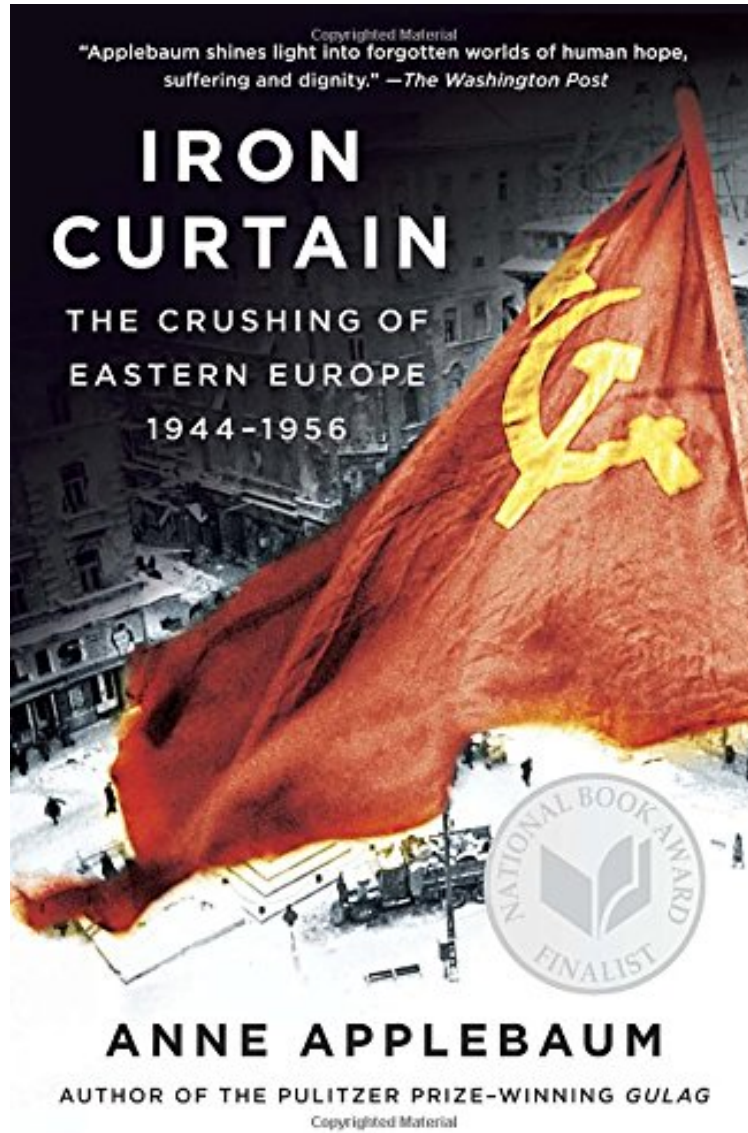


[Mobile book] Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956

## Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956

Anne Applebaum

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**Anne Applebaum : Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956:

363 of 382 people found the following review helpful. The Evils and Brutalities of Communism By Paul Gelman 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. The second one is more interesting and focuses on the years 1948-1956. In general, the book is mainly about Central Europe and only three countries are broadly scrutinized: Hungary, Poland and East Germany, but the author makes sure to also write about the similar fate of other countries, such as Bulgaria, Romania, and to some extent Yugoslavia and the Czech nation. In a way, this book is an accusation against the West, because it fell into the trap of Stalin and his cronies, thus allowing the rulers of Eastern Europe to conduct policies of suppression, of ethnic cleansing, of mass rape and of nationalization-steps which destroyed the lives of many millions of innocent victims. All of this was possible after conducting mass and false propaganda with the help of the secret services established in order to smash any possible resistance in this process of the so-called "utopia". Take for example the crackdown on the church in Poland where priests were arrested en bloc. A similar pattern of harassment and arrests followed in Hungary, where hundreds of church schools were nationalized within months, followed by the closure of monasteries. Nuns in the city of Győr were given six hours to pack up and leave, while in Southern Hungary 800 monks and some 700 nuns were removed in the middle of the night, told they could only take 25 kilos of books, placed on a transport and deported to the Soviet Union. In the winter of 1952-53, senior figures in the church of Krakow underwent a trial featuring fabricated evidence and forged documents. In East Germany, many children were expelled from school for refusing publicly to renounce religion. It was Stalin who, at a Cominform meeting in Karlsbad in 1949, ordered the bloc's communist parties to adopt harsher policies, and it was imperative "to first isolate the Catholic hierarchy and drive a wedge between the Vatican and the believers". We will have to fight a systematic war against the hierarchy; churches should be under our full control by December 1949". The principle guiding these totalitarian regimes was simple: The party is always right, hence the party cannot make any mistakes. A new term was invented: "Homo Sovieticus", which meant that this new species would never oppose communism, and would never even conceive of opposing it. No one was exempt from this ideological instruction-not even the very youngest citizens. Textbooks had to be rewritten to reflect and praise the new reality of Stalinism. Art in all of its forms was recruited to augment the false messianic credo of these dictatorships, thus the obliteration of free thought everywhere. Conspirators were to be found in many places and paranoia was the name of the game. Clerics, workers, intellectuals, rural landowners who were all classified under the rubric of "internal enemies" were sent to Gulags, after conducting mock trials which included made-up evidence and false witnesses. Soviet advisers both wrote the scripts of these "trials" and helped persuade victims to make the necessary confessions, after using torture, beatings, confinement in dark chambers, the inculcation of fear about the fate of the prisoner's family, subtly staged confrontations, the use of stool pigeons and many more techniques. Ms. Applebaum singles out the example of Geza Supka, who was the leader of the Freemasons in Hungary. In 1950 this organization no longer existed, since it was considered a threat to the regime. Supka was described (in a thick file declassified only now) as being a "representative of Anglo-Saxon interests in Hungary" and a traitor plotting to overthrow the regime. The file also contains many false testimonies rendered by some of his friends, but the most harrowing element of the file includes the daily reports on Supka by informers. Even the report about his death in 1956 was to be included in that file. Similar *modi operandi* against other "enemies" were to be found in other countries as well. Then some revolts in the fifties were immediately crushed in East Germany and Hungary in 1953 and 1956, respectively. In the end, the communist leaders asked themselves the same questions they had posed after Stalin's death. Why did the system produce such poor economic results? Why was the propaganda unconvincing? What was the source of ongoing dissent and what was the best way to quash it? In the end, as Ms. Applebaum concludes, "the gap between reality and ideology meant that the communist parties wound up spouting meaningless slogans which they themselves knew made no sense". Here the author comes, in my view, to the right conclusion that after Stalin's death none of the regimes were as cruel as they had been between 1945 and 1953, but "even post-Stalinist Eastern Europe could be harsh, arbitrary and formidably repressive". The Berlin Wall built in 1961 was just one example. Both Romania and Yugoslavia tried at different times to carve out individual roles in foreign policy, distancing themselves from the rest of the Soviet bloc, but not necessarily in very meaningful ways. By using a lot of new archival material, and after interviewing numerous citizens in Germany,

Hungary and Poland, the result is a riveting and enthralling book which also offers deep and extensive analysis of the various segments discussed in her book. This opus will become one of the best written on this topic and a classic of its kind. This in spite of the fact that it is not a comprehensive history of the whole Eastern communist bloc. Highly recommended. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. From the frying pan into the fire

By Wolfgang Muench  
This book is an intelligent and very readable history of Central Europe after the second world war. Anne Applebaum carries together many aspects out of literature and witnesses of turning devastated countries into totalitarian states, i.e. jumping from the frying pan into the fire. The mechanisms how Communism finally destroyed civil societies and identities which were already maimed by German Nazism and war. It is a heavy topic but the book gives a short essay on totalitarianism which counters many revisionist arguments about Communism. Anne Applebaum writes lightly with a sense of humour and irony and produces a number of short and iconic sentences to bring issues to the point. A required reading for anybody trying to understand economic and social developments which impact Poland, Hungary and Eastern Germany until today. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Research, Excellent Writing, And Excellently Argued

