



Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War

R.M. Douglas

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Immediately after the Second World War, the victorious Allies authorized and helped to carry out the forced relocation of German speakers from their homes across central and southern Europe to Germany. The numbers were almost unimaginable—between 12,000,000 and 14,000,000 civilians, most of them women and children—and the losses horrifying—at least 500,000 people, and perhaps many more, died while detained in former concentration camps, while locked in trains en route, or after arriving in Germany exhausted, malnourished, and homeless. This book is the first in any language to tell the full story of this immense man-made catastrophe.

Based mainly on archival records of the countries that carried out the forced migrations and of the international humanitarian organizations that tried but failed to prevent the disastrous results, *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* is an authoritative and objective account. It examines an aspect of European history that few have wished to confront, exploring how the expulsions were conceived, planned, and executed and how their legacy reverberates throughout central Europe today. The book is an important study of the largest recorded episode of what we now call "ethnic cleansing," and it may also be the most significant untold story of the Second World War.

Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War Details

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Geraldine says

Very thorough and fair book - certainly in the UK this is a part of history few people are aware of. I thought Douglas's decision not to focus on personal stories was good (other books have done this already). It is a tremendously relevant book at the moment as we live through a time with mass movements of people in Europe (for different reasons than post 1945). I found it a terrifically interesting book.

Carol Leibiger says

I'm writing a review of this book for the Yearbook of German American Studies. It's a detailed and fair treatment of the expulsions of ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia after World War II. It details the hardships and abuse endured by the ethnic Germans (mostly women, children, and the elderly), as they were forcibly "returned" to Germany in 1945-47. What I find particularly good is author Douglas' impartial rendering of the facts, which don't support revisionist equating of the ethnic Germans' suffering with that of the Nazis' victims. Another important contribution is Douglas' placement of blame for the ethnic Germans' sufferings on the Allies, who acquiesced in the expulsions and did nothing to see that they were carried out in and "orderly and humane" manner.

Gabriele Goldstone says

I had family members who went through this. Relieved to finally read about it. My mom's memories were confusing and emotional. I needed to see the big picture and I sure didn't get it through my school years.

Charlie Rudd says

Ray Douglas has done a good job of an even handed overview of this whole terrible era of history. Many books of this nature are threaded through with American exceptionalism, not worth finishing. I was vaguely aware of the tensions caused by large ethnic minorities acting as fifth columns within sovereign nations, this book has really brought it home. It also connects with the current state of the Potsdam countries, Poland and Hungary sliding into fascism, economic malaise and large areas of depopulated inactivity, much like the Scottish Highlands and West Coast of Ireland.

Doug Norton says

The cover photo is a novel waiting to be written. The winners get to write--or in this case suppress--history. I suspect that I am like many readers who thought they knew the "big stories" of World War II but I had no inkling of this, the most massive ethnic cleansing in history. War is a very, very blunt instrument

Riet says

Dit boek gaat over een periode van de recente geschiedenis, die iedereen maar het liefst vergeet en verwijgt. Het behandelt de verdrijving van de Duitser, die vaak al generaties lag in de landen buiten duitsland woonden. Dit begon direct na mei 1945 en heeft zo'n drie jaar geduurd. De titel slaat op het protocol, opgesteld in Potsdam, waarin werd gesteld, dat de verwijdering van de Duitsers uit die landen "orderly and humane" diende te geschieden. Dat was dus niet zo. Het waren afschuwelijke taferelen, die vaak niet onder deden voor de wandaden van de nazi's. Allemaal met het excus, dat alle Duitsers schuldig waren aan wat nazi-Duitsland had aangericht. De schrijver laat ook zien wat de consequenties op de lange duur van deze handelwijze zijn geweest. Een erg interessant boek, maar je wordt er niet vrolijk van.

Jake Goretzki says

Compellingly told (I love the way each chapter begins with a quiet biographical moment), scrupulously researched and balanced. It's fantastic that something like this has come out in English - the whole episode is one unknown continent. Fascinating.

Oliver Hazan says

A thorough panorama of the biggest example of ethnic cleansing in history, when the ethnic German population in Poland and Czechoslovakia was (understandably?) forcibly sent to Germany following WWII. These horrible episodes are fairly unknown and constitute an essential link between WWII and the German economic miracle of the 50s and 60s.

Colin says

This is a readable but depressing book on the expulsion of German speaking citizens from Poland and Czechoslovakia just after the the Second World War. It was tantamount to ethic cleansing and was very similar to the ethnic cleansing practised by the German Nazis during World War 2. It was retribution on a massive scale to civilians of German descent. I strongly recommend this book about a little known affair.

Mark says

Politically and socially factual account of one of the greatest tragedies in human history.

Jozef Schildermans says

Important, must-read history of the little known history of the massive, deadly expulsions of ethnic "Germans" -- mostly innocent women and children -- from Eastern Europe immediately after WW2 and extending to 1947 and beyond. Asks and answers lots of thought-provoking questions on guilt, morality, revenge, cynicism, and international law that are still relevant today. I for one didn't know that the Dachau concentration camp closed only in ... 1960, when the last ethnic Germans that were housed there immediately after the end of the war, left the camp. Some of the expellees were antifascists and escaped Jews from German descent. Their anti-Nazi activities during the war didn't save them from forced expulsion.

