Gulag: A History Study Guide

Gulag: A History by Anne Applebaum

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Gulag: A History is an account of the Soviet Russian Gulag labor camps during the twentieth century and discusses what life was like within the camps for prisoners. Applebaum makes extensive use of recently opened Gulag archives, memoirs, interviews, and other official documents to narrate this history.

The first section of the book describes the origins of the Gulag from the Bolshevik Revolution through the Great Terror of the late 1930's. During this time, forced labor camps were organized throughout the Soviet Union. These camps housed a wide variety of prisoners, from professional criminals to "kulaks" to "politicals." Leaders within the Soviet Union often used the camps as a way of eliminating political challengers□both real and perceived□and others who criticized the Soviet regimes. Prisoners were forced to participate in hard labor, often in large projects that were not well funded or thought out, including the White Sea Canal. In the 1930's, authorities began further expanding the camp system into the harsh climates of the far north, including the Komi and Kolyma regions. During the Great Terror0's, many politicals were arrested and sentenced to the camps. Mass executions, sometimes with victims chosen at random, were common.

The second section of the book describes life within the camps, from a prisoner's arrest to his daily life within. Although everyday life differed from one camp or prisoner to another, there are several shared aspects that most prisoners dealt with during their sentences. For example, one common experience was hunger within the camps. Rations were small, and many prisoners died from starvation or related illnesses. Another was extreme temperature; in the northern camps, prisoners often suffered the pervading cold during work and sleep with little or no heat. Finally, prisoners experienced forced labor in the camps. A prisoner's job often determined whether he or she would live or die. Other topics that Applebaum discusses in this section are the physical appearance of the camps, arrest procedure, interrogations, transportation to the camps, survival strategies, guards, and dying prisoners.

The final section discusses the decline of the camps until their elimination in the late 1980's and early 1990's. During World War II, the camps had expanded due to the influx of prisoners from occupied territories and foreign armies. During and immediately following the war, Stalin tightened his control over the Soviet Union, sentencing more individuals to the camps to serve the need for slave labor. Although Stalin persisted with the camps, it was becoming increasingly clear to other leaders that the camps were both problematic and unprofitable. After Stalin's death, the camps underwent a number of changes. While some subsequent leaders tried to improve conditions within the camps and release some prisoners, others tightened control over them. During the post-Stalinist period, a number of strikes and a few rebellions occurred, which helped bring about the end of the system. Finally, during the 1980's, Gorbachev issued a series of amnesties for most of the remaining prisoners and called for an examination of the history of the Gulag, which essentially shut the camp system down.

Introduction

Introduction Summary

The introduction gives a brief history and account of the Gulag system and situates it within the larger context of concentration camps globally. The acronym GULAG stands for *Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei*, which translates to "Main Camp Administration." Generally, however, this acronym came to stand for not only the administration of the Russian camps but also the entire system of Soviet slave labor from the 1910's through the 1980's. Even more broadly, it represented the entire repressive Soviet system and its arrests, forced labor, exiles, and deaths.

The Gulag began shortly after the Russian Revolution in 1917, and by 1921 there were eighty-four forced labor camps in various parts of the USSR. From 1929 to 1953, estimates indicate that around 18 million individuals passed through the system, with the total number of prisoners around two million at any given time. While the system of mass forced labor gradually disappeared after Stalin died in 1953, the camps did not dissipate entirely. Some were redesigned in the 1970's and 1980's and used as prisons for a new generation of individuals who opposed Soviet rule.

Applebaum argues that the Gulag is much less well known, particularly to Westerners, than the Nazi concentration camps. In part, this is due to the absence of concrete information on the camps until recently, when archival records about the camps were made available to researchers. She also argues that a hard look at the history of the Gulag is difficult for those in the West because many of the Communist ideals, such as social justice and equality, are fundamental to Western democracies. In addition, particularly in the United States, World War II is remembered as a just war; to incorporate the Gulag history into this means admitting that the Western Allies helped condemn thousands to death in the camps by forcibly repatriating them to Russia and/or by ceding Russia rule over certain areas in Eastern Europe.

Forced labor and concentration camps are not unique to Russia or to this time period in Russian history. Czarist Russia, as early as the 18th century, sentenced prisoners to forced labor. The Gulag also developed and existed in roughly the same time period and continent as the Nazi camps. These two systems are related in several ways. Both emerged from World War I and the Russian Revolution. They also belong to the wider history of concentration camps globally, including forced labor camps in Cuba, in South Africa during the Boer War, and in German South-West Africa. Also, both systems legitimated their actions and brutality by creating categories of "enemies" who were persecuted and destroyed not for what they had done but because of who they were.

However, the two systems also differ in important ways. Applebaum identities two differences that she feels are fundamental. First, the definition of "enemy" in Russia was more ambiguous than the definition of "Jew" for the Nazis. For example, in Russia, no one category of people had death that was guaranteed, and individuals could improve

their lot or leave the camps through various means. Second, and more importantly, the two systems were organized around different primary purposes. While the Soviet system was brutal and caused many deaths, the primary purpose of the camps was economic. It was not, like the Nazi system, organized with the intent to deliberately kill masses of people.

Introduction Analysis

One of the important points that Applebaum makes in this introductory chapter is that while the Soviet system of camps was different from the Nazi camps, they do share some similarities, which are important for understanding the depravities of which humans are capable. While most people are probably aware of the Nazi camps and a number of museums worldwide commemorate the events, the Gulag is much less known, particularly in the West.

The Gulag is an important part of the larger history of concentration camps and of the brutality that can result from the label "other." Stalin killed more Ukrainians during the terror famine of the 1930's than Hitler's mass extermination of Jews. Over 18 million individuals passed through the system at one time or another, and while many lived through their experiences, many did not. Despite the Gulag's importance to both Russian history and world history, Stalinist terror and the Gulag system often inspire little more than indifference in the West.

Part 1, Chapter 1: Bolshevik Beginnings—Summary

Part 1, Chapter 1: Bolshevik Beginnings□Summary

In 1917, two revolutions swept across Russia. Czar Nicholas II abdicated rule in February of that year, ending the Czarist regime. The first post-revolutionary Provisional Government, led by Alexander Kerensky, was weak and dissatisfaction among the citizens was high. Despite this, Applebaum argues that few expected the Bolsheviks, a radical socialist party, to seize control of the government following an October 25 coup against the provisional government. Vladimir Illyich Ulyanov, better known by his revolutionary pseudonym, Lenin, became the new leader of Soviet Russia.

Against this backdrop, the first Soviet labor camps were created. Soon after taking power, Lenin identified a new kind of "criminal:" the class enemy. "A class enemy opposed the Revolution, and worked openly, or more often secretly, to destroy it" (p. 5). Because a precise definition of the class enemy was never provided, people could be arrested for any perceived transgression□and were often arrested not for what they had done, but for whom they were. The few prisons that remained after the revolution became overcrowded with the influx of these new prisoners. At this time, Lenin's secret police, the Cheka (whose full name was the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage) was formed. Later, this organization would become the more familiar KGB.

During 1918, the government turned over empty World War I prisoner-of-war camps to the Cheka, in an attempt to solve the problem of how to deal with the overcrowded prisons. On Sept. 5, 1918, Lenin directed the Cheka to carry out his policy of Red Terror, which was directed at those suspected of being a class enemy and included arrests, imprisonments, and murders. While individuals were imprisoned in numerous camps, the labor purpose of the camps remained ambiguous at this time.

Politicals, members of non-Bolshevik, revolutionary socialist political parties, who had fought for the Revolution but were not part of Lenin's faction, presented a certain problem for Lenin and the Cheka. Many of these individuals had already been imprisoned during the Czarist regime and knew how to pressure their jailers, organize hunger strikes, and communicate within the prison system. More importantly, however, they had many contacts outside of Soviet Russia. Their contacts and other socialists outside of Russia began to generate negative publicity about the conditions within the prisons. The Cheka answered by moving some of the more troublesome socialists to further reaches of Russia and away from their contacts, but even this did not guarantee isolation.

The Cheka began searching for another solution in dealing with the class enemy. This search would eventually lead them to the start of the Gulag in 1923.

Part 1, Chapter 1: Bolshevik Beginnings□Analysis

Against the backdrop of the Revolution, Lenin took power over Soviet Russia. However, his control over the country and rival parties was tenuous. This chapter describes not only the situation that Lenin faced, but also how he attempted to solve the challenges to his regime that existed. One of those solutions was the creation of camps for the politicals.

Lenin's Red Terror offers a preview of things to come for Soviet Russia, for Stalin would employ similar tactics during the Great Terror of the late 1930's. The ambiguous definition of "enemy" during both of these periods meant that many innocent people were caught in the mass arrests and sentenced to the camps.

Part 1, Chapter 2: The First Camp of the Gulag—Summary

Part 1, Chapter 2: The First Camp of the Gulag Summary

Located in an old monastery, the Solovetsky concentration camp is commonly known among prisoners as the first camp of the Gulag. Although other camps existed during the early 1920's, and though forced labor was not a new concept in the prisons, Solovetsky was the first to organize forced labor into a system. The camp held various types of prisoners, including the politicals. The Soviet solution to dealing with the potential problems the politicals might cause was to give them what they wanted (books, writing materials, etc.) but to relocate them to the outer reaches of Soviet Russia in order to make it difficult for them to remain in contact with outsiders.

Living conditions for most prisoners at Solovetsky were harsh and primitive. Bunks were made of long, broad planks of wood. Poor quality and variety of food led to weakness and illness. Torture of various sorts happened frequently, and overwork was common. One form of torture famous on the island was being sent "to the mosquitoes," where a prisoner would be tied up naked in the forest until they were swarmed by mosquitoes, often fainting from the loss of blood. Guards also carried out mass executions in seemingly random fashion.

However, not all prisoners lived under these conditions at Solovetsky. A group of imprisoned actors were allowed to organize a theater in the camp, where they put on plays and operas. The camp also boasted a library, botanical garden, and its own monthly magazine. These more privileged prisoners were also able to participate in Soviet celebrations and holidays.

By the middle of the 1920's, it was becoming clear that the camps of the Gulag were not meeting the goal of becoming self-supporting. This ushered in many changes to the system. At Solovetsky, a former prisoner, Naftaly Aronovich Frenkel, became the new camp commander. He began by setting up a system that fed prisoners according to the quantity of their work. Under this system, strong prisoners grew stronger as they were fed well, while weaker prisoners often grew weaker, many dying due to the small food rations given to them. Frenkel also began sending prisoners out of the camp to build roads. He gradually discarded everything that did not contribute to the productivity of the camp. Finally, the lines between political prisoners and those with criminal sentences were dropped, with both groups engaging in forced labor. By the end of the 1920's, even socialist prisoners held no special distinction within the Gulag.

Part 1, Chapter 2: The First Camp of the Gulag Analysis

Although there were other camps during at this time, Solovetsky captures much of what the Gulag system comprised. We see how the camps begin, including the start of hard labor, torture, and food rations according to productivity. None of these characteristics are unique either in world history or to the Soviet Union, yet the system managed to encapsulate them all into a system of brutality and uncertainty. These characteristics would be seen again later in other camps.

Solovetsky is also different in some ways, particularly compared to what the camps would evolve into under Stalin. In the beginning at least, there were re-education programs and cultural activities happening within the camp. This juxtaposition of freedoms and activities with torture and restrictions sums up in many ways the Gulag system. It was brutal, but also filled with inconsistencies and surprises.

Part 1, Chapter 3: 1929: The Great Turning Point—Summary

Part 1, Chapter 3: 1929: The Great Turning Point□Summary

1929 marks a turning point for both Soviet Russia and the Gulag system. By this time, Lenin had died, Trotsky had been discredited, and Joseph Stalin had taken over the reigns as the leader of the Soviet Union. In 1929, the Soviet government announced a "Five-Year Plan," which was an economic plan that sought a twenty percent annual increase in industrial output. The plan called for rapid industrialization, food rationing, and longer work periods in general society. In rural areas, peasants were forced to give up their landholdings to the government and join collective farms. This would weaken the agricultural system and lead to the famines in the Ukraine and Southern Russia in the 1930's that killed millions.

