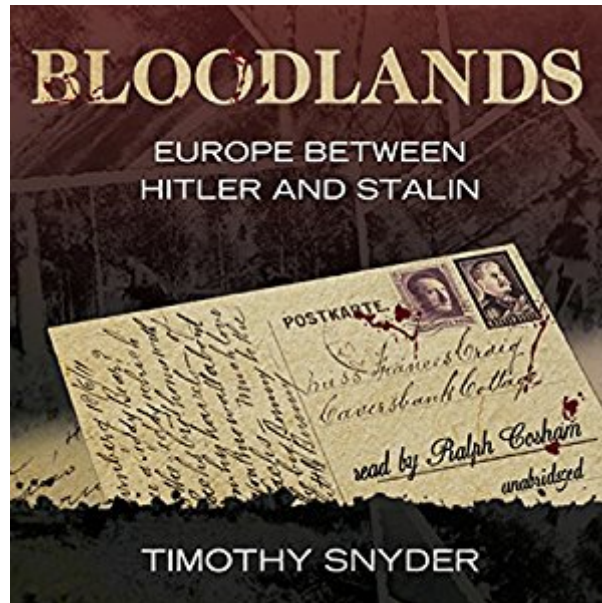


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Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler And Stalin



Synopsis

Americans think of World War II as "The Good War", a moment when the forces of good resoundingly triumphed over evil. Yet the war was not decided by D-day. It was decided in the East, by the Red Army and Joseph Stalin. While conventional wisdom locates the horrors of World War II in the six million Jews killed in German concentration camps, the reality is even grimmer. In 13 years, the Nazi and Soviet regimes killed 13 million people in the lands between Germany and Russia. The majority of these deaths occurred in Eastern Europe, not Germany. In the groundbreaking long-view style of Tony Judt and Niall Ferguson, Tim Snyder, one of America's foremost historians of Eastern Europe, has written a new history of Europe that focuses on the battleground of Eastern Europe, which suffered the worst crimes of Hitler and Stalin. Based upon scholarly literature and primary sources in all of the relevant languages, *Bloodlands* pays special attention to the sources left by those who were killed: the letters home, the notes flung from trains, the diaries found on corpses. This is a new kind of European history, one more concerned with suffering than with intention, one that recognizes how stories of progress or victory have excluded the most salient human experience, and one focused on the extreme predicament of the tens of millions of Europeans who found themselves between Hitler and Stalin. The scale of destruction in the lands between Germany and Russia has eluded historians and baffles the cynicism of our new century, but for these very reasons, *Bloodlands* offers the way forward to a sensible reconstruction of European history. Ultimately, in Snyder's matchless telling, the German and Soviet regimes appear not so much as totalitarian twins, but as rivals whose ruthless pursuit of similar goals doomed millions of innocents.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Rarely have I encountered a history that is as enlightening and thought-provoking as Snyder's account of the impact of forced starvation, genocide, war, ethnic cleansing, and geographic re-location on the peoples of Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, the Baltic Republics, and the formerly German Reich over the two decades between 1933 and 1953, when Stalin died. Residents of the region of Europe he calls the Bloodlands experienced atrocities of an unprecedented nature and scope in this period. What is especially striking is how many people were victimized multiple times in this relatively brief period--first by the Soviet authorities, then by the Germans, and then again by the Soviets as Stalin and Hitler imposed their insane doctrines on civilian populations. Snyder is an extremely skillful writer and holds the reader's attention throughout in what could easily have been a dry treatise on the demographic dimensions of human suffering. He skillfully weaves in the gripping stories of individual people caught in the maelstrom, giving a human face to the numbers. I have to disagree with one reviewer who alleges this is just another study of the similarities between Soviet and Nazi totalitarianism; Snyder is careful to compare and contrast these two tyrannical regimes. This is an engrossing book, but may be a bit too ambitious for people without some familiarity with modern European history. However, it is certainly worth reading and gives valuable new perspectives on the impact of the 30s, World War II, and the Postwar Era on residents of Eastern Europe. I recommend it highly to anyone interested in the history of the period.

"Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin" by Timothy Snyder, is a book about the intentional mass murder of over 14 million people between 1930 and 1947 in a general area that encompasses what is now Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus, Ukraine, and western Russia. And by murder, I mean that. As part of that 14 million number, Mr. Snyder counts only those that were outright killed, intentionally starved, or otherwise were put to death outside of military actions or by being worked to death. If you were to include the deaths that could have been predictably foreseen as a result of certain actions taken, that number jumps to between 17 and 21 million people who were killed. The author breaks the killing periods into 5 general subsets ... Stalin starving the Ukrainian kulaks in 1932-1933, Stalin's Great Terror of 1937-1938, Hitler and Stalin murdering and otherwise removing Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian intelligentsias from 1939-1941, Hitler's murdering the Jewish population and "undesirables" of many countries, intentionally starving Russian POWs and Soviet civilians, and executing civilians as part of partisan reprisals in 1941 -

