or use the entire speech, it can be accessed at www.winstonchurchill.org. Teachers will need to register with the Churchill Centre (it is free), then click on the Speeches tab. Audio, video, and print formats of the full speech are available on this site.

The main point of the speech is to alert the world in general, and Americans in particular, to the new realities of the postwar world situation.

As shown here, the speech includes three major points:

1. **“Europe Divided”**

This section explains that, following World War II, Europe was divided into Communist and non-Communist spheres of influence. This has to do with the position of Allied armies at the end of the war (see background information). Churchill refers to the division as being by an **“iron curtain.”** Note that this was not the first time that the term was used, but that it was made famous by Churchill’s usage in this speech. Churchill states that, to the east of the iron curtain, Soviet domination is resulting in a lack of freedom, the creation of a police state, and ever-growing control emanating from Moscow (in effect creating Soviet “satellite” states in Eastern Europe). To the west of the iron curtain, democratic governments and freedom survive. Churchill states that an Eastern Europe in the grip of totalitarianism “is certainly not the liberated Europe we fought to build up.” In other words, having defeated the Nazis successfully, the world is faced already with a new menace: the Soviet Union.

By the way, the barrier between east and west was not an actual “iron curtain;” it was a heavily guarded physical barrier that was extremely difficult to cross. From the 1940s to 1989, movement of any kind was severely restricted across this barrier. Eastern and Western Europe became distinct regions with different governments and standards of living.

2. **“Communist Fifth Columns”**

This section discusses Churchill’s concerns about the potential for Communism to spread in areas outside of Eastern Europe, including France, Italy, Turkey, Persia, and China. Churchill is concerned about the Far East in particular. Churchill states that Communism is a growing threat because the Soviets are building up and supporting Communist movements in these countries, hoping to either influence elections or overthrow the government, and so causing the spread of Communism in several areas of the world. The “Fifth Columns” are those people in each country who are working with the Soviets to help bring about these changes. This includes such people as Communist party members, who were often willing to do Stalin’s bidding, and spies or agents working with orders from Moscow. The combination of internal support and outside interference creates the danger that more countries will become Communist.

3. **“War Is Not Inevitable”**

Churchill states that, even though the situation is grim due to the expansion of the Soviet Union, a new war will not necessarily follow. In part this is because the Russians do not want war. Churchill believes that the Soviets will try to advance their interests as much as possible without war. Therefore, what is needed most is for the democracies, including the United States, Britain, and the Commonwealth, to unite in a common front and stand together in opposition to the Russians’ plans. This show of force could cause Russia to reconsider its expansionist activities

In essence, Churchill argues for a revival of the wartime alliance between Great Britain and the United States. This alliance is known as the “Special Relationship” and was extremely important in the Allies’ ultimate victory in World War II. Churchill believes that a strong relationship between the United States, Great Britain, and the “English-speaking peoples” in the British Commonwealth and Empire, will prove a vital force in the post-war age. They will form a new sort of balance of power to check Soviet expansion.

Churchill believes that, if Western nations form a common policy, and if they use the United Nations as a vehicle to promote democracy and peace, then the advance of Russia may be stopped and the peace preserved. Churchill’s great concern here is that the United States will return to the policy of isolationism which it had followed in the 1920s and the 1930s, and he wants to make it plain that the United States needs to be involved globally. Churchill’s focus on the development and maintenance of the close relationship between the English-speaking peoples is a consistent theme in his political career. This speech is the first of several along this theme.

Historical Background on the major events beginning with the 1945 Spring Offensives in Europe and the Yalta Agreement of February

1. At the beginning of 1945, Allied Forces were approaching the borders of Germany with ever-increasing manpower and material.

The English-speaking Allies were approaching the Rhine River after the brutal fighting as a result of Operation Watch on the Rhine (known in the U.S. as the Battle of the Bulge).

Allied Forces were advancing in northern Italy while the Greeks were making a good fight in the Balkans.

The massive Red Army had moved through the Baltic States to the east bank of the Vistula River in the north and had advanced well into Rumania in the South. Essentially all of the U.S.S.R. had been liberated from the German invaders.

In essence, Allied forces were advancing on Germany from three directions and the Rhine River in the west and the Vistula River in the east offered the final great natural barriers to the major Allies.

(It is suggested that teachers study a map of the final offensives in order to understand the location of the armies involved at the end of the war.)