By Anne Mills  
In this book, Anne Applebaum presents overwhelming evidence that the Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe after WW2 was just that -- a carefully planned and brutally executed Soviet program. This isn't exactly new news. But she presents the story in a new way, framing it in the institutions of totalitarianism, and ticking off one by one the areas in which the USSR reshaped (or destroyed) institutions in eastern European countries to produce states modeled on the USSR itself. Unquestionable, she has a strongly anti-communist view. Her evidence, however, is so compelling that this view becomes a very convincing narrative of what happened, and how it happened. Moreover, she writes very well, so that what could have been an important but turgid framework for footnotes becomes a powerful narrative. For me, her compelling arguments and her crushing pile of evidence moved at least this reader away from the standard old liberal view of "well, yeah, but the U.S. did lots of bad things too". What happened in Eastern Europe was not an accident, and it didn't reflect the wishes of most of the people in the region. The fall of Communism in Eastern Europe, after reading this account of its beginnings, looks like a very good thing indeed.

National Book Award Finalist  
TIME Magazine's #1 Nonfiction Book of 2012  
A New York Times Notable Book  
A Washington Post Top Ten Book of 2012  
Best 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.

.com Best Books of the Month, December 2012: The gulags. The show trials. The boot stamping on a human face. These trappings of postwar totalitarianism have stayed in our collective memory--brutal and terrifying, yes, but after more than 50 years, also so detached from their context that they've almost become political bogeymen. Anne Applebaum's *Iron Curtain* is a powerful attempt to show that totalitarianism was more than just its most public excesses. A complement to such big-picture histories as Tony Judt's *Postwar*, this book is concerned with the details of totalitarian rule: the diaspora of party enforcers from the USSR to the rest of the Soviet Bloc; the sudden takeover of radio stations, universities, and youth groups by partisans; the conflicted response of Catholic leaders to Stalin's methods. Thanks to Applebaum's extensive interviews and archival research, *Iron Curtain* ensures that the everyday experiences of those in the Soviet Bloc will endure, even if they soon pass beyond living memory. --Darryl Campbell

From Booklist  
Applebaum's *Gulag* received a 2004 Pulitzer Prize, an accolade that accords prominence on her new, groundbreaking investigation of the history of communism. Examining Stalin's imposition of totalitarian regimes on Poland, Hungary, and the Soviet zone of Germany, Applebaum depicts Communist parties that were remorselessly successful in destroying opposition but that failed to win widespread popular support. An interesting motif in Applebaum's history is the awareness by Communist leaders of civil society's rejection of Stalinist socialism, demonstrated by the communists' losses in somewhat unfettered postwar elections. After redressing that problem with rigged polls and mini gulags, the regimes strove to improve communist ideology's attractiveness through propaganda, mass demonstrations, socialist realism in art, and model communist cities. Some people became convinced supporters, but most did not and survived through personal compromises with communism. The latter's individual stories, drawn from interviews and research into those suppressed by state security, infuse Applebaum's account with perplexing human interest. What made for a collaborator, a true believer, a dissident? A masterful chronicle and analysis, Applebaum's work is a history-shelf necessity. --Gilbert Taylor  
Praise for Anne Applebaum's *Iron*