Prior to this, in 1926, the criminal code had been rewritten to include an expanded definition of "counter-revolutionary" crimes. It created categories such as "wreckers" and "saboteurs" who were said to be, through their actions, preventing Russia from living up to its economic potential. With the process of forced collectivization begun, millions of individuals resisted in both large and small ways. The term "kulak" was a vague pejorative used to refer to anyone who used hired labor or had more property than was considered acceptable; almost anyone could be labeled one and arrested for it. Some individuals were arrested for owning an extra cow, having an extra bedroom in their house, or being accused by a neighbor. Entire families were arrested and either sentenced to the camps or sent into exile in places like Siberia and Kazakhstan. To handle the overcrowding caused by the new prisoners, a new plan was devised where prisoners would be sent to far northern Russia to help exploit the resources there. After they finished their sentences, prisoners would be required to stay in the north, becoming forced colonists.

Applebaum also discusses the question of whether the Gulag camps were actually planned by Stalin or whether they just happened as a side consequence of the processes of collectivization and industrialization. The latter argument tends to focus on the haphazard beginnings of the camps, the fact that Gulag officials often seemed to have no clear goals in mind for the system, and the cycles and changes in the system itself. However, there is also evidence that Stalin had a designed plan in mind for the camps, or at the least a belief in the usefulness of forced labor. Stalin, throughout his reign in Russia, was immensely interested in the camps and their productivity. He was often intimately concerned with their daily operations and the decisions made about them, as well as taking an interest in particular prisoners. Moreover, the mass arrests during the 1930's and 1940's suggest a carefully planned course for providing forced laborers for the Soviet economy.

Part 1, Chapter 3: 1929: The Great Turning Point□Analysis

In this chapter, we see the expansion of criminal categories and reasons for arrest. This would be only one time of many that this would happen. Stalin in particular arbitrarily created categories to accomplish his goals of eliminating anyone he felt might be a threat. As we will see throughout the book, arrests and sentences were contradictory and confusing. Prisoners were arrested for no reason under capricious charges of political crimes. As Applebaum discusses throughout the book, it will probably never be clear if Stalin arrested people simply to fulfill his need for slave labor. At many times, this appears to be the case. We do know that the camps were of special interest to him throughout his life as leader of Soviet Russia, and that he would use prisoners in many large-scale projects, one of which Applebaum discusses in the next chapter.

We also see here the expansion of the camps in the north. Again, this was only a sign of things to come. Soon, many of the larger camps were located there, and neighboring towns grew out of the camps. The kulaks and exiles forced to relocate there accomplished the dual goals of strengthening Stalin's regime by eliminating anyone who might cause a problem, and of providing people to populate these areas of Russia to exploit the resources there.

Part 1, Chapter 4: The White Sea Canal—Summary

Part 1, Chapter 4: The White Sea Canal□Summary

As mentioned above, Russia was often very concerned about its public appearance regarding the concentration camps. When the West threatened a boycott on Russian wood, one of its main exports, Russia sought to further obscure the role of prisoners in the forestry industry and moved some of the prisoners to other industries. This led the way for the construction of the White Sea Canal, which was designed as a way for ships to get from the White Sea to Baltic ports without having to traverse the Arctic Ocean. In order to do this, 141 miles of canal would be dug, along with five dams and nineteen locks. Stalin eagerly wanted the project to take place, and especially wanted it to utilize forced labor.

The building of the canal is a chronicle of chaos and disorganization. Wood, sand, and rocks were used instead of metal and cement, and the canal was built only twelve feet deep in an effort to save money. Most technology was too expensive or unavailable, which led to the use of unskilled labor. Materials, tools and living conditions were all makeshift and often manufactured by hand.

One important aspect of the White Sea Canal is that it was the first and only project fully exposed to foreign and domestic propaganda. A group of writers, led by Maxim Gorky, wrote a book about the project, praising the camps and the project for its power to redeem individuals.

Part 1, Chapter 4: The White Sea Canal□Analysis

This chapter is an excellent example of the many large projects that prisoners were forced to work on. Stalin often used slave labor in his projects; to him, this labor offered an economical way of reaching his five-year plan. In addition to railroads and highways that were never finished or rarely used, the White Sea Canal was a project gone wrong from the start. The unskilled labor and economic shortcuts hindered the project's outcome.

It also illustrates the inconsistencies and lack of logic in some of these projects. As Applebaum shows repeatedly, the Gulag system was fraught with aspects that made little sense. In this case, railroads were already transporting a great deal of goods across the same region. Shipping from the White Sea to Baltic ports had dropped off and would continue to do so, making the project almost unnecessary from the outset.

Part 1, Chapter 5: The Camps Expand—Summary

Part 1, Chapter 5: The Camps Expand□Summary

As the White Sea Canal project was underway, the administration was expanding the camp system in what some Soviet historians have called the "opening up of the far north." Under this expansion, prisoners performed such tasks as building northern railways and roads, cutting wood for export, and packaging fish harvested in the White Sea. Two of the camps founded during this time in the North, the Ukhtinskaya Expedition and the Dalstroi Trust, would go on to become virtual industrial empires. Still, the death toll at many of the camps was high, and even at camps where mortalities were lower, conditions were still almost intolerable because of the cold and the lack of provisions or adequate clothing.

One of the early forays into the North was the Ukhtinskaya Expedition, which set out in 1929 and had the good fortune of having over sixty-eight mining engineers along that had all been arrested as wreckers in 1928. Arriving in Ukhta in the Komi Republic, the prisoners built the work sites and the camp while the geologists searched for the best places to drill for oil. Early on, conditions were harsh because of the lack of adequate supplies. Prisoners lived in tents and medicines arrived in fewer quantities than ordered. Expeditions from the Ukhta camp sometimes established sub-camps in the region. As more and more prisoners and kulaks arrived in the region, the area around the camp grew to include collective farms, hospitals, and factories.

Dalstroi, another infamous northern camp located in the far northeast corner of Siberia in Kolyma, has often symbolized the Gulag system. Eduard Berzin became the first camp commander, and while conditions were not necessarily pleasant under him, they would become much harsher in later years. Berzin believed that in order for workers to have the greatest productivity, they should be kept warm and well fed. Prisoners and exiles from Dalstroi built mines, some of the city of Magadan, and docks for Magadan's port.

Part 1, Chapter 5: The Camps Expand□Analysis

Prisoner memoirs reflect the realities of camps in the north: extreme cold that often resulted in death, inadequate clothing, dangerous work, and little sustenance. Often, prisoners arriving at the campsites had to build their own shelters. In retrospect, it is easy to see why the death tolls were high in these camps. Despite these hardships, however, the camps in the North became some of the largest in the Gulag system. Many prisoners passed through their gates and were forced to remain in the region after their release. This not only served to populate the northern regions, but also allowed the Soviet regimes to take advantage of the resources that existed there. Without the Gulag

camps, it would have been much more difficult for the leadership of Russia to make this happen.

Part 1, Chapter 6: The Great Terror and Its Aftermath—Summary

Part 1, Chapter 6: The Great Terror and Its Aftermath□Summary

1937 and 1938 are commonly known as the years of the Great Terror, when thousands were arrested. The concentration camps were transformed into places where prisoners were deliberately worked to death or killed in other ways. Stalin used this purge as a way to eliminate his rivals and enemies and terrorize the Soviet population. Many camp commanders of the Gulag were arrested and eliminated, along with leaders in the Communist party, members of the Red Army, and the families of individuals targeted as "counter-revolutionaries."

The concentration camps became harsher and more deadly. Prisoners "were no longer considered full citizens of the Soviet Union, if they were to be considered people at all," (p. 103). Food rations decreased and conditions in the camps worsened as more prisoners were arrested and sentenced. Fatalities in the camps officially doubled between 1937 and 1938. The secret police, now called the NKVD, issued execution quotas, sometimes for thousands of prisoners. In some camps, selection for execution appeared random, while in others prison leaders seemed to take the opportunity to rid themselves of specific individuals perceived as problematic.

The mass executions abruptly ended in November 1938, although some of the arrests continued. The economic productivity of the camps continued to decline. Lavrenty Beria became the new leader of the NKVD, and immediately began trying to improve and change the Gulag system. Prisoners were further regarded as units of production as he sought to increase productivity. His efforts proved to be at least somewhat successful.

Part 1, Chapter 6, The Great Terror and Its Aftermath□Analysis

Within this chapter, we see another of the tactics Stalin used to maintain and strengthen his hold over the Soviet Union□he simply had rivals and perceived enemies arrested and put into the camp system. There, the individuals were killed or forced to engage in hard labor. Stalin considered these individuals neutralized; if they weren't killed, they would be far too busy trying to survive in the camps to oppose Stalin's regime. Stalin would continue to use such tactics until his death, although not always in such numbers.

The Gulag system also evolved with the Great Terror. Though the system was already severe and lethal, it became worse. The mass executions again illustrate the inconsistencies and uncertainty within the Soviet Union and the camp system. Already struggling merely to survive, prisoners in some camps had to further cope with random executions. A prisoner in that camp could not know if or when they would be chosen,

and had no means to prevent it from happening. Their situation had become even more helpless.

Part 2, Chapter 7: Arrest—Summary

Part 2, Chapter 7: Arrest□Summary

One of the unique aspects of the Soviet camp system, in contrast to the Nazi camps in Germany, is that its inmates arrived via the legal system. Applebaum writes that by the middle of the 1920's, people were no longer picked up off the streets and thrown in jail without investigations, trials, and sentences; however, the crimes for which people were arrested for were ambiguous, and the procedures of investigation and trials were absurd. At various points in time, different groups were targeted for arrest, including engineers and specialists in the 1920's, kulaks in the 1930's, Poles and Balts in the 1940's, and anyone deemed a "foreigner" in the 1930's and 1940's. Foreign communists in particular were often targets for arrest and conviction, and at times anyone suspected of having a foreign connection (including anyone with a pen pal or relative abroad) was likely to be arrested. Others were arrested for telling jokes (or even listening to one) about the government or leaders, being late for work, stealing bread to feed one's family, attempting to change jobs, and being named by someone (a friend, family member, or jealous acquaintance) as a "co-conspirator." Yet, at the same time, arrests and convictions remained unpredictable and inconsistent. Some people were arrested and convicted, but others who were in similar groups or had done similar things weren't.

The methods for arrest were also varied and inconsistent. Some individuals were given ample warning that an arrest loomed. Others were completely surprised. Some individuals were picked up at work, while others were picked up on the street. The most common place for an arrest to occur, however, was at home. People feared the midnight knock on the door, particularly during times of mass arrest. Nevertheless, for all the unpredictability of arrests, the events afterwards followed a constant course. Prisoners, after entering the local prison, would be registered, photographed, and fingerprinted. If the individuals were brought to a city prison, rather than immediately sent on into exile, they were then thoroughly searched. Some individuals would be isolated from other prisoners.

The interrogations that took place within the prisons have been described in both history books and popular movies. When many arrests were occurring at the same time, investigations were kept to a minimum and the accused would be quickly interrogated and sentenced. Others were interrogated seemingly with the sole purpose of making the prisoner confess whether they were guilty or not. Physical torture was used in many cases, particularly during the 1930's, and psychological abuse was common throughout the years of the camps. For example, one method of psychological torture often used was to deprive the prisoner of sleep.

Part 2, Chapter 7: Arrest□Analysis

The descriptions and examples used in this chapter illustrate well the inconsistencies and unpredictability of the arrests and sentences in the Gulag system. Individuals could

be arrested for virtually any perceived offense, and arrested at anywhere, at anytime. Entire groups were sometimes targeted, but even then it was unclear as to which members of that group would be arrested. The notorious "knock on the door" kept individuals in constant fear that their arrest could occur at any point.