2. The major Allied leaders, Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin (referred to as the Big Three), recognized the logistical challenge of advancing into Germany as well as the possibility of the German government trying to salvage some kind of agreement with fewer than all the Allies on their fronts. The Big Three determined to meet in February at the Russian resort town of Yalta and to address these and other issues for ending the war against Germany.
3. Josef Stalin, Premier of the Communist Party in the U.S.S.R, hosted the summit, on the Crimean Peninsula. President Franklin Roosevelt of the U.S.A. attended, but his health was alarmingly poor. Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of Great Britain completed the Big Three and would manage a difficult diplomacy which required Soviet military action to the east of Germany, but concern over Soviet location at the end of the war.
4. The Yalta Agreement included:
 - a. A German unconditional surrender to the Allied Powers.
 - b. If Germany did not surrender unconditionally to the Allied Powers, all Allied armies would advance to the Elbe River and there stop. This of course, put the city of Berlin in the Red Army battle zone.
 - c. Once Germany was defeated, zones of occupation would be established, essentially based on where the invading armies had entered and fought in Germany. Two exceptions to this included the British crossing of the Elbe to secure the entire southern border of Denmark and keep the Soviet forces off the North Sea; and eventual withdrawal of U.S. troops from Czechoslovakia.

- d. Though the city of Berlin was in the Soviet zone of post-war occupation, it would also be jointly occupied by the Allied forces.
 - e. It was determined that a post-war meeting would be held to address these and other post-war issues. (That would be held in July in Potsdam, outside Berlin, but the Big Three would have changed by then.)
5. By the end of March, Soviet forces had crossed the Vistula River and were in the process of destroying German Army Group Vistula. Soviet forces were also advancing through the Balkans and pushing through Hungary into Czechoslovakia and southern Poland.

English-speaking forces had crossed the Rhine and were advancing through the industrial north of Germany (British forces) and the central and southern German states (U.S. forces).

By early April Soviet forces were moving toward the Oder River and German resistance though fierce, was failing. The Battle for Berlin began in mid April and other Soviet forces reached the Elbe River at Torgau late in April to discover U.S. forces on the other side.

6. Benito Mussolini, in an attempt to escape Italian partisans was captured in the Lake Como region and executed. Hitler committed suicide in his Berlin bunker, with other Nazi party members, and families, by 1 May. All Axis resistance officially ended on 7 May and 8 May was proclaimed by the Four Great Powers (France had been courted after liberation) as Victory in Europe Day.
7. While Germany was defeated and combat on the European continent had ended, there remained two huge issues for the European Allies and the U.S.
- a. On 1 April, Allied forces in the Pacific had commenced the invasion of the island of Okinawa, which was fewer than 350 miles from Japan. The battle was still being fought when V-E Day was proclaimed and none of the Allies foresaw a quick defeat of the Japanese in their home islands.
 - b. On the continent of Europe, besides the terribly high loss of human life, there was massive material destruction of homes, utilities, transportation and communication networks; hundreds of thousands of displaced and homeless persons and a dramatic reduction in all economic productivity. European nations faced the possibility that they could not recover from this war following the terrible losses of the First World War.
8. The immediate political and economic response to the war in the western European nations was a very significant swing to the left. All the countries replaced their wartime governments with governments dedicated to social and economic reform. This was significantly true in England, where the wartime coalition government was voted out of office and Winston Churchill was replaced on the Treasury Bench by Clement Attlee.

Ironically, this swing to the left was compatible with the objectives of the Soviet Union in Stalin's post-war plans for eastern Europe. The Soviet Union and Stalin's government saw post-war political and economic stability in a grand collection of occupied and sympathetic states. Because the Red Army had to march through Eastern Europe to conquer Germany, Soviet troops were able to occupy much of Eastern Europe, including Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and

Rumania. Stalin began altering boundaries (including the German-Polish border) and dictating who could run for office as new governments were formed in countries occupied by the Red Army. Thus Eastern Europe was falling under the control of the Soviet Union. This had not been the intention nor the understanding of the English-speaking participants at the Potsdam Conference.

In particular, Poland was a problem. Since World War II had originally been declared over the German invasion of Poland, the fact that Poland's government was coming under the control of the Soviet Union was a major issue. It was apparent that the wartime spirit of cooperation was fading..

9. For his part, Winston Churchill was terribly disappointed by his rejection in the spring election of 1945. It is worth noting his final comments in his *History of the Second World War*, the sixth volume. Churchill was at first, quite grumpy and unkind to those around him as he dealt once again with major rejection. But as often happened at other times earlier in his life, he began to work his way back into a good humor and much of his attention was directed at the immediate post-war actions of the Soviet Union.
10. Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri invited Winston Churchill to accept an honorary degree and to speak on 5 March 1946 and Churchill accepted the invitation. He and Clementine crossed the Atlantic on the *Queen Elizabeth* in January and arrived in New York. The passengers with the Churchills included a large number of Canadian soldiers heading home from Europe and Winston was asked to address them as they neared their destination. His speech paid tribute to their efforts and great victory and indicated that, while the world situation still faced other tribulations, the people of the British Empire had the substance to deal with all successfully. These remarks might be considered a prelude to the Fulton speech.
11. The Churchills would spend three months in the U.S., traveling from New York to Florida, where Winston would paint and work on his speech for Westminster College. During the Florida stay he also visited Cuba, then returned to travel with President Harry Truman on the Presidential train to Missouri.
12. Churchill's speech was his opportunity to draw attention to the new global realities, and he chose to make it in the heartland of America, not in Washington, D.C. Academic discussion continues about whether or not Churchill shared the content of his speech with the President prior to its delivery, but numerous historians indicate that he did. Churchill had already shared his concerns to be expressed in Fulton, Missouri with British Prime Minister Clement Attlee, so the speech was not a surprise to the leaders of the two English-speaking governments. On the other hand, the speech was quite unexpected for many American and British citizens and the early response was very critical. Churchill was again presented by many as an alarmist and a war-monger.

