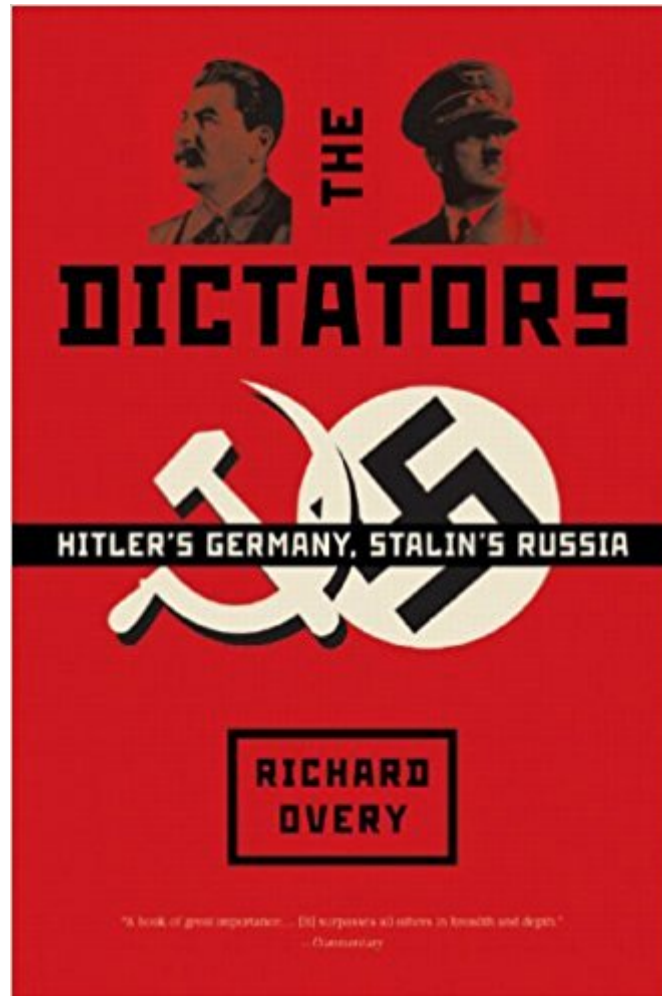




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# The Dictators: Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia



## Synopsis

"A book of great importance; it surpasses all others in breadth and depth."--Commentary If the past century will be remembered for its tragic pairing of civilized achievement and organized destruction, at the heart of darkness may be found Hitler, Stalin, and the systems of domination they forged. Their lethal regimes murdered millions and fought a massive, deadly war. Yet their dictatorships took shape within formal constitutional structures and drew the support of the German and Russian people. In the first major historical work to analyze the two dictatorships together in depth, Richard Overy gives us an absorbing study of Hitler and Stalin, ranging from their private and public selves, their ascents to power and consolidation of absolute rule, to their waging of massive war and creation of far-flung empires of camps and prisons. The Nazi extermination camps and the vast Soviet Gulag represent the two dictatorships in their most inhuman form. Overy shows us the human and historical roots of these evils. 16 pages of illustrations

## Book Information

Paperback: 928 pages

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company; Reprint edition (January 17, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0393327973

ISBN-13: 978-0393327977

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 1.6 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 24 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #124,253 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #86 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Ideologies & Doctrines > Fascism #151 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Russian & Former Soviet Union #189 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Ideologies & Doctrines > Communism & Socialism

## Customer Reviews

Comparisons between Hitler and Stalin and their regimes are nothing new, but this dense, comprehensive, scholarly investigation is more nuanced than most. Overy sidesteps the simplistic debate over which dictator was more evil and focuses on how they, and the systems they created, were similar and different. He delves into their regimes thematically, in topics ranging from police states and economic systems to wartime behavior. The results yield intriguing historical insights,

although the book demands a careful reading. For instance, Overy notes that both Hitler and Stalin created cults of personality, but for Hitler "personality was the defining criterion of leadership"; Stalin, on the other hand, emphasized Communist ideology first and embraced a personality cult only when he realized it could cement his stranglehold on power. Interestingly, while the Nazi Party increasingly relied on workers' support and ideology, Stalin's Communist Party "the "vanguard of the proletariat"â "relied more and more on middle-class technocrats. At times Overy restates points long known to historians, e.g., both leaders pursued negative utopias, but from different bases: class warfare was Stalin's justification, while Hitler chose biological purity. But when he points out the differences in their policies toward minorities and nationalitiesâ "Hitler adhered to a racial ladder, while Stalin, a Georgian, flip-flopped to suit his political goalsâ "Overy's analytical strength and depth of knowledge emerges. 32 pages illus.; maps. Copyright Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Conceding that Alan Bullock's *Hitler and Stalin* (1991) is the standard dual biography, Overy tackles an old controversy about Hitlerism and Stalinism: the degree to which they are similar. Assessing kinship may strike nonhistorians as impertinent in the context of each system's mountain of victims, but Overy explains this work as a necessary empirical foundation for the historiography of the two dictatorships. The dictators' personalities are brought forward only as they pertain to their governing and propaganda apparatuses; most pertinent of all is the way each man regarded himself as a world-historical actor with a "redemptive" mission. Overy spreads that insidiously essential aspect of the Hitler and Stalin dictatorships across the divisions of his analysis, which include the cultlike panegyrics to the leader; their popular support; their military buildups; and, crucially, their fantasy ideologies, without which their crimes and World War II are difficult to imagine occurring. From a notable historian of WWII, this serious integration of extant scholarship will be of use to student and professional researchers. Gilbert Taylor Copyright Â© American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Richard Overy's book *The Dictators* sought to compare the ideological similarities and differences exemplified by Stalin's Russia and Hitler's Germany. He examines many different factions of both regimes. He starts by looking at how these two dictatorships were able to come about and concludes that without the occurrence of World War I and a little bit of luck, these regimes could not have risen. Overy then goes on to look at the style in which these two dictators ruled. He explains

that they claimed the democracy of the West divided the nation into a class system. They wanted true democracy that gives undisputed power to one political party to represent the country. Overy also suggests that Hitler and Stalin were not dictators just for the sense of power, but in order to reach their goal of a Utopia even though their ideas of Utopia differed. Hitler's utopia was a racially pure society, while Stalin's utopia was a classless society. Both of these rulers knew that they faced another inevitable war, and they both heavily involved themselves in the militaristic strategies of their countries. Overy states that WWII would become a total war because it would determine if the ideology of each system would survive. Lastly Overy focuses on the nationalism and racism in each dictatorship, which led to the mass extermination as well as deportation of people. He explains that due to the nationalism and anti-Semitism in both countries it was easy for people to look past the rumors of work and extermination camps. This book is fairly in depth, and a slow read due to the immense amount of information Overy includes. At times Overy seems a little too eager to place Stalin and Hitler in the same category when comparing the two dictatorships, and you must take what Overy says with a grain of salt. He is however clearly very knowledgeable on what he is writing and is very in tune with the ideas he is trying to set across. Overy does not lack data or support throughout his book. If you are interested in how dictatorships come to be and how they are able to keep their power this is a great book for you to read. Some parts are a little harder to get through than others, but overall the topic is interesting and very well written.

Richard Overy's *The Dictator's: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia* provides great insight for those lacking in solid history of the time period. Although the book demands some knowledge of the time period, making for a slow read and visits to "Google" to further one's knowledge of any number of particulars, the book provides a solid understanding of both the two dictators as human beings and their dictatorships. Overy glides over the basic facts of familial history and upbringing to focus on the reasoning behind each rise to power. The book's format, although lacking a chronological format, flows well in providing a side by side comparison on topics such as economic systems and cultural control. The book educates the reader on the way each viewed his territories and its people, as well as the "utopia" so interestingly referred to within its pages. Overy explains how each Stalin and Hitler felt war and conflict was inevitable, yet for different reasons. Hitler felt any dictator had to go through war, as if it was a right of passage. Stalin felt as though to defend his ideological beliefs, war was a necessary measure. Although a slow read, and sometimes heavy; the book leaves the reader with an understanding of the time and the reasoning behind these trying periods in history. The book is long, yet contains many illustrations to break it up and the work entices the reader to

reach the next chapter and learn of a new comparison. One would be hard pressed to find criticism regarding the wealth of knowledge contained in the work; it proved well researched and informative from start to finish.

Richard Overy offers his readers a fresh, well researched perspective on the characteristics of Hitler and Stalin's regimes. The comparative method employed by Overy makes it comprehensible and accessible to the average reader. You do not need to be an expert to enjoy this book, but once you complete it you will feel as though you have advanced your understanding of these two dictators significantly. Overy cuts right to the facts in this book. You will not catch this author speculating on the sexual inclinations, intrapersonal relationships, or drug habits of either Hitler or Stalin. Instead, this author chooses to examine the methods by which these two men came to power, their ideology, economic policies, military initiatives, and manipulation of justice. Overy is concise and fair in his representation of the dictators. You never feel as though this author is telling you to what to think. Overy gives his reader all of the facts and leaves the rest open to interpretation. Overall this book was highly enjoyable. I've read many books that focus solely upon the personal characteristics of Hitler and Stalin. It was quite refreshing to finally learn more about the institutions that supported them.

good information but confusing text layout

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