The description of the interrogation likewise reveals the brutality that underlies the Gulag system. Prisoners were beaten, women were raped, and bones were broken in attempts to gain confessions from prisoners who, in most cases, probably had not even committed the offense they had been charged with.

Part 2, Chapter 8: Prison—Summary

Part 2, Chapter 8: Prison□Summary

In some ways, the prison system prepared prisoners for the Gulag. By 1942, prisoners were required to take a daily walk of at least an hour so that they would be physically fit and prepared to help the wartime effort in the camps. Except for prisoners under direct interrogation, prisoners were given eight hours of sleep, and those that were sick received better food and vitamins. Like the camps, prisons also differed from one to another, and across various time periods.

Prison officials tried in various ways to break prisoner solidarity. By 1935, prisoners were forbidden to talk, sing, or shout to one another; to stand by the windows; or in any way try to communicate with individuals, inside or outside the prison. Prisoners were sometimes referred to by a letter rather than their name, so that prisoners could not identify each other. Prisoners were forbidden from sleeping during the day, and bright lights were often used in the prison cells at night. Informers kept prisoners from becoming too comfortable or from breaking prison rules.

Despite the strict regulations, prisoners found ways to resist the system. They taught new arrivals how to care for themselves and how to maintain basic hygiene. Prisoners left notes for one another and bribed guards to pass on letters and messages both within the prison and to people on the outside. They also organized committees to care for the poor and sick among them. Perhaps the greatest resistance innovation was the prisoner's Morse code, which enabled them to communicate by tapping on walls and plumbing.

Part 2, Chapter 8: Prison□Analysis

One of the interesting and important aspects of this chapter is its discussion about the prisoners' resistance. It is easy to view the prisoners as helpless against the whims of Stalin and his regime. Within both the country as a whole and the camps, life was uncertain. Individuals never knew when they might be arrested and sent to the camps or deported. They also didn't know whom they could trust, or who was an informer. One person might be sent into exile, another to the camps, and still another executed, all under ambiguously fabricated charges. Life was lived in apprehension.

Here we see that prisoners did find ways to resist the system. Applebaum writes, "And yet□if they could, prisoners fought back, against boredom, against the constant small humiliations, against the attempts to divide and atomize them" (p. 153). That resistance would be seen more clearly here than in the camps is not surprising. Within the camps, survival became paramount. In the prisons, survival was also important, but there were fewer immediate risks. Interrogations and cruelty occurred, but fewer died in the prisons. With prisoners grouped together for long periods of time, without the struggle of hard labor, there was more time and energy to devote to resistance.

Part 2, Chapter 9: Transport, Arrival, Selection—Summary

Part 2, Chapter 9: Transport, Arrival, Selection Summary

After their arrests, interrogations, and sentences, prisoners were transported across Russia to Gulag camps. The relocation often took place in stages; first, to the trains by way of trucks; then, by train to transit camps; and finally, for some, by boat or barge to their Gulag camps. The camp system used trucks and trains that appeared normal, rather than standing out as a part of the prison system. Trucks used for transport were often disguised to look like regular heavy-goods trucks or bread trucks. Only closer inspection of the trains would show cars wrapped in strands of barbed wire, wood platforms for guards, and iron bars on all of the small windows.

The journey to the camps was full of hunger and torment, and always took place in crowded transports with little to no comfort. Prisoners were rarely given more than a cup of water per day, despite being given small rations of salty fish that only increased their thirst. Access to regular bathroom facilities generally was not allowed, and prisoners were forced to relieve themselves in front of others on the trains themselves. The temperature in the cars ranged from very hot to very cold, depending on the outside weather and the crowdedness. Prisoners remember trains occasionally stopping so that corpses could be removed.

When the trains stopped, the transit camps were little better. As jailers would never see most of the prisoners again, there was little concern for their welfare, although some transit camps had better conditions than others. Prisoners could sometimes earn a little extra bread by carrying cement buckets or loading wagons, but water was in short supply.

The horrors of the prisons, transports, and transit camps culminated with the final journey to the Gulag camp. In order to reach Kolyma, prisoners had to endure trips via boats or barges. Old cargo steamers were often used, with only slight modifications (e.g., crude wooden bunks, machine gun nests, and iron grilles separating areas). Prisoners were kept below deck for the first part of the voyage food rations were simply thrown below, while water was dropped in buckets. Criminal convicts killed other captives, robbed them of their clothes and goods, and raped female prisoners.

Finally, prisoners arrived at the Gulag camp. The first sight that greeted them was their camp's gate, which often displayed a slogan. Prisoners were counted, after which they took baths and were shaved. Prison clothing was issued. Perhaps the most important thing to happen upon arrival, however, was the selection of prisoners for certain categories of workers. This was particularly important for the prisoner because their assigned category could determine whether they lived or died. Prisoner assignments

were supposed to reflect their health, sentence, and social origin. They were assigned to three categories of work: privileged, light, and heavy. According to how well they satisfied the particular norms for their jobs, prisoners were then assigned to one of four levels of food rations: basic, working, reinforced, or punishment.

Part 2, Chapter 9: Transport, Arrival, Selection Analysis

As Applebaum points out, the long train ride across Russia was in many ways symbolic of the break between the prisoners' old lives and new ones. They were no longer considered Soviet citizens, and they lost most, if not all, of their rights. Everything familiar was gone, replaced by the atrocities of the camps.

This chapter is provides an interesting comparison to the infamous transports to Nazi concentration camps. Survivors of the Holocaust often wrote about the brutal, life-threatening rides in overcrowded trains with little to eat or drink. The Gulag transports differ little from them, including the death of prisoners en route.

Part 2, Chapter 10: Life in the Camps—Summary

Part 2, Chapter 10: Life in the Camps Summary

Within the Gulag system, life and work varied greatly between camps. By 1939, Beria had issued stringently detailed rules that were meant to increase the economic productivity of the camps. The regulations contained everything from how the barracks should look to what the prisoners' daily life should be like. Every prisoner was to be assigned a job, with a set of norms to fill. Not surprisingly, as in other areas of the Gulag system, these regulations were met in varying degrees.

The *zona* was the immediate area of the camp. Within this rectanglular area, bordered by a series of fences made from barbed wire, sat the barracks and dining hall. In order to reach the *zona* from the outside, prisoners had to pass through a guardhouse. Armed guards were positioned in high towers all around the *zona*. Although prisoners were often shot if they ventured too close to the fences, within the camps they could move about freely when they were not working.

Within the camp, there existed a regime of rules and regulations for the prisoners. This mandated such things as when prisoners would wake up, when food was received, and how long prisoners could sleep. In most camps, each morning prisoners were organized into work brigades, counted, and marched to work. This was repeated on the return to camp in the evening. Workdays were long, although this too varied over time and place. Rules were frequently adjusted or broken. Prisoners were sometimes kept at the work sites for longer periods of time in order to fulfill impossible norms and days off were revoked.

For most prisoners, their living spaces consisted of the barracks, often built by the prisoners themselves. Sometimes the barracks were simple buildings made of wood; at other times, the barracks were earth dugouts. Prisoners generally slept on long, wooden sleeping shelves, where prisoners lay down next to each other in a long row. At other times, they might have double-decker bunks that held four prisoners. Only occasionally did the "beds" have straw mattresses. In some barracks, there was virtually no light, but in other camps, lights were left on constantly. The barracks were often cold and had no running water. Outhouses were located some distance away.

Bedbugs and lice were common due to the dirt, crowding, and poor hygiene. In theory, prisoners were supposed to have a bath every ten days in the bathhouse with a small amount of soap. Clothing was to be boiled in disinfectant. However, soap rations were often not given out and in some camps, baths were taken with a large mug of water. Frequently, prisoners only had a short time in which to clean themselves after waiting for hours to bathe.

The dining hall was one of the main buildings within the *zona*. In large part, prisoners were kept hungry for control and regulation. The camps distributed soup to prisoners once or twice a day. Prisoner memoirs often discuss the soup's watery consistency and suspect contents, including animal lungs and spoiled cabbage. The bread was distributed in small pieces, colored black with a coarse texture, and baked with a great deal of water. Thieves within the camp stole bread and whatever else in the way of food might have been available. Most prisoners were vitamin deficient, and many in the camps died from hunger.

Part 2, Chapter 10: Life in the Camps Analysis

This chapter aptly relates the iniquity, brutality, and despair of the Gulag camps. Applebaum provides us with description of the camps and life within. Through the use of recollections and official reports, she creates a narrative of daily life that consists of little more than hard labor, filth, and extreme hunger. Both the inconsistency of the system and its harshness are illustrated through her discussion.

Part 2, Chapter 11: Work in the Camps—Summary

Part 2, Chapter 11: Work in the Camps□Summary

The central function of life in the camps was work. Daily life revolved around work and the camp administrators were preoccupied with it. Still, as with other areas of the Gulag, it is difficult to generalize about this aspect across the camps because of variances within the system. There was a huge range of economic activity across the camps, from cutting trees to mining gold to establishing chemical factories to building of airports. Generally, prisoners were assigned to perform either as a general worker or a "trustie" that was given more specific tasks. Brigadiers led each brigade of workers and were responsible for overseeing the work.

For the most part, whether prisoners suffered wasn't a concern. What mattered was the fulfillment of the norms. Norms could be anything related to the work being done; for example, a certain number of trees that had to be cut, or a certain amount of gold to be mined. Norms were often set at unattainable levels, for the prisoners were not professionals and not provided enough sustenance to maintain high levels of performance. The weather conditions also greatly affected both the work being done and the prisoners' health. The worst jobs in the winter were in the forests, where the cold was compounded by unpredictable storms. Regulation clothing offered little protection. Other factors that hindered norm fulfillment were broken machinery and bad organization.

The camps also contained Cultural-Education Departments, or KVCh, which tried to re-educate prisoners with Soviet propaganda. The KVCh sought to promote the value of work among the prisoners. It produced camp newspapers, gave reports on the successes of the camp, and sponsored political lectures, libraries, and theatrical productions. KVCh instructors were also responsible for those individuals who refused to work and sometimes became the scapegoats when norms weren't fulfilled and the camp failed to meet its economic goals.

Part 2, Chapter 11: Work in the Camps□Analysis

As in the previous chapter, this one provides insight into the camps and what life was like in them. Here, Applebaum concentrates on the labor that prisoners did. Yet again, we see the inconsistencies in the system. The camp that a prisoner ended up in sometimes determined whether they would live or die. In some, work may have been safer or in less extreme conditions, or have had more reasonable norms. In Chapter 10, we were shown the differences in living conditions within the camps, which influenced the ability of the prisoners to work. Some camp commanders made a difference in the daily lives of prisoners, while some did not at all. Others cared only about the bottom

line. To a certain extent, this occasionally led to better conditions, which meant healthier workers and therefore greater productivity.

We also learn about the KVCh and their efforts to re-educate prisoners. This was just one piece of the pervasive system of propaganda used by Stalin and government of the Soviet Union. Propaganda was used legitimate the policies and actions of the government. As we will read in further chapters, propaganda continued throughout the history of the camp system, particularly when the outside world questioned the government's activities.

Part 2, Chapter 12: Punishment and Reward—Summary

Part 2, Chapter 12: Punishment and Reward□Summary

Within the camps, there were means of punishments and rewards designed to encourage prisoners to work and abide by the rules. A prisoner could be placed in a "punishment isolator," known by its Russian acronym ShiZO. Applebaum suggests that these punishment isolators seem to contradict the economic principles of the camps, which demanded productivity. However, they were an everyday part of the life and operation in the camps. They were used for two types of prisoners□those who refused to work and those who committed a camp crime. For those who refused to work, the punishment cells offered an alternative to the exhaustion of work, but it came with its own harsh realities, from shortened rations to the cold, damp solitude in which they were forced to sit all day. Heating in the cells was often neglected, and commanders often added their own special torments. Within the camp system, there were also punishment barracks and even punishment camps for refusers, thieves, and escapees. Little is known about these special camps as very few prisoners survived them.

