



## VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM MEMORIAL FOUNDATION

# Communism: A History of Repression, Violence, and Victims

## Chapter 6 Assessments and Assignments

### Create the Context

Homework and preparation:

- **Read** the chapter essay, “Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union” and Vsevolod Meyerhold’s Victim Story.
- **Watch** the video listed below as a primer on Joseph Stalin and his totalitarian leadership.
  - “*Joseph Stalin - Dictator* (4 minutes).  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e\\_2of8pmHYU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_2of8pmHYU).
  - *The Truth About Stalin’s Prison Camps* (6 minutes)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62BQ4Ruu1tk>

### Wrap-Up Questions

- How did the ideology of Stalinism align with Marxism-Leninism? How did it differ?
- What was Stalin’s relationship with Lenin and his role in the early years of the Soviet Union?
- What were the main elements and goals of the Five-Year Plan? What were the most notable consequences?
- Why did Stalin conduct his purges? What were the results?
- What was Stalin’s role in World War II, and how did it differ from that of Western leaders?

- What was life like in Stalin’s Soviet Union? How did Stalin limit individual freedoms in the USSR?
- Which of the Tools of Communism presented in Section 1, Chapter 2 did Stalin use to gain and maintain power? Provide examples.

## Assessments

- **In-Class Assessment 1: Compare**  
Ask students to research a domestic policy in the United States from the 1930s. They can look to government archive or presidential library websites for different policies from the time period. This policy should focus on improving the economy or infrastructure or address industrialization. Compare that policy to one of Stalin’s policies from the same period. How do the terms of these policies differ? How different were the outcomes?
- **In-Class Assessment 2: Create**  
Students can create a political cartoon of Stalin or everyday life in the Soviet Union. The cartoon should emphasize the difference between Stalin’s promises and the reality of living conditions and outcomes.
- **Take-Home Assessment: Create an Infographic**  
Instruct students to synthesize what they have learned in this lesson with original research on Stalin and the early Soviet Union (1917-1953). Have the students create an infographic using an online tool or on paper. Free online tools for creating infographics include Canva, Venngage, and Piktochart.
- **Take-Home Assessment 2:**  
Assign the following article, and study the photos provided. Stalin used photoshop to perpetuate his narrative about the Soviet Union and to “erase” those who did not agree with him. Have students look to modern-day countries that use the tools of communism and come up with examples of these same tactics today.

*How Photos Became a Weapon in Stalin’s Great Purge*

<https://www.history.com/news/josef-stalin-great-purge-photo-retouching>

## Primary Source Activity

Have the students read the primary source, “Stalin Collects,” published by the New York Times on October 3, 1939. Pose the following question to the class: “If you were the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, would you accept or deny Stalin’s demands of stationing troops in the Baltics? Why or why not?” Separate the class based on their answers, and conduct a structured debate, with each side presenting one idea at a time.

## Primary Source

### STALIN COLLECTS

News that the Lithuania Foreign Minister is about to follow his Latvian and Estonian confreres to Moscow occasions no surprise. The terms

imposed on Estonia, obliging this helpless little neighbor to submit to Soviet control of her foreign policy and Soviet occupation of the strategic islands off her coasts, foreshadowed what was in store for the other Baltic states. These are the nations whose refusal to accept a Russian guarantee was so long the false pretext for holding up the conclusion of the British-Soviet Pact. In their interest and also in her own, for the British had no desire to see Russian naval bases in the North Sea, Britain supported the plea of the Baltic states to maintain their independence. Stalin magnified this snag because he was already deep in a game more to his taste. Even then he was conspiring to surprise the British – and also, no doubt, his fellow-conspirator – by an arrangement that reduced these states to protectorates on the Slovakian model and restores to Soviet Russia the warm-water ports, the trade facilities and the naval and submarine bases enjoyed by imperial Russia.

The swift and cold-blooded manner in which sovereign nations are summoned one by one to hear what their future status is to be shows Stalin to be something more than an apt imitator of Hitler. His method of intimidation and conquest is quicker and quieter. No shrill speeches, no international appeals, no wars of nerves, accompany the approach of this conqueror to his prey. Stalin is much more indifferent than Hitler to world opinion. His victims, like the Estonian Minister, express appreciation for the treatment they have received; they have not lost everything. His armies, unheralded by threats or declarations, move stolidly into Poland and proceed methodically to “liquidate” all traces of the capitalist order – landlords, private businesses, officers of the Polish Army. The noisiest war they wage is the war against religion.

Stalin acts in his own way to gather the fruit from the shaken tree. Whatever ultimatums are delivered within the sound-proof walls of the Kremlin, he makes no public demands, asks and answers no question. His ultimate intentions and purposes are as little known now as when he startled the world by joining up with Hitler. But from now on each move will help to illuminate Soviet intentions and clarify Stalin’s attitude toward the larger struggle Europe is preparing with elephantine deliberation, as of a monstrous machine gathering in all the forces of destruction. Hitler proceeds to play his final card, and his partner’s hand becomes a matter of vital importance. *The New York Times*, October 3, 1939<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> “Stalin Collects,” *The New York Times*, October 3, 1939, accessed January 2022, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1939/10/03/94714462.html?pageNumber=18>.