1945, and people who died as a result of forced resettlements in 1945-1947. While I've read extensively about World War II, I learned a great deal from this book. As one example, there were no purely death camps in Germany proper, the Germans built those in occupied Poland. While there were concentrations camps in Germany and many of these camps contained extermination chambers, their primary function was as forced-labor camps. Personnel assigned to the labor camps had a slim chance of surviving. There were 6 death, or extermination, camps set up in Poland ... Auschwitz, Chelmno, Belzed, Majdanek, Soribor, and Treblinka. Only Auschwitz and Majdanek had labor camps attached to them, the other 4 existed purely to murder people. Of the people who arrived at the death camps other than Auschwitz (and for a time, Jewish prisoners at Majdanek), they were all usually killed within hours of arrival, and of those sent there, only about 100 people saw the inside of the camp and lived to tell of it. At Auschwitz, new arrivals were separated into those who would be killed immediately, and those who would work in the labor camp until they weakened and then they were killed. The survivor's tales from Auschwitz come from those assigned to the labor camps. This book attempts, with great success, to show the vast scope of death in the bloodlands, and how Hitler's and Stalin's extermination policies were alike and how they differed. He also shows how the Wehrmacht was much more complicit in atrocities than the German soldiers of the time would have liked you to believe, and how international and allied policies overlooked much of the killing for a variety of reasons. The book is grim reading, and while it is more of a scholarly study of the depredations of Hitler and Stalin, there are anecdotes contained within that are heartbreaking, such as the Polish-Jewish mother breastfeeding her infant mere seconds before they're shot, and a starving Ukrainian toddler hallucinating that he sees the food that will save his family's lives. It is not a sensationalist text; it calmly, objectively, and concisely discusses the horrors that occurred. I highly recommend this book. It is the first book I've read that ties so many of the atrocities committed against the helpless into one highly readable and informative tome, and shows them as part of a larger tapestry against the framework of the times.

I would suggest taking a careful look at the Kindle edition of this book (the free sample) before ordering it: I downloaded the sample of this book and quickly discovered that the maps in the Kindle version were almost illegible. The book looked fascinating, and the maps are important, so I ordered the hardbound version instead.-----I have now owned the hardbound edition of this book for a week or two, and, although the book is excellent in every way, my reading progress has been slow because the subject matter is both terrifying and depressing. So far, the book has demolished many of my hazy ideas about what happened in the Bloodlands. For example, I had a

never-closely-examined "picture" of how Hitler killed six million Jews. That would be as follows: he rounded up the Jews living in Germany, took them to concentration camps like Auschwitz, and gassed them. We have all seen the film footage, which makes an indelible impression. It turns out that my "picture" is completely wrong. Germany simply did not have enough Jews, and a huge number escaped through emigration while it was still allowed. The total of German Jews killed was 175,000. That is (don't mistake my meaning) in itself an incomprehensible, enormous number, but it does not account for six million dead. What Hitler did, in fact, was to conquer Poland (with the connivance of Stalin) and begin massacring Polish and East European Jews. A huge number were simply shot and tossed into unmarked mass graves. There were also "killing camps" (NOT concentration camps) where the average "stay" was just a day or two, and the victims were gassed without any pretense of work whatsoever. One reason we Americans were slow in understanding the truth is that we (our troops) never even got to the Bloodlands, and so the massive crimes of Hitler and Stalin, amounting to 14 million dead, were simply things that we remained unaware of. I could recite the names of the monstrous killing camps and you most likely would not recognize them --- neither did I. What we remain ignorant of are horrendous crimes such as Stalin's collectivization drive in the Ukraine, which was an utter failure. Shortly after his wife committed suicide (with a bullet through her heart), Stalin became actively malicious towards the Ukraine, seizing all their grain and selling it abroad, and causing a famine which killed 3.3 million people. This is described in the chapter on "Class Terror." But then came the show trials and the Great Terror. This time, Stalin went after nationalities which he suspected --- Poles, Ukrainians, Belorussians -- and the Ukraine experienced a second wave of terror-murder, described in the chapter on "National Terror." All of this happened well before World War II, and all of this time Hitler was able to point to Stalin as a horrific example of Bolshevism ("Why You Should Vote for the Nazis"). Very soon, Hitler invaded Poland from the West, and Stalin (after a cautious pause) invaded from the East, and the stage was set for some of the worst crimes in human history. When you realize that Hitler, in annexing "his half" of Poland, had suddenly created a nation with more Slavs than any other nation in the world (aside from the USSR), and when you think of Hitler's lunatic insistence on "racial purity" --- in addition to his initial plan to steal the land of the Slavs, annihilate them, and populate the lands with German farmers --- a genuine shiver of terror runs down your back. This is a long overdue, magisterial work, which will be a very valuable source for students, teachers, and researchers in the future.

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