One of the rewards that prisoners could receive was through the camp post office. Only prisoners who met their work norm were allowed to meet with family members (although only once every six months, further complicated by the distance to many of the camps) or receive packages (which were also limited). Letters going out of the camp were carefully censored for any details about the camps. As the regulation of these rewards was inconsistent, camp commanders had a great deal of control over them. Some allowed more letters than the allotment, while others never distributed letters to individuals they didn't like or who were seen as problem prisoners.

Visits from relatives could be either rewards or punishments, although this often had more to due with the purpose for the visit than any decision by camp commanders. Many prisoners never received visitors, as trips to the camps were both physically and psychologically difficult. Meetings that did happen were generally brief and took place in the presence of at least one guard. In some of the bigger camps, however, longer meetings of several days without guards were possible. Whatever the regulations, the meetings often ended poorly. Prisoners told relatives not to come again and spouses arrived to end marriages.

Part 2, Chapter 12: Punishment and Reward□Analysis

Social control is often an effective manner of reward and punishment. Here, we see the social control mechanisms used within the camp system to induce prisoners to work and follow the rules. In addition to the aspects that Applebaum discusses in this chapter,

work assignments, food rations, beatings, and mass executions also were used to keep prisoners in line. Interestingly, although we might expect the system to consist solely of punishing prisoners, rewards were also offered to prisoners for good behavior. With the isolation of the camps, letters and packages from home served as incentives for prisoners to work hard and obey the rules.

The prison memoirs relate the contradictory elements of visits from the outside. While visits ostensibly seemed to be a reward for prisoners, it appears that often prisoners regarded them in opposite ways, sometimes even refusing to meet with the visitor. For prisoners, reminders of the outside were difficult, and the meetings often went poorly. Prisoners may also have been concerned about the safety of relatives and other visitors, both due to the difficult journey to the camps and the possibility of being seen as a collaborator with the prisoner and being arrested themselves.

Part 2, Chapter 13: The Guards—Summary

Part 2, Chapter 13: The Guards Summary

Commanders, jailers and guards were at the top of the camp hierarchy, but they didn't live in a world entirely separate from the prisoners. Guards and administrators sometimes carried on affairs with prisoners or worked in a black market system together. It was not unusual, as well, for prisoners to eventually become guards and administrators or for administrators and guards to become prisoners.

With few exceptions, jobs within the camps were not considered desirable or prestigious. Guards often had little or no experience and limited education. The conditions, even for guards, were frequently primitive and difficult, with long hours and a lack of proper clothing and shoes. Incentives were offered to potential employees in order to fill positions at the camps in the far north. When this didn't work, Soviet labor boards simply sent thousands of ex-Red Army soldiers were sent to work in the camps after the war.

The system did reward some of the loyal and more fortunate guards. Some received better rations and social advances. Camp commanders, particularly in the bigger camps, received many perks, including higher salaries and bonuses. Prisoner and administrator memoirs talk of camp commanders having servants, exotic foods, and luxurious furniture. Prisoners were often used to help make these things happen. Still, it bears mentioning that some camp commanders did go to great lengths to try to make things more bearable for prisoners.

While cruelty was not required, however, it was often the norm. Applebaum argues that most of the time, the cruelty in the camps was due more to the thought of prisoners as non-human than to an actual desire to be cruel. Propaganda persistently labeled prisoners as criminals, collaborators, and traitors. Commanders often referred to prisoners as machinery or tools, rather than as humans. This dehumanization helped to justify the ill treatment of prisoners.

Part 2, Chapter 13: The Guards Analysis

While Applebaum does not make direct comparisons in this chapter to Nazi Germany, for those familiar with the history of the Holocaust comparisons become almost automatic when reading through her chapters on prison life. Although she at times does make such comparisons, it is not her purpose in the book. Nonetheless, these two systems evolved during the same era and on the same continent. Both countries had brutal leaders in Hitler and Stalin. Prisoners died in great numbers in both systems. While the author may not always make direct comparisons, the indirect comparisons are omnipresent.

It is interesting to note, as part of these implicit comparisons, that in most cases the guards within the Gulag system did not specifically have orders to be cruel. Given the economic aims of the camp systems, guards who sadistically harmed individuals or killed them might have been seen as violating the goal of the camp. The author points out that guards and administrators were sometimes punished for being too cruel to prisoners. Certainly, there were instances of guards acting sadistically and harming others for their own savage enjoyment. However, for the majority, this wasn't the case. Instead, the guards acted with indifference and self-interest, taught to see prisoners as little more than cattle.

Part 2, Chapter 14: The Prisoners—Summary

Part 2, Chapter 14: The Prisoners Summary

Within the camps were several different types of prisoners. Prison memoirs describe in detail encounters with the *urki*, the Russian professional criminals, as shocking and bewildering. The *urki*, or "thieves-in-law," sat atop the prisoner hierarchy in the camps and were distinct from the ordinary criminals within the camps who had been arrested for petty crimes. The *urki* followed their own culture, with foundations in the criminal underground of Czarist Russia. Although the re-education programs targeted the *urki*, by the 1930's, camp authorities had given up this idea and begun using the *urki* to control other prisoners. *Urki* dressed differently, used their own language and rules, and gave themselves identifying tattoos. The thieves also played card games with elaborate rituals, often betting other prisoners' goods and food rations.

Peasants and workers made up the vast majority of the camp prisoners. The ordinary criminals had often not done anything that would be considered a crime in another state. Instead, authorities arrested these prisoners for stealing a loaf of bread, buying goods and selling them elsewhere, or for something as seemingly minor as taking pencils from their workplace.

Most political prisoners were not dissidents, former leaders in the party, or religious figures. Most were ordinary people without strong political views who were swept up in the mass arrests. Authorities categorized political prisoners under "anti-Soviet agitation," "counter-revolutionary activity," "counter-revolutionary terrorist activity," and "Trotskyist terrorist activities." Sentenced under the first category, prisoners sometimes received easier sentences; those sentenced as Trostkyists were given the hardest work in the camps. Foreigners commanded a certain amount of admiration, but this also served foreign prisoners from making close contacts within the prisons.

Part 2, Chapter 14: The Prisoners Analysis

The Gulag camps were characterized by a wide diversity of prisoners. People from various nationalities, backgrounds, and sentences existed within the camps. Again, there is the implicit comparison to the Nazi camps, where Jews were specifically targeted. While it is true that certain groups were targeted for arrest within the Gulag system, this occurred sporadically. Stalin did appear to have certain ethnic minorities arrested and sentenced during his regime, inducing what Applebaum refers to as "cultural genocide." However, many other groups were also targeted over the years, including Russian peasants, and the aim was primarily about slave labor rather than eliminating the existence of a particular group.

This chapter also informs the reader about the hierarchy within the camps. *Urki* existed at the top of the prisoner hierarchy, due to the violence that they would inflict upon other prisoners, and their internal and external networks. They also had cultural and behavioral codes that set them apart from other prisoners.

The chapter also demonstrates the senselessness and inconsistency of the system. Individuals were arrested and sentenced for things that seem absurd, and many people were simply caught up in the mass arrests. A jealous neighbor or acquaintance could turn someone in on a fictitious charge in order to gain his or her possessions. An individual could be arrested for trying to help his or her family survive or for arriving late to their job.

Part 2, Chapter 15: Women and Children—Summary

Part 2, Chapter 15: Women and Children□Summary

Women experienced the same atrocities within the camps as men did, although they additionally had to contend with sexual threats and harassment. Camp commanders did not want women because they were physically weaker, and perhaps because of this the number of women in the camps remained relatively low. However, low numbers meant that women were in low supply, and thus valuable to male prisoners in ways similar to the possession of bread, clothing, and other materials. For a woman sentenced to the camp, her survival depended on her status and position in the camp. Females attached to one of the male professional criminals became possessions to be bartered and traded. Some of the criminal bosses also had young males as their "wives" as well, but Russian society viewed this as taboo and said little about it in memoirs. Memoirs often described lesbian relationships among the women and its ritualization in the camps. Sex itself was public, as there was no opportunity for privacy. Rape and prostitution were common; in some of the camps, certain barracks were virtually brothels. In spite of the sexual torment that women often experienced in the camps, prisoners do describe instances where love developed. Men and women carried on relationships through letters thrown over fences and smuggled to each other.

Given this atmosphere of sex, rape, and prostitution, women naturally endured pregnancy and childbirth in the camps. Authorities regularly arrested pregnant women and children along with their parents. Some women deliberately became pregnant in order to be excused from hard labor and hopefully receive an early release. Administrators were ambivalent about abortions, sometimes allowing them and sometimes giving further sentences to women who attempted them. When women did give birth in the camps, children suffered from malnutrition and lack of care. Children ranked low on the camp hierarchy and administrators did little to improve their conditions. At the age of two, children were transferred from the camps to regular orphanages. Parents easily lost track of their children as both were transferred from place to place. Children in the orphanages faired little better. The orphanages were overcrowded, dirty, and possessed a high mortality rate. Many children ended up running away and joining the ranks of the professional criminals.

Within the camp system were eight children's colonies, located in the Ukraine. Children placed in these camps had committed crimes themselves or were children of arrested parents. These camps were run by the same authorities of the adult camps and in most ways resembled them. By 1935, authorities passed laws making children as young as twelve liable as adults. The number of juvenile delinquents, however, continued to grow despite the harsher sentences. Authorities arrested, interrogated, sentenced, and transported children to these camps in the same ways as adults. They also expected children to work in the camps' economic ventures. Children worked in brick factories,

clearing snow, sewing, and doing metalwork. Authorities also subjected the children to the same camp propaganda and psychological pressures adults faced in the camps.

Part 2, Chapter 15: Women and Children Analysis

Although most of the prisoners were men, women were arrested and sentenced. They too experienced the brutality of the system and often endured rape and forced relationships with authorities. In some ways, survival for women depended on whom they were attached to within the camps. With the criminals, women were traded and bartered back and forth. With a camp authority, the women may have had a bit more protection. As with many other aspects of the camp, women probably had little control over this.

The situation for children was even bleaker. The mortality rates for children in the camps were high and the orphanages on the outside were little better. Applebaum shows how the system actually generated more professional criminals as children and young adults fled the orphanages for the streets. This, in turn, led to the creation of children's camps that resembled the horror of the adult camps.

Part 2, Chapter 16: The Dying—Summary

Part 2, Chapter 16: The Dying Summary

Dying prisoners, or *dokhodyagi*, ranked at the very bottom of the camp hierarchy. They suffered from malnutrition, starvation, and diseases like scurvy and pellagra. Those who were starving experienced dizziness, swelling, and stomach problems, deteriorating both physically and mentally. Prisoners wrote of how the dying would reach such levels of starvation that they didn't care for themselves anymore.

Prisoners also died while laboring. The mines and factors often had unsafe conditions and workers who were weakened by hunger and fatigue only exacerbated this. Many prisoners also died from diseases like tuberculosis, dysentery, pneumonia, and typhus. Applebaum writes that while the subject of suicide is strangely taboo, some prisoners did take their own lives. They saw suicide as a way of reasserting control over their lives.

Camp authorities and doctors kept many aspects of the dying a secret. Commanders would release dying prisoners early so that their deaths would not show up in official statistics. Commanders also made sure that doctors were not writing "starvation" as the cause of death for prisoners who died within the camps. They performed secret mass burials, which were in theory forbidden, and many graves went unmarked in an attempt to conceal the truth of their demise

Part 2, Chapter 16: The Dying Analysis

Given the depravity of the camps and the system, it is not surprising that large numbers of people died. In this chapter, Applebaum describes what dying was like in the prisons: the hunger and fatigue, the diseases, and the madness that occurred. The author also explains why the official statistics of death in the camps are not accurate. The practice of letting prisoners go just before death so that they wouldn't show up on the official numbers certainly skews the records.