Historical Background
on the major events in Europe following the speech,
commencing with the Berlin Blockade and continuing through the Arms Race.

1. Churchill's use of the term *iron curtain* referred to the boundary between the Soviet occupied European states and those which it did not occupy. This boundary separated Germany into two distinct zones, later to be known as the Federal Republic of Germany (the western zone which included the British, French and Americans) and the German Democratic Republic (the eastern zone occupied by the Soviet Union). The boundary then continued to include Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria and Albania in the Soviet zone and that would also include Poland. Yugoslavia would establish a Marxist dictatorship but not be cooperative with the Soviet Union.
2. The major implication of the Soviet occupation was that free elections were not being held and the nations were being incorporated into the Soviet economic system, thus without a say in the process.
3. The United States government took action to contain the spread of Communism in Europe. In 1947, President Truman stated the Truman Doctrine, offering American aid and support to "all countries resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities and outside pressures." This resulted in American aid to both Greece and Turkey, which enabled non-Communist elements to remain in power. Further, the United States also authorized the Marshall Plan, a \$13 billion aid package to European countries to help the recovery effort from the war. Western European countries accepted this aid, but Stalin refused to allow those nations under his control to accept it. Regardless, the Marshall Plan also was a success in that, as Western Europe rebuilt, and the economy recovered, the appeal of Communism faded.
4. For the Soviets, a major problem existed in the joint occupation of the city of Berlin and they sought ways to reduce the capitalistic influence there. Meanwhile, the western Allies, specifically the U.S., sought to strengthen the economy of Germany to stimulate recovery, which the Soviets regarded as a threat to their national security. A currency tiff developed and the U.S. issued a new Deutschemark to promote stability.
5. This new currency was offensive to the Soviet Union and a threat to their economy, badly weakened in the war, so they began to blockade the road and rail access from the western zones of Germany into the western zones of Berlin. Finally, a full blockade was established and suddenly the fate of 3 million Berliners was in question without the supplies, which arrived from the western zones by truck and train.
6. From the spring of 1948 through the spring of 1949, the Soviet Union enforced a blockade. Many regard this as the very first major action in a Cold War.
7. The response of the western allies who maintained zones of occupation in Berlin was to attempt to supply the city by airplanes and this attempt is known as the Berlin Airlift. This was possible because a zone of free airspace from the western zones of occupation in Germany to the western zones of occupation in Berlin was recognized. While the *air corridor* was not very large, it did enable cargo aircraft to come and go freely from Berlin. The Soviet Union decided not to challenge the air corridor and in a remarkable example of international cooperation among the

western allies and the people in Berlin, the city was saved and the Soviets eventually stopped the blockade.

8. One major result of the Berlin Blockade and Airlift was that all people clearly recognized a major ideological tension between the United States and her allies and the Soviet Union. Much has been written about the early identification of Cold War philosophies and policies, but the question of ideological differences and resulting actions is not questioned.
9. This growing tension was complicated in 1949, when the Soviet Union successfully tested an atomic bomb. One response in the U.S.A. to this test was a National Security Council document, which recommended dramatically increased research and development of atomic weapons. As both countries worked to develop more powerful weapons as well as delivery systems, the threat of the Cold War became greater.
10. Both ideological sides sought to consolidate their spheres of influence and in Europe this included the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, countries militarily committed to containing the Soviet sphere of influence in eastern Europe and the Warsaw Pact, which included the Soviet Union and its eastern European sphere of influence which was committed to stopping any western military action against itself.
11. Communism control expanded in the Far East. In 1949, the Chinese Communists won the long civil war, and China became a Communist country. Korea, divided into zones of occupation after World War II, was also the scene of conflict. In 1950, North Korea, which had become Communist, invaded non-Communist South Korea in an effort to reunite the country. In 1953, the war ended in a stalemate, and also Josef Stalin died. Nikita Khrushchev replaced Stalin as Party Leader, the Cold War was clearly established with nations aligned against each other and *hot spots* developing as far away from Berlin as Korea.
12. Thus, less than ten years after the defeat of Germany and Japan in World War II, a Cold War existed. This war was based on two great powers with distinctly different world views and governmental and economic systems. This Cold War was complicated by an *arms race* in which each side sought to gather an advantage in a policy often referred to as *deterrence*. This policy was based on the acquisition of such great strength that the other side would not risk attack because of the fear of retaliation.

