Dear A.,---

First of all, this is clearly a well-thought out and well-written essay. The first paragraph offers a strong hook, while at the same time providing important historical information. You transition smoothly into the second paragraph, which successfully sets up your thesis. I think your thesis is really three-pronged, and incorporates both the second-to-last sentence of the second paragraph, which you described as the sentence that explains your motive, and the last sentence in the paragraph. The second-to-last sentence brings in your argument about the relationship between Schlesinger’s and Kennan’s works. The last sentence takes this argument further with the suggestion that “democracy, not totalitarianism, is the real issue to be solved in the Cold War,” and then offers a solution: “the revitalization of the individual’s spirit” (Craig 4). In response to your expressed doubt regarding the strength and validity of your thesis, I think it is definitely a valid argument.

There are, however, a few places where I saw potential for improvement. In your cover letter, you explained your thought process in structuring your paper. After reading through the paper a few times, I realized that you could maybe rearrange, and slightly rework, some of your body paragraphs in order to make the development of your argument more logical and systematic. Your third paragraph is really strong; all of your points are well-supported, and your quotes are sufficiently analyzed. But I feel like a smoother transition could be made between this paragraph and your fifth body paragraph. Your third paragraph discusses democracy’s inherent flaws, and how these flaws lead to anxiety, which “creates the greatest draw to the totalitarian state” (Craig 4). It seems to me like this paragraph leads perfectly into your argument that the failure of democracy “has had dire consequences for the human race” (Craig 5). This paragraph serves to further develop the point you make in the third paragraph, and to bring in different angles of this point. The fifth paragraph transitions directly into your sixth paragraph, in which you explain totalitarianism as the “new alternative” (Craig 6). (By the way, I really liked the last sentence of this paragraph—“The very creation of the totalitarian state is evidence enough…”). Then, I see a logical transition between your sixth paragraph and your fourth paragraph; after talking about the failure of democracy, and how this has lead people to seek security in the “new alternative,” it makes sense to discuss how totalitarianism (the “new alternative”) “fail[s] to solve these very same problems” (Craig 4). Because you wrote in a different order, the fourth paragraph obviously doesn’t flow well into the seventh paragraph, but I think with a few additional sentences, you could make a successful transition from the fourth paragraph into the seventh (which begins the end segment of your paper, addressing the third prong of your thesis).

You also mentioned in your cover letter that you were worried it may seem like you repeat yourself. I don’t think you do (except maybe slight overuse of the word anxiety in the first few paragraphs), but I think you could maybe condense the end of your essay by incorporating the points you make in your eight paragraph into your seventh paragraph, instead of separating them into different paragraphs. You introduce your eight paragraph with a reference back to Kennan’s writing, which seemed somewhat out of place and disruptive of the flow of the argument. I realize that you’re trying to engage with both Kennan’s and Schlesinger’s texts, but maybe you could cut out some of
the analysis of “The Long Telegram” in this segment, and just discuss Schlesinger’s deeper analysis of the task at hand—“breathing new life into the spirit of democratic man” (Craig 8). Basically, this section (the seventh and eighth paragraphs) was the only point at which I felt like you were repeating similar points unnecessarily, and making some points, particularly regarding Kennan’s argument, that didn’t seem to contribute to your thesis.

Lastly, after what I saw as a generally strong and logically developed argument, I didn’t think your conclusion managed to successfully solidify your thesis. It becomes slightly unclear whether you’re claiming that Schlesinger believes that “the key difference between totalitarian nations and democratic ones lies in the soul of their people” (Craig 9), or you’re expressing your own opinion. For example, I really like the way you worded this: “the democratic man will die for what he believes in, while the totalitarian man will be killed for disbelief” (Craig 9)—but whose voice is this? Your thesis clearly states Schlesinger’s implications in his writing, not your own understanding of the failure of democracy and the “new alternative”; however, doesn’t drive this point home, and your final point seems too personal and slightly out of place.

Sorry if this response is filled with confusing and/or overwhelming advice. I really enjoyed reading your paper; it made me think about these complex issues in a new light. I had so much to say about your writing because I found your argument, and the way in which you approached it, really thought-provoking and interesting (not because I found significant fault with it). Hopefully I didn’t just add more confusion, and good luck revising!

Sincerely,

J--