We also see in this chapter another form of resistance that prisoners used: faking or causing illness in order to evade work. Many of the things that prisoners inflicted upon themselves in order to be classified as sick seem unbelievable. However, considering the situation, these methods were often less torturous than the hunger and work of the camp.

Part 2, Chapter 17: Strategies of Survival—Summary

Part 2, Chapter 17: Strategies of Survival□Summary

Surrounded by hardship, prisoners struggled to survive, developing various tactics to assist them in this effort. Some prisoners found ways of raising themselves above other prisoners and live without caring for them. Camp guards would reward prisoners for working hard and meeting norms.

Tufta, which translates as "swindling the boss," was one strategy that prisoners employed. Prisoners found ways of making it seem like they were working and meeting norms, even while not doing so. "They pretend to pay us, and we pretend to work." (p. 350). Controversy has erupted in recent years over how hard prisoners actually worked and how much effort they put into trying to avoid it. Some prisoners did perform the work expected, but the memoirists also make clear that many tried to evade work, mainly for survival. With insufficient clothing and little food, prisoners who could successfully avoid work sometimes saved their own lives. *Tufta* was probably used most at the brigade level, however, with entire groups involved in disguising how much work each member did. At higher levels in the camp, the norm-setters themselves engaged in deception.

Prisoners also collaborated with the authorities to survive. The Soviet camp system used *pridurki* or "trusties" to help them exert power and control. "Compound trusties" had the most privileges because they never left the *zona* for work. Prisoners wrote that these individuals lived an easier life than those doing hard work, as they dealt with the cold less, had fewer work hours, and often received perks such as better clothing, food, and other materials. Surprisingly, given their typical cruelty and corruption, professional criminals often held these positions. Camp authorities also used some prisoners as informers within the camps.

Some prisoners found help through the camp hospitals and doctors. Every camp had a doctor or nurse on hand to treat the sick. Camp regulations stated that those who were sick, as defined by the doctor, had to be treated differently than ordinary prisoners. Camp commanders wanted to cure the sick so they could be put back to work, but they also didn't want to encourage prisoners to fake illnesses. To balance this, they set limits on the number of prisoners who could be labeled sick, and set up invalid brigades for prisoners who could no longer do hard labor. As with the camps themselves, the conditions in the hospitals varied. Many had limited supplies and insufficient quantities of medication. Additionally, not all doctors treated patients well, and some had few qualifications.

Not all prisoners sought ways to escape or malinger; some prisoners simply followed the rules, met their norms, and forged friendships with others to help them through.

Prisoners tried various ways of keeping themselves sane in the camps, from reciting poetry to cleaning their barracks to indulging in prayer. Other prisoners participated in the camps' theater or other cultural activities.

Part 2, Chapter 17: Strategies of Survival□Analysis

This chapter offers an important addition to the history of the camps. While prisoners engaged in protests during the early Gulag history and again in the post-Stalinist era, they also resisted the system during the brutality of the Stalin regime. It is often tempting to see prisoners as nothing but helpless in the face of the camps' barbarity. However, prisoners did resist, just as they had in the prisons before reaching the camps. The scant rations, weather conditions, and labor forced them to find ways to survive. The methods for resisting ranged from groups working together to conceal whether norms had been met to direct collaboration with authorities. Whatever the method, individuals did have some power within the system. Their struggles to find ways to avoid work, or to avoid fulfilling the impossible norms, saved many individuals.

Part 2, Chapter 18: Rebellion and Escape—Summary

Part 2, Chapter 18: Rebellion and Escape Summary

A myth exists about the impossibility of escape from the Gulag system; however, some prisoners did manage to do just that. The camps were designed with barbed wire fences and watchtowers constructed to prevent escapes. Camps were located in places where the distance and weather created serious impediments for most of the year. Local residents in towns near the camps were also paid to turn in escapees. Authorities and guards shot any prisoner who tried to escape.

Despite these factors, prisoners still attempted to escape. No camp was completely secure, and escapes were probably more common than the memoirs suggest. Many escapees tried to reach the Finnish border and some did accomplish escape to that country. Professional criminals had perhaps the best chances for escape, as they could blend into the criminal world once outside the camp. Conversely, authorities pursued political prisoners with great fervor, making their escape attempts more difficult.

Prisoners escaped in various ways. Some snuck away from loosely guarded work sites. Others attacked and shot guards. "One of the standard methods of criminal escape involved cannibalism. Pairs of criminals would agree in advance to escape along with a third man (the 'meat'), who was destined to become the sustenance for the other two on their journey" (p. 398). Escaped prisoners walked long distances to cross national borders into safety.

Rebellion in the camps did occur. Protests sometimes happened on the transports when there was no water or food. Political groups staged hunger strikes. The Ust-Usa rebellion, however, is unique in the history of the Gulag system. A free worker, rather than a prisoner, led the rebellion from the Lesoreid prison. On Jan. 24, 1942, Mark Retyunin and a group of rebels disarmed the bathhouse guards. The rebels raided the storerooms, distributing clothing and food to prisoners, and then marched to Ust-Usa, a neighboring town. They attacked the post office and the jail, cutting off communication to the outside. Townspeople alerted a neighboring camp and began fighting back. The fighting continued all night and the townspeople captured many of the rebels. Those that remained headed for another town, where they found that the militia was headed in their direction. The militia closed in and killed the rebels who did not kill themselves first.

Part 2, Chapter 18: Rebellion and Escape Analysis

This chapter again illustrates how prisoners resisted the camp system. While many individuals chose a more passive resistance through the means discussed in Chapter 17, others sought to escape the prison system altogether. Fears of rebellion plagued

authorities throughout the camps' existence, and as we will see in later chapters those fears were not unfounded.

Even if they escaped, prisoners faced a harsh reality. They found themselves in isolated areas with little food, where anyone they encountered might turn them in. Many faced months of walking in order to cross over foreign borders. It is not surprising then, that professional criminals were better able to evade detection after their escapes. They were able to blend into the criminal networks in most of the larger cities.

Part 3, Chapter 19: The War Begins—Summary

Part 3, Chapter 19: The War Begins□Summary

For Soviet Russia, World War II began on June 22, 1941 when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union. Repression for political prisoners increased and all foreigners in Soviet society were collected and imprisoned. On June 24, authorities issued orders that any prisoner convicted of a political crime could not leave the camps, even if their sentence had ended. Within the camps, life grew more exacting as longer working hours were established and food further rationed to help with the war effort. During 1942, at least one in four prisoners died, and over the course of the war, over two million prisoners died in the camps.

As during other periods in the Gulag system, chaos reigned. Authorities in the occupied territories of Poland and the Baltic states panicked, and executed many prisoners. Hurried evacuation plans led to overcrowded transports, where prisoners suffocated or were killed by falling bombs. Guards made prisoners walk from camps in the east farther into the Soviet Union. Many died along the way from hunger or being shot by guards.

Part 3, Chapter 19: The War Begins□Analysis

Although there have been many heinous times during the history of the Gulag, the period of WWII ranks as one of the highest, surpassed only by the Great Terror and its mass arrests and executions. Thousands of prisoners in western camps and the occupied territories were simply shot so they would not fall into German hands. Others died on forced marches to safer areas, or in cramped transports, falling victim to starvation, suffocation, and bombing.

For the political prisoners, this must have been a time of extreme terror and uncertainty. Already previously classified as enemies of the Soviet state, they were now forbidden from leaving the camps even when their sentences were finished. They likely feared the possibility of another round of mass executions.

Part 3, Chapter 20: Strangers—Summary

Part 3, Chapter 20: Strangers□Summary

The Gulag system had always contained a number of foreigners, primarily foreign wives and communists. After 1939, the NKVD rounded up many individuals from Soviet-occupied countries. The authorities wanted to secure the areas and increase Sovietization in these areas. As a result, many Poles, Balts, Ukrainians, and others were arrested as political prisoners, which could mean just about anything. With these massive arrests, the Soviet authorities abandoned any pretense of legality, doing away with trials and sentencing altogether. They also began arresting and imprisoning minority groups within the Soviet Union who were targeted as potential German collaborators.

The deportation of some groups, such as the Chechens, was particularly brutal. Guards placed many in sealed transports with no food or water. Applebaum argues that these deportations could be referred to as "cultural genocide." While there were no mass executions, Stalin essentially erased these groups from existence, eliminating them from official documents and killing many through the camp system. Authorities encouraged them to abandon their native languages, religions, and their pasts.

Soviets first set up POW camps after their occupation of Poland in 1939. They seized many Polish soldiers and officers, putting them into both POW camps and the Gulag system. Following Stalin's orders, the NKVD secretly murdered many other Polish officers. The Soviets took over 2 million German prisoners of war and over a million other Axis soldiers into their camps from 1941 to 1945, By the end of the war, POWs and criminal prisoners were treated the same, with hard labor in the mines and poor food rations.

At the end of the war, a number of Russians were found outside of Soviet borders. Some had been in Nazi POW camps, and some were anti-communist émigrés who had left after the Bolshevik Revolution. Stalin sought to have them and others returned to the Soviet Union, and did so courtesy of a controversial decision at the Yalta Conference. Filtration camps, similar to those of the Gulag in their use of forced labor, were set up to handle those who confessed and those who were deemed suspicious. "Whether they had left the Soviet Union voluntarily or by force, whether they had collaborated or been captured, whether they had returned willingly or been forced into cattle cars, all were asked, at the border, to fill out a form which asked whether they had collaborated" (p. 437).

The Soviet authorities developed a new sentence for war criminals whom had allegedly committed real crimes (as opposed to those who were sentenced for spurious reasons)□viewed as unreformable and dangerous, and were sentenced to special camps known as *katorga*. These prisoners were set apart from other prisoners by high fences and striped uniforms, and locked into their barracks each night. While many of

these prisoners had indeed collaborated with Germany, others were sentenced for fighting for their own nation against both Germany and Russia.

Part 3, Chapter 20: Strangers Analysis

Although there had always been "strangers" in the camps, WWII brought not only new types of foreigners, but also more of them. One of the more striking events of this era was the return of the Russians. Applebaum suggested in the beginning of the book that the West's involvement in this return might be one of the reasons why the Gulag has not been remembered as well as the Nazi camps. Through the decisions of the Yalta conference, the West sent thousands of individuals back to Russia, often leading to their deaths. Many of these individuals had escaped Russia during the Russian Revolution or immediately afterward. As anti-communists, they knew their lives were in danger. After the conference, regardless of the fact that they had done nothing wrong and did not want to return to Russia, they were forced to go, often by Western forces. Most often, they were then sent directly to one of the camps.

Surprisingly, Soviet POWs also found themselves in the Gulag system. Anyone who had been captured by the Germans was viewed as tainted or at least suspect. *Katorga* camps were organized to hold these prisoners, and the camps would continue to play an important role in the Gulag system after the war.

Part 3, Chapter 21: Amnesty–and Afterward—Summary

Part 3, Chapter 21: Amnesty-and Afterward□Summary

Immediately following the outbreak of WWII, authorities began issuing amnesties for healthy men of fighting age. Nearly a million prisoners were released during the first three years of the war, though these prisoners did not include professional criminals or political prisoners. Amnesty did not mean survival for the released. Some have speculated that prisoners released from the Gulag were assigned the most deadly positions on the front lines. Surprisingly, few prisoners seemed to object to fighting for Stalin and many distinguished themselves in the war. Within the Gulag, prisoners were also swept into Soviet patriotism and the camps certainly made an industrial contribution to the war effort.