Curtain “Applebaum shines light into forgotten worlds of human hope, suffering and dignity. . . . One of the most compelling but also serious works on Europe’s past to appear in recent memory. . . . With extraordinary gifts for bringing distant, often exotic worlds to life, Applebaum tells us that Sovietization was never simply about political institutions or social structures.”—The Washington Post “Remarkable . . . a book that reanimates a world that was largely hidden from Western eyes, and that many people who lived and suffered in it would prefer to forget.”—The New Yorker “Epic but intimate history . . . [Applebaum] eloquently illuminates the methods by which Stalin’s state imprisoned half the European continent. . . . Applebaum offers us windows into the lives of the men and sometimes women who constructed the police states of Eastern Europe. She gives us a glimpse of those who resisted. But she also gives us a harrowing portrait of the rest—the majority of Eastern Europe’s population, who, having been caught up in the continent’s conflicts time and time again, now found themselves pawns in a global one.”—The Wall Street Journal “Iron Curtain is a superb, revisionistic, brilliantly perceptive, often witty, totally gripping history. . . . The book is full of things I didn’t know—but should have.”—London Evening Standard “Illuminating. . . . Human beings, as Ms Applebaum rousingly concludes, do not acquire ‘totalitarian personalities’ with ease. Even when they seem bewitched by the cult of the leader or of the party, appearances can deceive, she writes. When it seems as if they buy into the most absurd propaganda—marching in parades, chanting slogans, singing that the party is always right—the spell can suddenly, unexpectedly, dramatically be broken.” —The Economist “A tragically intimate account of the imposition of communism in Central Europe. Here is a world in which political authorities shut down choral singing societies, bird-watching clubs, anything that might nourish an independent social sphere. The story is told both with artistry and scholarship.” —David Frum, *The Daily Beast*, Favorite Books of 2012 “A meticulously researched and riveting account of the totalitarian mind-set and its impact on the citizens of East Germany, Poland and Hungary. . . . Even as it documents the consequences of force, fear and intimidation, however, *Iron Curtain* also provides evidence of resistance and resilience.” —Minneapolis Star Tribune “Deeply researched, exciting. . . . A masterful work that will be read profitably by both laymen and scholars. . . . It is the best book on its subject, and will remain so for quite a while.” —Christian Science Monitor “Disturbing but fascinating history. . . . With precision in her narration and penetrating analysis, Applebaum has written another masterful account of the brutality of Soviet rule.” —Publishers Weekly, starred review, Best Book of 2012 “A dark but hopeful chronicle that shows how even humanity’s worst can fracture and fall.” —Kirkus s, starred review, Best Book of 2012 “Magisterial . . . Anne Applebaum is exceptionally well qualified to tell [this story]. Her deep knowledge of the region, breadth of view and eye for human detail makes this as readable as her last book, on the Gulag.” —Daily Mail (UK) “A true masterpiece. . . . Impressive. . . . Applebaum’s description of this remarkable time is everything a good history book should be: brilliantly and comprehensively researched, beautifully and shockingly told, encyclopedic in scope, meticulous in detail. . . . First and foremost of [the book’s achievements] is Applebaum’s ability to take a dense and complex subject, replete with communist acronyms and impenetrable jargon, and make it not only informative but enjoyable—and even occasionally witty.”—The Telegraph (UK) “A masterly synthesis in English of recent research by scholars in these countries, and of the range of memoirs by participants and survivors.” —The Guardian (UK) “Applebaum’s excellent book tells with sympathy and sensitivity how unlucky Eastern Europe was: to be liberated from the Nazi dictatorship by the only regime that could rival it for inhumanity.” —The Independent (UK) “So much effort is spent trying to understand democratization these days, and so little is spent trying to understand the opposite processes. Anne Applebaum corrects that imbalance, explaining how and why societies succumb to totalitarian rule. *Iron Curtain* is a deeply researched and eloquent description of events which took place not long ago and in places not far away - events which contain many lessons for the present.” —Fareed Zakaria, author of *The Post-American World* “*Iron Curtain* is an exceptionally important book which effectively challenges many of the myths of the origins of the Cold War. It is wise, perceptive, remarkably objective and brilliantly researched.” —Antony Beevor, author of *Stalingrad* and *The Second World War* “This dramatic book gives us, for the first time, the testimony of dozens of men and women who found themselves in the middle of one of the most traumatic periods of European history. Anne Applebaum conveys the impact of politics and ideology on individual lives with extraordinary immediacy.” —Amanda Foreman, author of *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire* and *A World on Fire: Britain’s Crucial Role in the American Civil War* “Anne Applebaum’s highly readable book is distinguished by its ability to describe and evoke the personal, human experience of Sovietisation in vivid detail, based on extensive original research and interviews with those who remember.” —Timothy Garton Ash, author of *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of ‘89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague*