

Death and Redemption – The Gulag and the Shaping of Soviet Society  
by Stephen A. Barnes.  
Princeton University Press 2011.

While people the world over are suffused with information about the concentration camps established by the Nazi regime during the 1930s and 40s, far fewer are as aware of the Gulag, the Russian equivalent, which operated in their most extreme form for far longer, from 1921 to 1953, and which ruined the lives of the approximately 18 million people who passed through the system during the era of Joseph Stalin alone.

In *Death and Redemption*, Steven A. Barnes, the associate professor of history and Director of the Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies at George Mason University, takes a fresh look at the Gulag system and especially at the role it played in rehabilitating to Soviet Society those comrades who, for one reason or another, had fallen foul of it.

*Death and Redemption* is divided into six chapters, book ended by an introduction and conclusion: The Origins, Functions and Institutions of the Gulag; Reclaiming the Margins and the Marginal: Gulag Practices in Karaganda, 1930s; Categorizing Prisoners: The Identities of the Gulag; Armageddon and the Gulag, 1939-1945; A New Circle of Hell: The Postwar Gulag and the Rise of the Special Camps; The Crash of the Gulag: Releases and Uprisings in the Post-Stalin Era.

Steven Barnes does a forensic dissection of his subject, but the level of detail and the statistics still do not blunt the horror of the over-riding picture, epitomised in chapter 2 by his description of the Karlag agricultural corrective labour camp in the Karaganda region of Kazakhstan, a hellish place where temperatures could plummet to minus sixty four degrees Celsius and prisoners lived in tents and mud huts, or without shelter altogether.

*Death and Redemption* is a powerful reminder of the depths of inhumanity to which the Soviet system under Stalin sank in its persecution of all those who fell foul of the Bolshevik ideal, as well as a brilliant depiction of the horrors of the camps of the Gulag archipelago that awaited those hapless individuals who found themselves in its clutches.

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