Authorities also released a number of Poles, after the Polish state was re-formed, to join the Polish army and fight against Germany. This, however, only applied to ethnic Poles, which left ethnic Ukrainians, Belorussians, and Jews in the camps. The authorities did little to help the released men reach the Polish army. Further problems ensued when former prisoners reached the base only to find that the army lacked food, medicine, and equipment. Surveys taken from the released Poles were one of the only sources of information about the Gulag system outside of Russia.

As the war ended, Stalin set up camps in what was to become the "Soviet bloc" in Eastern Europe. These camps were built following the Gulag's example, and often included the same structures and routines, including hard labor and norms. The camps in Germany, some located at the site of former Nazi concentration camps, appear to have been more deadly than the Russian camps. While war criminals and Nazi officers were sent into either POW camps or Gulag camps in Russia, the German camps held many of the German bourgeoisie, including judges, lawyers, and businessmen. Similar camps were set up in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia. The Bulgarian and Yugoslav camps were particularly severe. These camps, however, did not last long, and many had already closed before Stalin's death in the 1950's.

Part 3, Chapter 21, Amnesty-and Afterward□Analysis

Applebaum discusses in this chapter how some men were released from the Gulag to serve in the army. However, as she explains, this release did not necessarily mean survival or an easier time. Many released from the Gulag went directly to the front lines, where they were killed or injured. Poles who were released received no assistance from the Gulag authorities or the Russian government. Many did not know where to go, or how to get there without money or food.

This chapter also points to the West's complicity in the Gulag system. Parts of Eastern Europe remained in Russia's control after the war as part of various agreements. The government quickly set up camps, with the help of the Gulag authorities, which closely resembled the camps in Russia. Although many of them lasted for less than ten years, they were particularly brutal and many prisoners died within them.

Part 3, Chapter 22: The Zenith of the Camp-Industrial Complex—Summary

Part 3, Chapter 22: The Zenith of the Camp-Industrial Complex□Summary

After the war, Soviet citizens and prisoners looked forward to an easier time. People began to openly complain about the conditions they lived in, and rumors spread quickly about prisoners being freed and the elimination of collective farms. However, this did not happen. Stalin, in the wake of the atomic bomb, rededicated the country to military and industrial production and again tightened his control over Soviet Russia. Authorities began a new series of arrests, targeting the army, ethnic minorities, and collective farmers. Former prisoners, particularly politicals, were rearrested. Thus, the Gulag expanded after the war, reaching a count of more than two and half million prisoners by the early 1950's. This led to several changes in the camps.

While the old political prisoner had rarely actually been political, many of the new political prisoners had engaged in anti-Soviet activity. These prisoners began causing trouble for authorities. They stood up to the professional criminals within the camps, banding together to force change. This worried authorities, who feared that these prisoners would turn to rebellion soon. To combat this, authorities formed new camps as extensions of the *katorga* camps. Each camp bore a name taken from nature, presumably to hide what the prisons really were. Prisoners were only allowed minimal contact with family and lived in some of the harshest regions of Russia. There were only nominal medical facilities, and prisoners labored arduously during ten-hour days.

Authorities also made changes regarding the professional criminals. The most dangerous were simply separated from the rest; some were sent to special recidivist camps. Authorities also made use of collaboration, offering special incentives to criminals who would inform on other criminals.

By the early 1950's, it was clear to everyone but Stalin that the Gulag system and its camps were economically unprofitable. Stalin instigated a new set of lengthy projects, such as an asbestos production plant, new railways, power stations, and the Great Turkman Canals. Inspections in 1953 showed that the cost of the camps was far above the profits from the slave labor. Despite this, no one dared challenge Stalin about the camps.

Part 3, Chapter 22: The Zenith of the Camp-Industrial Complex□Analysis

After the end of WWII, the camps began to undergo changes. First, they expanded, and prisoners were re-arrested. Second, new political prisoners entered the camps, often

with anti-Soviet sentiments and experience in trying to subvert authority. They challenged the existing hierarchy within the camps and the power of the professional criminals. In response to the battles between these prisoners and the criminals, the authorities separated the most dangerous from one another and sent political prisoners to newly created camps similar to the *katorga*.

This chapter also provides glimpses into the end of the Stalinist regime. By the early 1950's, everyone but Stalin seemed to agree that the camps were unprofitable and that changes needed to be made. Given his history of imprisoning anyone who challenged him, it is not surprising that these views were not shared with Stalin, and that his policies persisted without question.

Part 3, Chapter 23: The Death of Stalin—Summary

Part 3, Chapter 23: The Death of Stalin□Summary

Stalin died on March 5, 1953. Prisoners most often greeted news of his death with caution, as they were afraid that voicing relief or celebration would garner them greater sentences. Most, however, felt that things were about to change. Beria made many changes after Stalin's death. He reorganized the secret police, transferring many from the Gulag camps to other ministries. He ceased many of the large projects that Stalin had started, and announced amnesties for prisoners with sentences of five years or less, pregnant women or those with small children, and everyone under the age of eighteen. He issued orders that no physical torture would be used against those arrested, and openly discussed his plans of eradicating the slave labor system. These moves, however, unsettled further an already troubled country. Nikita Khrushchev organized dissention against Beria, who was arrested and died soon thereafter.

Many of Beria's plans were abandoned, although Stalin's projects remained stopped and amnesties continued. Camp administrators began treating prisoners better, and prisoners gained some power within the camps. In some cases, protests occurred; in others, violence arose as prisoners sought the prized amnesties. The prisoners of the "special camps were still separated in what would be a recipe for rebellion. Over the years, they had developed an internal organization and were poised to resist the system.

Part 3, Chapter 23: The Death of Stalin□Analysis

This chapter again foreshadows the end of the camps. Beria attempted to change the system. Ironically, Khrushchev eliminated him by arresting him and sentencing him to the same prisons he was trying to reform. Throughout the camp history, Soviet leaders neutralized perceived enemies by having them arrested and put into the Gulag. If they didn't die, they were too concerned with survival to present any further challenges. The circumstances surrounding Beria's death are mysterious, and it is unclear whether he simply died like many other prisoners, or whether he was executed.

Part 3, Chapter 24: The Zeks' Revolution—Summary

Part 3, Chapter 24: The Zeks' Revolution□Summary

A colloquial name for a Gulag inmate was "*zek*." After Stalin's death, rumors abounded as to what would happen to various prisoners. At the same time, organization within the special camps grew stronger. In some camps, these groups put out underground newspapers and began organizing strikes. In the Gorlag and Rechlag camps organized strikes took place. Camp administrators left the camps in fear. Various theories exist about whether the rebellions were planned by a Ukrainian secret organization or whether the secret police had actually started them to reassert their power and place in the Soviet Union.

Strike committees began trying to sort out the situations, but it became clear that the striking zeks wanted amnesty, not just improvements in their living conditions. While authorities began with negotiation, they often ended with violence. Soldiers assumed control of the camps and the striking prisoners, killing some and moving others to different locations. While both the Gorlag and Rechlag strikes were ended, others continued elsewhere.

In 1954, another strike broke out at the Steplag camp. The camp was already experiencing problems with prisoners breaking rules and staging strikes and protests. Guards began to use violence, serving to further incite the zeks. On May 16, a group of prisoners broke down a section of wall between them and the adjacent camps in the complex. Camp guards opened fire. Angered by this, prisoners invaded and took control of the camp warehouses, bakery and workshops, where they started manufacturing weapons. Authorities convinced them to go back to work, but broke the promises they made. Within two days, prisoners had complete control over the *zona*, having chased the authorities out. Although authorities expected the situation within the camp to result in chaos, prisoners responded positively to their newly found control. They cleaned up barracks, distributed food, and began producing radio news programs. The prisoners organized a strike committee that met with Soviet authorities. However, when negotiations stalled, the authorities resorted to violence yet again. Soldiers invaded the compound on June 26, killing many and arresting the remainder.

Part 3, Chapter 24: The Zeks' Revolution□Analysis

In this chapter, Applebaum discusses the ramifications of the placement of new political prisoners in camps. In some ways, the rebellions that take place during this period are not surprising. Prisoners had been resisting the Gulag system since it began. Although their actions were often on a smaller scale, they laid the foundations for later organized action. By this point, the prisoners had the advantage of knowing more about the system and what might happen. The new prisoners, experienced in protest, were able

to build upon this foundation and coordinate mass strikes. Aside from their own knowledge, they were able to learn from older prisoners, including those who had previously engaged in revolt.

Part 3, Chapter 25: Thaw–and Release—Summary

Part 3, Chapter 25: Thaw-and Release□Summary

Although the strikes failed, they did signal a change in the Gulag system. Leaders were growing tired of the forced labor camps, the problems they caused, and their unprofitability. By July 1954, authorities adopted eight-hour workdays and easier procedures for earning early release. Prisoners were allowed to send and receive mail without restriction and items became available for them to purchase. The authorities also began reviewing cases and releasing some prisoners. Despite the problems, however, the authorities did not shut the camps down completely.

In Feb. 1956, Khrushchev, the leader of the Soviet Union, gave a speech to the Party Congress detailing Soviet crimes under Stalin. As news of the speech spread, rehabilitation sped up, and more people were released. The Interior Minister also supported the return to a normal prison system. There was controversy as this took place, resulting in a mixed outcome for the camps. The Gulag itself, the Main Camp Administration, was eliminated. Both Dalstroi and Norilsk, two of the largest camps, were shut down. However, the judicial system remained as biased and politicized as before.

The early releases brought prisoners mixed emotions. "Many were simply not ready" (p. 511). Individuals found it difficult to reach home, as they had no money and only a little food. Some individuals committed minor crimes to return to the prison system, where at least they would have bread. Returnees also found personal difficulties and heartache, as it was difficult to find places to live and work. Some sought rehabilitation, but others were blocked outright from even seeking it. Families discovered they often didn't know each other anymore, and prisoners found that individuals often didn't want to hear about their camp experiences. Additionally, the released prisoners were a source of fear for those who had sent them to prison in the first place.

Khrushchev began using the writings of returned prisoners for his own propaganda against his enemies. This appears to be why he allowed Alexander Solzhenitsyn's work, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, to be published. Solzhenitsyn's life illustrates the changes after the release of the prisoners. His book was published in 1962 at the height of what was known as the Khrushchev Thaw, when repression was at a low point and the Soviet leader was attempting to reduce Cold War tension. The novel recorded a single day in the life of a prisoner, Ivan Denisovich. While the book was met with fanfare and many letters of praise from prisoners, when Khrushchev was later ousted from leadership, this changed. By 1965, the conservative backlash had begun, and angry reactions ensued. Both Solzhenitsyn and his book were under attack.

Part 3, Chapter 25: Thaw-and Release Analysis

This section of the book details both the results of previous actions and the beginnings of the Gulag's end. There would be further backlash and a return to harsher times, but large-scale, positive changes to the system were finally made. During this period, leaders were still struggling with what to do with the camps; they were unprofitable and problematic, and the growing rebellions and strikes were causing further problems.

The chapter also shows the Soviet propaganda machine in action once again. In this case, Khrushchev used the writings of poets and memoirists to undermine his challengers. However, this led to a conservative backlash.

Part 3, Chapter 26: The Era of the Dissidents—Summary

Part 3, Chapter 26: The Era of the Dissidents□Summary

Although the death of Stalin signaled a change, the camps evolved rather than disappear. The nature of political prisoners had also shifted since the 1920's. By the 1950's, the people that the KGB arrested generally expected their arrests because they had participated in some anti-Soviet activity. Fewer political prisoners were arrested, and the ones that were imprisoned consisted of new types of politicals, such as the first group of Soviet Baptists. The sons and daughters of former political prisoners also were often arrested, as many of them had become dissidents themselves. The judicial system had also changed, limiting the power of the KGB (who handled the political investigations) and MVD (who now controlled the prisoner system).

