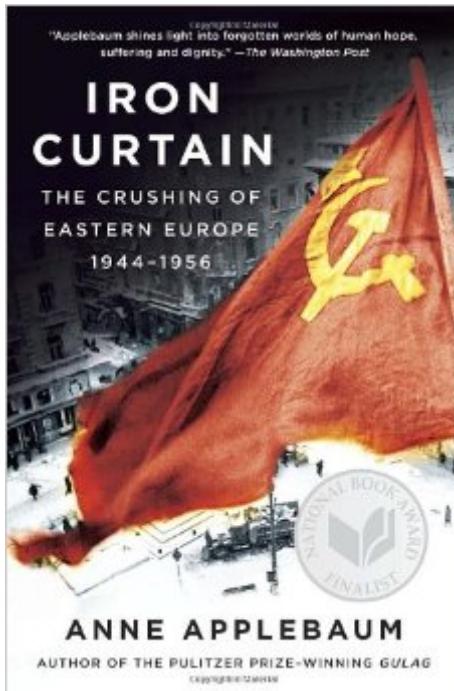


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Iron Curtain: The Crushing Of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956



Synopsis

National Book Award Finalist TIME Magazine's #1 Nonfiction Book of 2012A New York Times Notable BookA Washington Post Top Ten Book of 2012Best Nonfiction of 2012: The Wall Street Journal, The Plain Dealer In the much-anticipated follow-up to her Pulitzer Prize-winning Gulag, acclaimed journalist Anne Applebaum delivers a groundbreaking history of how Communism took over Eastern Europe after World War II and transformed in frightening fashion the individuals who came under its sway. Iron Curtain describes how, spurred by Stalin and his secret police, the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe were created and what daily life was like once they were complete. Drawing on newly opened East European archives, interviews, and personal accounts translated for the first time, Applebaum portrays in chilling detail the dilemmas faced by millions of individuals trying to adjust to a way of life that challenged their every belief and took away everything they had accumulated. As a result the Soviet Bloc became a lost civilization, one whose cruelty, paranoia, bizarre morality, and strange aesthetics Applebaum captures in these electrifying pages.

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Customer Reviews

As a child living in Romania, I remember that my parents used to do everything so that the infamous Securitate would pry into our lives as little as possible. In the sixties, the Romanian dictator Dej did everything in order to please his Russian masters. His menu included a variety of things, such as beatings, torture, incarcerations, threats, illegal deportations and the suppression of human

rights. Mind you, I was not even allowed to take with me my violin, since it was considered "state property". During my university days, I decided to specialize in the history of the Cold War. Surprisingly, there were many revisionist books and other similar monographs which-up to the fall of Communism-painted a very rosy picture of the Communist "paradise". In fact, some scholars were sure that Communism had its bad points, but capitalism and its ideology represented by America were worse. Enter Anne Applebaum's book, which totally destroys and naive theories of the revisionist scholars one by one. "Iron Curtain" explains in very simple words to what degree all the countries in Eastern Europe experienced the brutal process of becoming totalitarian states as ordered by Big Brother Stalin. As she claims, this process was a gradual one and did not happen overnight. Neither was it uniform everywhere. By writing about more than fifteen relevant topics, Ms. Applebaum describes in great detail how tens of millions of people experienced the most terrible regimes known in that geographical part of Europe. She explains how, for example, political parties, the church, the young people, the radio and the economy of those countries were doomed from the very end of World War 2. The book is divided into two parts: "False Dawn" and "High Stalinism". The first part is about the consolidation of the regimes.

I greatly admired Ms. Applebaum's "Gulag", and was looking forward to reading this work. She has done an excellent job of research--thorough, painstaking, a work of great scholarship from beginning to end. And the story she tells is fascinating and tremendously informative. But that said, I had to stop about halfway through--I simply grew weary of reading it. When I titled this review "makes the case", I am saying that I feel it reads like a grand jury indictment rather than a history. I am not speaking about her writing style, which is excellent, but in terms of how she organized the book. The story is handled chronologically, and within that framework she breaks it down into subject areas as they apply to each of the three nations she chose to study. But this leads to a litany of repression that becomes tedious after a while: Here's what they did to the civic groups. Here's how they crushed the opposition parties. Here's what they did to the churches. Here's what they did to youth. Here's what they did to dissidents, and so on. By the middle of the book, I was saying to myself, "OK, OK, I get the point. I see what they did and how they did it." Notwithstanding her use of individual "witnesses", the ultimate effect is to detach the reader emotionally from the frightening story of how the Soviets imposed their hegemony. It might have also been more interesting to delve a bit further into the biographies of Ulbricht, Rakosi, Bierut, and their cohorts, rather than treating them somewhat superficially as slightly different species of the same animal. And although she criticizes "revisionist" histories, she does not (as far as I can tell) offer any alternative explanation for

Stalin's expansionism.

This review is about the 656 pages version printed in England, by a subsidiary of Penguin Press, written by Anne Applebaum, author of the Pulitzer prize winning "Gulag: A history of the Soviet Camps." The sheer size and scope of the book give pause to the casual reader but this is mitigated by the author's elegant prose and ability for descriptive details. The reader is not spared from the horrors of war illustrated by the unremitting violence, unmitigated brutality, wholesale rape, mass murder, abject poverty, deadly starvation and theft - events that led to mass dislocation and homelessness of massive populations within Europe by the end of world War II - and became the fertile ground for the spread of false hope by the communists. These events are well described in the first half of the book, "False Dawn". The second part, "High Stalinism", is a vivid description of the betrayal of the so-called "communist ideal" by Stalin and his minions based mostly on personal interviews and original source document research by the author. Applebaum depicts the subjugation on Eastern European countries through persecution, mass deportation, bogus trials, trumped-up accusations of treason and sedition and the summary arrests, torture and execution of dissidents. Civil administrations and societies were destroyed, religion was outlawed and churches persecuted - as demonstrated by Stalin's edict to.. "Isolate the Catholic hierarchy...Separate the Vatican from the believers....Control all the churches by December 1949" .. at the Cominform meeting in Karlsbad in 1949. Planted throughout the eighteen chapters, are the stories of individuals, such as Benda in East Germany, Supka and Bien in Hungary who were persecuted by communist regimes.

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