

Revolutionary Russia, 1891-1991: A History

By Orlando Figes

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From the author of *A People's Tragedy*, an original reading of the Russian Revolution, examining it not as a single event but as a hundred-year cycle of violence in pursuit of utopian dreams

In this elegant and incisive account, Orlando Figes offers an illuminating new perspective on the Russian Revolution. While other historians have focused their examinations on the cataclysmic years immediately before and after 1917, Figes shows how the revolution, while it changed in form and character, nevertheless retained the same idealistic goals throughout, from its origins in the famine crisis of 1891 until its end with the collapse of the communist Soviet regime in 1991.

Figes traces three generational phases: Lenin and the Bolsheviks, who set the pattern of destruction and renewal until their demise in the terror of the 1930s; the Stalinist generation, promoted from the lower classes, who created the lasting structures of the Soviet regime and consolidated its legitimacy through victory in war; and the generation of 1956, shaped by the revelations of Stalin's crimes and committed to "making the Revolution work" to remedy economic decline and mass disaffection. Until the very end of the Soviet system, its leaders believed they were carrying out the revolution Lenin had begun.
With the authority and distinctive style that have marked his magisterial histories, Figes delivers an accessible and paradigm-shifting reconsideration of one of the defining events of the twentieth century.

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Editorial Review

From Booklist
Russia's experience of the Bolshevik regime appears as a complete historical period in this survey. Figes sets the stage by describing the politics that paved the way for Lenin—radicalization of parties and the rigidity of the Romanov autocracy and its collapse under the strains of WWI. Recounting the Reds' victory in the ensuing Russian Civil War, Figes underscores that Lenin's governing instruments and attempt to totally eradicate capitalism were not anomalies but essential features of the Communist program. His concession in 1921 to restore a modicum of free enterprise encouraged successive leaders such as Gorbachev to look to the 1920s for the "real" Lenin, but Figes delineates the weaknesses of the argument. Stalin reached for the real Lenin of the Civil War, who employed mass suppression, dispossession of the peasantry, and state control of industry. Reprising those policies, albeit on a pathologically murderous scale, Stalin cultivated support from the generation he promoted to fill the places of his victims. Bringing the story full circle with the Khrushchev generation's doubts about the Communist system, Figes delivers an exemplary introduction to the Russian Revolution. --Gilbert Taylor

Review

"A primer intended for readers unfamiliar with the territory, it sparkles with ideas, vivid storytelling, poignant anecdotes, and pithy phrases . . . Fresh and dramatic." ?Victor Sebestyen, *The Sunday Times (London)*

"The dean of contemporary Russian studies-and a gifted popularizer-ventures a refreshing thesis that joins the fondest dreams of the Bolsheviks to the full-circle collapse of the Soviet Empire." ?*Kirkus Reviews, starred review*

About the Author
Orlando Figes is the author of eight books on Russia that have been translated into twenty-seven languages; they include *The Whisperers*, *A People's Tragedy*, *Natasha's Dance*, and *Just Send Me Word*. A professor of history at Birkbeck, University of London and a frequent contributor to *The New York Review of Books*, Figes is the recipient of the Wolfon History Prize, the W. H. Smith Literary Award, the NCR Book Award, and the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, among others.

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