By 1966, neo-Stalinists had regained control over Soviet Russia and established a collective leadership. The authorities began arresting writers and poets whose work contained anti-Soviet themes, as well as individuals who owned copies of their work. This spawned more arrests as other intellectuals protested or criticized the government's actions. The dissidents, as they were known, did not start a mass movement or lead large-scale protests; rather, they galvanized a small human rights movement that often had more activity outside of the Soviet Union. With new communication technologies, dissidents in the Soviet Union were more easily able to send news of repression to the outside world than the politicals of the 1930's and 1940's. Underground publishing houses grew in Russia, and they often published writings on the history of Stalinism, the Gulag system, and the persecution of the dissidents. A newsletter, *Chronicle of Current Events*, played a large role in disseminating this information.

Life within the camps for arrested dissidents was much the same as it had been in years past, but with some differences. The same hunger existed and the same transports took place, but work was prioritized differently now that the camps were not trying to meet economic goals. Homosexual rape and domination, as well as self-mutilation, were more frequent occurrences. The balance of power between authorities and prisoners had also been upset. Prisoners were more likely to strike and protest, and the authorities were more likely to make concessions (although they still withdrew them). By the 1970's, the most troublesome political prisoners were placed in high security prisons. The prisoners continued to protest, while the authorities sought to make them publicly recant their views. Prisoners still contended with ranging food norms and with punishment cells.

By the late 1960's, authorities also began placing dissidents in *psikhushka*, or special mental hospitals. This allowed authorities to discredit dissidents as crazy. Prisoners

labeled mentally ill were sent to both ordinary psychiatric hospitals and these *psikhushka*. "Patients who agreed to renounce their convictions, who admitted that mental illness had caused them to criticize the Soviet system, could be declared healthy and free. Those who did not recant were considered still ill, and could be given 'treatment.'" (p. 549). Treatments ranged from drugs to electroshock therapy to forms of restraint. However, this new system did not work as well as authorities had hoped. Instead, it focused a great deal of attention on the Soviet Union from the West, and in particular from various psychiatric groups.

Part 3, Chapter 26: The Era of the Dissidents□Analysis

The use of psychiatric hospitals to control dissidents is an interesting change from the days when politicals were simply dumped into the camp system. Through this, changes in both the Soviet regime and in the camps themselves are evident. It was no longer working to simply make dissidents disappear, although this did still occur. Looser regulations on letters and packages and new communication technologies meant that dissidents within the camps had a voice that challenged authorities. Discrediting these dissidents, or forcing them to publicly acknowledge the errors of their beliefs, became an alternative to the camps. The hospitals served to keep recalcitrant prisoners out of society and stigmatize them as crazy.

Part 3, Chapter 27: The 1980's: Smashing Statues—Summary

Part 3, Chapter 27: The 1980's: Smashing Statues□Summary

Yuri Andropov, former head of the KGB, took over leadership of the Soviet Union in 1982. In ways similar to Stalin, he thought that stronger discipline (including stricter camps and more surveillance) would help the Soviet Union's problems. "Thanks to Andropov, the first half of the 1980's is remembered as the most repressive era in post-Stalinist history." (p. 553). Andropov arrested and re-arrested dissidents, and frightened people away from anything resembling a protest movement. Those suspected of being involved in one risked losing everything. They and their spouses would lose their jobs, their children would be denied entrance to universities, their residence permits would be revoked, and their travel would be restricted. Information still leaked out into the outside world about the repressive tactics, but it had little impact on Soviet policies.

After less than 13 months in office, Andropov died of kidney failure in early 1984. His successor, Konstantin Chernenko, served an even shorter term. Subsequently, Mikhail Gorbachev took power, signaling what would become a drastic change in the leadership of the Soviet Union. He believed that Russia needed to speak openly about its problems and its history, developing the policy of glasnost, meaning "openness." During this reform, revelations about the Gulag system came to light, and previously banned books about it became available in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's aim, however, was not to dismantle the system but to reform it, for he was a believer in the Soviet regime. Despite the floodgates of information that were opened, there were not corresponding mass releases of prisoners. It wasn't until 1986 that a general pardon was issued to all political prisoners.

The end of the Gulag came with little fanfare, and Applebaum suggests that no one really even noticed that it happened. Indeed, wide-scale reform took place across the nation, and by the time the Perm political camp closed in 1992, the Soviet Union had been dissolved.

Part 3, Chapter 27: The 1980's: Smashing Statues□Analysis

Finally, after years of terror and brutality, the Gulag system ended. The secrecy that permeated its existence continued to a quiet ending that garnered little attention from either the outside world or the Soviet Union itself. The end was rather anticlimactic considering the profound inhumanity that had characterized the system.

The end followed yet another downswing into repression and harsh conditions in the camps. Like his predecessors, Andropov arrested those seen as challenging the system

and re-arrested former prisoners. As in times past, relatives and friends of those accused and in prisons were left destitute, without jobs and housing, under the familiar fear of arrest themselves.

Epilogue: Memory—Summary

Epilogue: Memory□Summary

In various places within the former Soviet Union, individuals and groups have placed monuments, memorials, and museums. Despite this, there is still a lack of public awareness about the camps and what went on in them.

Applebaum argues that there are some reasons for this silence. "Most Russians really do spend all of their time coping with the complete transformation of their economy and society." (p. 569). They also feel that they have dealt with the past already, particularly during glasnost in the late 1980's and early 1990's. On a large scale, many individuals participated in the camp system and don't want to face their guilt. Younger individuals may not want to find out how their grandparents and parents collaborated with the system. Many of the countries once part of the Soviet Union are led by communists now, who have no wish to drag up memories of what the communist Soviet Union did. The author suggests that failing to remember the Gulag has consequences for Russia and for countries outside of Russia.

Epilogue: Memory□Analysis

Applebaum's choice of memory as the closing theme of the book is an interesting one. Although the Gulag system was incredibly severe, with more individuals dying there than in the Nazi camps, its history is much less well known. The turn towards reflection, and in particular the memory of injustice and governmental crime, has been a global phenomenon over the last several decades. Governments and citizens in many countries have examined their pasts and the injustices within them, sometimes offering official apologies or monetary restitutions to victims.

Characters

The Zeks or Prisoners

The prisoners, or zeks, within the Gulag system came from all social and ethnic backgrounds within the Soviet Union and also included a number of foreigners. Prisoners came from several different categories, including professional criminals, political prisoners, and ordinary prisoners swept up in mass arrests. From 1929, when the Gulag underwent a massive expansion, until 1953, when Stalin died, over 18 million individuals passed through the camps. Applebaum conservatively estimates that close to 29 million individuals were involved in the forced labor system over the course of the Gulag's existence.

In the camps, prisoners engaged in forced labor, often in harsh climates and dangerous conditions. They were expected to fulfill work quotas, or norms, each day and their ability to achieve them affected the amount of food they received. Prisoners lived in barracks, often earth dugouts, within the *zona.* Food rations were low and many prisoners died from starvation. Prisoners were also subject to squalid living conditions, overcrowded transports to the camps, lengthened sentences, and occasional mass executions.

Nevertheless, prisoners fought back in a myriad of ways. They utilized *tufta*, or tactics of avoiding work, in groups or as individuals. They collaborated with the authorities and served as trusties. Prisoners also contributed to underground communication, published accounts of their experiences, and tried to escape. Some even used work strikes, hunger protests, and rebellions in an attempt to reform their situation.

Joseph Stalin

Born in 1879, Stalin led Russia during the height of the Gulag system. He became the general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party in 1922. He instigated the Great Terror during the 1930's to consolidate his power and eliminate his rivals. During the early years of his reign, he introduced a series of five-year economic plans that included collective farming and the slave labor of the Gulag.

Millions of Soviet citizens died under his regime from starvation, forced labor, and mass executions. Stalin took an active interest in the Gulag and its prisoners. He also sanctioned a number of large-scale projects, including the White Sea Canal, which used Gulag labor. Stalin died on March 5, 1953 after three ruthless decades in power. Although his death is officially listed as cerebral hemorrhage, some have suggested that he was murdered. The Gulag system began to decline after Stalin's death, although it took over three more decades for it to be abolished.

Vladimir Lenin

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov was born in 1870. Ulyanov, more commonly known by his revolutionary pseudonym, "Lenin," was the first leader of Soviet Russia. He was the leader of the Bolshevik revolution that took place on October 25, 1917 and was elected Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. He organized the first labor camps in the Soviet Union for the "bourgeois enemy," rather than for criminals. He suffered a series of strokes in the early 1920's, resigning from office in 1923. He died in 1924.

Lavrenty Beria

Beria, born in 1899, served as the head of the NKVD, the government agency that oversaw the Gulag system and the secret police, from the 1930's to the mid 1940's, and again in the 1950s.' He helped oversee Stalin's Great Terror of the late 1930's, which included mass executions and torture. During the post-WWII period, he helped set up secret police and camps in the occupied territories. After Stalin died, Beria became the second most powerful man in the Russian government, and he attempted to release a number of prisoners and reform the camps and interrogation policies. He was arrested in 1953 for criminal acts against the Soviet state and sentenced to death.

Cheka, GPU, OGPU, MVD, MGB/KGB

Each of these acronyms represents a different era and name for the secret police in the Soviet Union. Cheka, or Extraordinary Commission, was the name for the secret police during the civil war. The GPU, or State Political Administration, was the successor to Cheka during the early 1920's. The Unified State Political Administration, or OGPU, followed the GPU in the late 1920's and early 1930's. After this came the MVD, or Ministry of Internal Affairs, during the 1930's and WWII. Finally, the MGB/KCB, or Ministry of/Committee on State Security, was in charge of internal and external surveillance until the collapse of the Soviet Union. The secret police handled the investigations and interrogations of individuals who were suspected or accused of anti-Soviet activity. This section of the government was also ultimately responsible for the organization and character of the Gulag system.

Objects/Places

Dalstroi

Located in the Kolyma region, this was one of the largest camps in the Gulag. Many of the prisoners there worked in the gold mines. It was also known as one of the harshest camps.

Gulag

The *Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei*, or Main Camp Administration, was a division of the secret police that ran the labor camp system in the Soviet Union. Over time, "Gulag" has come to refer to the entire camp system, and more broadly the repressive system under the Soviet regime.

Katorga

Taken from a Czarist term for forced labor, *katorga* represented strictly regimented camps for war criminals. These camps came about after WWII.

Kolyma

This area is located in the far northeastern part of Russia on the Pacific coast. Dalstroi, one of the largest camp systems, was located here.

Komi

Komi is a northern region of Russia, located west of the Ural Mountains. A number of camps were located here.

Kulak

Traditionally, this term meant a prosperous peasant. Under the Soviet regime, it came to refer to anyone accused of opposing the Soviet government's regulations on collectivization. Over two million kulaks were arrested and deported in the early 1930s alone.

Lagpunkt

These were the Gulag camps. They existed from 1918 to the 1980's and 90's.

Psikhushka

These were psychiatric hospitals in the post-Stalinist period to where dissidents were sent. The authorities hoped to discredit the dissidents by labeling them mentally ill.

Shizo

This was the acronym that referred to the punishment isolation cells within the camps. Prisoners would often be sent here when they refused to work.

Solovetsky

This camp was widely recognized as the "first camp of the Gulag" by prisoners, and it saw the origin of the slave labor system. It was located in Northwestern Russia on one of the Solovetsky islands.

Tufta

This was the term used for the method of avoiding work or cheating on work norms.

Urki

The Urki were professional criminals. They often were at the top of the prisoner hierarchy.

The White Sea Canal

The Canal was a project instigated by Stalin that was built using forced prisoner labor. It connects the White Sea to the Baltic Ocean.

Zek

Taken from the Russian word *zaklyuchennyi* and its abbreviation *z/k*, this was the common term for prisoner.

Zona

This was the main part of the labor camp, located within the barbed wire fences. Prisoners often had the ability to move around within the *zona* when not at work.

