



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

By Richard Overy Ph.D.

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**"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

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

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"—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 nationalities—Hitler adhered to a racial ladder, while Stalin, a Georgian, flip-flopped to suit his political goals—Overy's analytical strength and depth of knowledge emerges. 32 pages illus.; maps.

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From [Booklist](#)

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*

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Review

"The most comprehensive, up-to-date and cogently argued comparison yet published. ... A richly insightful study."

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