

OUR NEIGHBORS



If we go on forgetting half of Europe's history, some of what we know about mankind itself will be distorted.

Every one of the twentieth-century's mass tragedies was unique: the Gulag, the Holocaust, the Armenian massacre, the Nanking massacre, the Cultural Revolution, the Cambodian revolution, the Bosnian wars, among many others. Every one of these events had different historical, philosophical, and cultural origins, every one arose in particular local circumstances which will never be repeated.

Only our ability to debase and destroy and dehumanize our fellow men has been—and will be—repeated again and again: our transformation of our neighbors into “enemies,” our reduction of our opponents to lice or vermin or poisonous weeds, our reinvention of our victims as lower, lesser, or evil beings, worthy only of incarceration or expulsion or death.

The more we are able to understand how different societies have transformed their neighbors and fellow citizens from people into objects, the more we know of the specific circumstances which led to each episode of mass torture and mass murder, the better we will understand the darker side of our own human nature.

Totalitarian philosophies have had, and will continue to have, a profound appeal to many millions of people. Destruction of the “objective enemy,” as Hannah Arendt once put it, remains a fundamental object of many dictatorships.

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