Themes

Brutality

Virtually every chapter in the *Gulag* discusses the oppression, severity, and brutality of the Gulag camp system. This terror was both physical and psychological. Physically, prisoners endured exhausting labor in extreme cold, savage beatings, little amounts of food, and executions. Torture was common during interrogations in the late 1930's. Millions of people were killed within the system by starvation, dangerous working conditions, and by other prisoners, guards, and camp authorities. Women were raped and children were left with little care in the camp nurseries. Prisoners' memoirs reflect the physical hardship within the camps. Most of the power in the camps belonged to the camp authorities and guards, who in many ways decided a prisoner's fate. However, there was also brutality among the prisoners themselves. Professional criminals stood atop the camp hierarchy and beat, raped, and threatened others. Later, they would battle with the new political prisoners in the post-WWII camps.

Individuals within the Soviet Union also experienced psychological terror, whether they were in the camps or not. The general populace was never sure who to trust and who might turn them in for anti-Soviet behavior. They could also never be sure when or why they would be arrested. Many individuals waited fearfully for that midnight knock on the door; many others were simply gathered up quietly and sent into exile. During interrogations, individuals were often denied sleep for long periods of time, and in the prisons communication among prisoners was often forbidden. Within the camps, random mass executions deprived them of any sense of security. All contended with the torment of hunger and the reality that death could occur at any moment.

The Soviet regime used both physical brutality and psychological terror to maintain control over not only the prisoners, but also society as a whole. Individuals concerned with their own survival had little time to challenge the system. Although the Gulag was geared toward economic purposes and not the mass extermination of a specific ethnic group as the Nazi camps were, a great deal of atrocity took place within the Gulag.

Resistance

Power within the Gulag system was held primarily with guards, camp commanders, and Soviet leadership. Prisoners had few rights and little control over their lives within the camps. Thus, while easy imagine the prisoners as helpless, they did find ways to resist the system.

Most often, resistance happened among small groups of prisoners or by individuals. In the prisons, they found ways of communicating with each other secretly, although this was against the rules. In the camps, they found ways of avoiding work. Brigades adjusted their work and norms so that no one was punished, covering for one another.

Others faked or induced illness in order to avoid the extreme cold and labor. Some individuals collaborated with the authorities in order to receive easier work or more rations.

Prisoners also rebelled and resisted in more open ways. Building on the protests that occurred in the Czarist regime, prisoners engaged in hunger strikes to try to force change. Some tried to escape the camps, although those who were caught were often shot. Later in the Gulag's history, prisoners organized revolts. At Ust-Usa, a group succeeded in escaping and resisting Soviet authority for a number of days before finally being overtaken.

Inconsistency

The camps were also characterized by a great deal of inconsistency. One of the places that this is demonstrated is in the arrests and sentences of individuals. As Applebaum points out, one individual might be arrested and sentenced to one of the Gulag camps, while another person arrested for the same thing would be sent into exile. Some foreigners were arrested, and others were not. The secret police also seem to have varied how they picked up arrestees. In some of the mass executions, prisoners were chosen at random for death, while in others certain prisoners were specifically targeted.

The camps also differed one to another. While there were certainly commonalities among them and prisoners experienced similar situations, some camps were harsher and more deadly than others. In some, guards and commanders were more sadistic; in others, the commanders sought to create better conditions for the workers. A prisoner's fate was in many ways intertwined with the camp that she or he was sentenced to.

Both within and without the camp system, the inconsistencies of the Gulag kept people in a constant state of insecurity and uncertainty. Individuals were almost never certain, particularly before the 1950's, when or if they would be arrested. Prisoners and non-prisoners lived in constant states of paranoia and fear. This worked to further the control of Stalin and other leaders.

Style

Points of View

Applebaum uses a third person perspective in the *Gulag*. We occasionally get glimpses of the author as narrator, but for the most part she relies on an omniscient, historical voice. Using prisoner memoirs, official documents, archival material, and interviews, she weaves together a history and description of the Gulag system and what life was like within the camps.

Applebaum's voice sets the contemporary stage for the reader, describing what certain prisons look like now and what the present landscape is in the areas that she visited. Overall, however, she lets the voices of the prisoners and sometimes officials tell the story. Particularly in the second section of the book, which describes life within the camps, the prisoners' voices (through memoirs, letters, and interviews) are used to illuminate life in the camps and exemplify the themes that Applebaum develops.

Setting

The Gulag system was located in Soviet Russia from the late 1920's until the early 1990's. The labor camps within the Gulag were located in all regions of Russia. Applebaum describes what many of the camps were like inside and what the landscape was around them. Through the course of the book, she describes a number of different camps, most notably Solovetsky, which she spends the third chapter discussing.

As the book covers the history of the Gulag, it moves in a somewhat linear fashion, with the rise of the Gulag discussed in the beginning of the book and the demise of the system at the end. The middle section of the book slightly breaks from this format with its general discussion of life within the camps. These chapters move back and forth in time, describing and comparing the camps, the prisoners, and the forced labor system. Applebaum also includes some discussion of what the camps look like today and some of her experiences traveling in Russia during the last decade.

Language and Meaning

For the most part, Applebaum uses simple language to describe the history of the Gulag. She includes many Russian terms and acronyms, but gives definitions for them and includes a glossary with the terms included as well. This makes the reading easier to follow. Individuals unfamiliar with Soviet history may have some difficulties with the inclusion of numerous Soviet individuals. Although she includes a brief introduction to each, the names of prisoners, authorities, leaders, prisons, and so on can be somewhat of a challenge to keep track of due to sheer volume.

Although most of the book is free of strong or vulgar language, the topic of the book necessitates some discussions of violence. Applebaum does not use this to sensationalize the topic in any way, but rather uses it to illustrate the brutality of the system. At times, these descriptions of violence are taken directly from prisoners' memoirs or official documents and can be disturbing.

Structure

Gulag: A History consists of twenty-seven chapters, an introduction, and an epilogue. Applebaum also includes an appendix, notes, bibliography, glossary, and an index, placing the work within an organized context and providing meanings for some of the terms she uses.

Applebaum uses archival materials, prisoner memoirs, letters, and other official documents to discuss the Gulag's history. As much of the official material concerning the post-Stalin Gulag is closed to researchers, she has fewer details about the events within the camps after that point. She used interviews with former prisoners and camp authorities to help piece together the history.

The book has three sections. The first section, entitled "The Origins of the Gulag, 1917-1939" discusses the rise of the Gulag system and the Great Terror. The second section, "Life and Work in the Camps" describes what the camps and prisoners were like. The chapters in this section include discussions on the physical look of the camps, what work was like, who the guards were, and how individuals survived within the camps. The final section, "The Rise and Fall of the Camp-Industrial Complex, 1940-1986" discusses the camps and events during WWII and the post-Stalinist era.

Quotes

"This is a history of the Gulag: a history of the vast network of labor camps that were once scattered across the length and breadth of the Soviet Union, from the islands of the White Sea to the shores of the Black Sea, from the Arctic Circle to the plains of central Asia, from Murmansk to Vorkuta to Kazakhstan, from central Moscow to the Leningrad suburbs." (Introduction, p.Xv)

"From the very earliest days of the new Soviet state, in other words, people were to be sentenced not for what they had done, but for who they were." (Chapter 1, p.6)

"On their first night in the camp, writes the memoirist and former prisoner Boris Shiryaev, he and other new arrivals were greeted by Comrade A. P. Nogtev, Solovetsky's first camp commander. 'I welcome you,' he told them, with what Shiryaev describes as 'irony': 'As you know, here, there is no Soviet authority, only Solovestsky authority. Any rights you had before you can forget. Here we have our own laws.'" (Chapter 2, p.22)

"From one day to the next, trucks and wagons simply arrived in a village and picked up entire families. Some kulaks were shot, some were arrested and given camp sentences. In the end, however, the regime deported most of them." (Chapter 3, p. 47)

"In the history of the Gulag, however, 1937 does mark a genuine watershed. For it was in this year that the Soviet camps temporarily transformed themselves from indifferently managed prisons in which people died by accident, into genuinely deadly camps where prisoners deliberately worked to death, or actually murdered, in far larger numbers than they had been in the past." (Chapter 6, p. 93)

"Their arrests and interrogations wore prisoners down, shocked them into submission, confused them, and disoriented them." (Chapter 8, p. 146)

"People are not machines, the camps were not clean, well-functioning factories, and the system never worked the way it was supposed to. Guards were corrupt, administrators stole, and the prisoners developed ways of fighting or subverting the camps' rule." (Chapter 10, p. 185)

"Prisoners were thus held in by barriers of sight, smell, and sound, as well as by barbed wire and brick. They were also held in by fear, which was sometimes enough to keep prisoners within a camp that had no fence at all." (Chapter 10, p. 187)

"If prisoners received bread only once a day, in the morning, they faced an agonizing decision: eat it all at once, or save some until the afternoon. To save the bread risked loss or theft of the precious quarter-loaf. On the other hand, a piece of bread was something to look forward to during the day." (Chapter 10, p. 214)

"Work was the central function of most Soviet camps. It was the main occupation of prisoners, and the main preoccupation of the administration. Daily life was organized around work, and the prisoners' well-being depended upon how successfully they worked." (Chapter 11, p. 217)

"Nowhere, I repeat, was cruelty actually required. On the contrary: deliberate cruelty was officially frowned upon by the central administration Yet cruelty persisted. Sometimes it was genuinely sadistic." (Chapter 13, p. 272)

"Most of the time, however, the cruelty of Soviet camp guards was unthinking, stupid, lazy cruelty, of the sort that might be shown to cattle or sheep. If guards were not explicitly told to mistreat prisoners, neither were they taught to consider prisoners, particularly political prisoners, as fully human either." (Chapter 13, p. 274)

"Nevertheless, of the hundreds of thousands of the people referred to in the camps as political prisoners, the vast majority were not dissidents, or priests saying mass in secret, or even Party bigwigs. They were ordinary people, swept up in mass arrests, who did not necessarily have strong political views of any kind." (Chapter 14, p. 292)

"Why the NKVD chose to deport one person, sending him to live in an exile village, and why they chose to arrest another person, sending him to live in a camp, is often difficult to understand, as the backgrounds of the deportees and the arrestees were interchangeable." (Chapter 20, p. 423)

"In other words, the camps were unprofitable, and many people now knew it. Yet no one, not even Beria, dared taken any action during Stalin's lifetime, which is perhaps not surprising. To anyone in Stalin's immediate entourage, the years between 1950 and 1952 would have seemed a particularly dangerous time to tell the dictactor [sic] that his pet projects were economic failures." (Chapter 22, p. 474)

Topics for Discussion

Describe what a prisoner's life was like in the Gulag system. How might a prisoner's life be different in one camp to another?

Compare and contrast the Gulag camps with those in Nazi Germany. In what ways do the two systems differ?

How did authorities control prisoners? Why was this an important part of the Gulag system?

Describe the ways that prisoners resisted the camp system. Why do you think they did these things? What did they risk?

Analyze the use of fear and uncertainty in the Soviet regime. How were these aspects utilized within the camps and in the wider society? What did their use accomplish for authorities?

Compare and contrast the Gulag system under Stalin with at least one other Soviet leader. In what ways were the camps the same? How did they differ over the time periods?

Describe the processes of arrest and interrogation. How did these events prepare prisoners for the Gulag system?

At several points in Soviet history, mass executions occurred. Under what situations did these executions occur? Why did they happen? What was the result of these executions? Describe at least two instances.

Compare and contrast the experiences of the *urki*, political prisoners, and ordinary prisoners within the camps.

The history of the Gulag includes a number of strikes and rebellions. Why did these occur? How did the Soviet authorities respond to them? What does the timing of the strikes and rebellions tell us about the camp system?

Many of the Gulag camps were located in the far north. Why were they placed there? Include in your answer a discussion of the economic, political and social reasons.