Using the “Iron Curtain” Speech in Class

Suggestions for teaching the speech: Although the speech can be given as a homework assignment, it is generally more useful to take time to go over the speech in class. This is because there are a number of details of the speech that require some explanation. Reading the speech in class and going over the content can take anywhere from 20 minutes to an entire class period, depending on the time the teacher has available and the prior knowledge of the students.

Suggestions for furthering and assessing student knowledge

Depending on the time available and the desired amount of depth into the topic, any or all of the following options could be considered to expand student understanding of the speech and its significance in history.

- A. Discuss the speech in class. See questions below.
- B. Hold a “Socratic Seminar” to allow students to address the content of the speech and to explore its implications. See questions below.
- C. Include content on the unit test.
- D. Use the speech as a primary source document and the basis for a written response, either an essay or a research paper.

Essay question: Assess the “Iron Curtain” speech in the light of the events of the Cold War. Did Churchill’s view the situation prove to be correct or incorrect? Support your answer by including specific events, facts, and developments from history.

- E. Assign a project that encourages students to examine and evaluate responses to the speech at the time it was given. Especially helpful are the following primary sources:
 1. “Tabulation and Analysis of Mr. Churchill’s New York Mail” dated March 15, 1946. This is a summary of the views of the letters and telegrams that Churchill received after making the speech. At churchillarchive.com: Document ID [CHUR 2/229/46-47](#)
 2. Draft typescript for a speech Churchill gave in New York City before his departure for Britain on March 20, 1946. This speech was a clarification of some points of the “Iron Curtain” speech based on the responses he had encountered. At churchillarchive.com: Document ID [CHUR 5/4C/106](#) and [CHUR 5/4C/108](#)

Research questions:

1. Analyze the range of responses to Churchill’s speech. What perceptions attitudes might account for the responses of Americans toward the speech?
2. Identify the ways that Churchill addressed issues raised in his speech in his next address in New York City.
3. For further students may want to investigate Stalin’s response to the speech (which is referenced by Churchill in his response in New York City).

Questions about the speech:

- A. What did Churchill mean by the term “Iron Curtain”? Where specifically, was the area he referenced in the speech? Locate it on a map.
- B. To what extent was Churchill correct in terming the division of Europe an “Iron Curtain”?
- C. How did the two sides of the iron curtain differ from each other?
- D. Explain the term “fifth column.” What does Churchill mean is going on in countries such as France and Italy?
- E. What is the essence of Churchill’s concerns about fifth columns?
- F. What other areas of the world were threatened by Communism at the time of this speech?
- G. Why is Churchill concerned about the spread of Communism?
- H. Analyze the following statements:
 - “I do not believe that Soviet Russia desires war. What they desire is the fruits of war and the indefinite expansion of their power and doctrines.”
 - “From what I have seen of our Russian friends and allies during the war, I am convinced that there is nothing they admire so much as strength, and there is nothing for which they have less respect than for military weakness.”What do these statements reveal about Churchill’s views of Russia’s objectives in 1946?
- I. What is Churchill’s solution to the problem of Soviet expansion?
- J. In Churchill’s view, what should be the future of the “Special Relationship” forged by Britain and the United States during the war?
- K. Following is a list of quotes from the speech that the teacher may ask students to address:
 - “A shadow has fallen. . .”
 - “. . . an iron curtain has descended. . . .”
 - “Athens alone. . . .”
 - “The Russian dominated Polish government has been encouraged to make enormous and wrongful inroads upon Germany. . . .”
 - “The Communist parties. . . . are seeking everywhere to obtain totalitarian control.”
 - “At the end of the fighting last June. . . .”
 - “---this is certainly not the liberated Europe we fought to build up.”
 - “. . . Communist fifth columns are established. . . . (and). . . constitute a growing challenge and peril to Christian civilization.”
 - “The outlook is also anxious in the Far East. . . .”
 - “. . . agreement which was made at Yalta. . . .”
 - “. . . I repulse the idea that a new war is inevitable. . . .”
 - “Our difficulties and dangers will not be removed by closing our eyes to them. . . (or). . . by a policy of appeasement.”
 - “. . . there is nothing they (Russians) admire so much as strength. . . .”
 - “. . . the old doctrine of balance of power is unsound. . . .”
 - “Last time I saw it all coming. . . .”
 - “We surely must not let that happen again. . . .”
 - “Let no man underrate. . . . the British Empire. . . .”
 - “If the population of the English-speaking Commonwealth be added to that of the United States. . . .”