Stephen Graham says

A good comprehensive history of the expulsion of Germans following World War Two. Douglas depicts the decisions and the consequences fairly without ever losing sight of what this followed. (See for example Mazower's Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe.) I would have liked more coverage of the problems of accommodating the expellees within Occupied Germany but it's hard to really say more than Douglas did.

Philip says

This is a great book of a little publicized event at the end of World War II. The horrors of Nazi crimes shadowed the abuse the German people withheld after the war. They suffered much, but, of course, less than those oppressed by the Nazis including the Holocaust. However, suffer they did and this expulsion of over 12 million people and its excesses are a lesson for the world in the future. Over one million died in the moving of Germans primarily from Poland and Czechoslovakia but also Austria, Yugoslavia, and Romania.

Michael Gilbride says

When the Allies planned the ethnic cleansing of ten million Volksdeutsche back to Germany, Douglas argues that it was similar to what the Nazis had themselves tried to implement. Attempting to be diplomatic, Churchill referred to the mass movement of people as a "disentanglement". Hardly an appropriate term to cover the tens of thousands of innocent civilians that died as they made their way to Berlin which "had become the epicentre of an accelerating humanitarian crisis". Mass rape was common in the camps that the Allies created for the ethnic Germans before they were sent back to Germany. Safe conditions were not established for the new expellees which resulted in a dastardly loss of life. Think, for example, of the thirty-seven German civilians who froze to death in Hamburg 1947 after they had arrived. Why is this history not more widely thought? Douglas: "Western opinion, in general, was not ready to deviate from the established narrative of Germans as perpetrators, regardless of the age or exact status of the "Germans" concerned"". Decades later, it is still not ready.

?The phrase "orderly and humane" came from the Potsdam agreement and reflected the desire on the part of the Allies to carry out the removals of peoples in a safe and controlled manner. Yet, the very idea was wrong. Douglas: "the sheer diversity among the Volksdeutsche was probably the biggest single impediment to the success of the colonization program". In other words, they encountered the same problem that the Nazis did: it is difficult to define ethnicity. The subject, in general, perplexes me and I cannot fathom why so many of our descendants have focused on a pigmentation of our skin. The complexities that the Allies encountered

were manifold: “the ease with which yesterday’s Pole, Ukrainian or Czech could become today’s German was not lost on Reichsdeutsche, who began to describe their supposed co-racials as Beutermane or “booty Germans””. Once you start down the road of defining people by their race, the ramifications are obvious and odious. The Volksdeutsche bore the brunt of the enmity as “mutual mistrust rose to the surface. Germans from the “old Reich” often regarded their ethnic German counterparts as a craven rabble indifferent to the fate of the Fatherland”. In the midst of the official expulsions, Romania and Yugoslavia began, unprompted, to forcibly remove their own ethnic German populations from their lands. A half a million Romanian Volkdeutsche were sent to the Russian gulag.

?The details are staggering. The “Brno Death March”, on the 30 May 1945 resulted in the deaths of hundreds – some reports say thousands- of Germans. More still died in the “impromptu camps in Phohorelice”. Douglas was in no doubt as the motivations of most the expelling governments: “Their aim had been, through the strategic use of terror, to cause the remaining German populations to flee by themselves”. The Myslowice labour camp recorded over two thousand deaths between March and December 1945. Conditions on the trains to Germany were just as lethal: ninety-four people died, including twenty-two children, on a train that arrived in Hof from Czechoslovakia on December 13th 1945. In the Gumience camp in Szczecin, fifty-two people died of “undernourishment”. Similarly, in the Dantesque facility in Swidwin, ninety-five people died of disease in February 1947.

?By November 1947, the Soviet zone in Berlin had taken almost two million ethnic Germans, the US zone a similar amount and the British zone just over a million. Why did the new arrives, many of whom did not consider themselves German at all, not rebel in their new homes? “The modernization of most of their (German) leaders, the growth of the economy, and the sure-footedness of Germany’s first post-war chancellor, Konrad Adenauer”.?Were any of the people who oversaw the violent expulsions ever brought to justice? Geborski, who was a “youthful commandant of Lambinowice”, was removed from his post in 1945 after he shot and murdered a number of ethnic Germans. He went on trial in 2000 but managed to flee to Israel where he died in 2007. For the most part though, no, nobody has been brought to justice.

Understandably enough, Germany did not push for reparations or apologies. Surely it is only a matter of time before this happens.?Orderly And Humane is that rare book that makes one think differently about accepted wisdom. That it came as such a surprise is a damning indictment of how history is taught. As Douglas writes, both at home and abroad “they (the expulsions) were processed psychologically by means of the same convenient mechanisms - denial, myth-making, de-contextualisation (and) rationalization”. Put simply: “human psychology...characteristically assigns much greater weight to one’s own suffering than to those of others”. Was it right for the Allies to move millions of innocent people’s around Europe? Bertrand Russell, in a letter to The Times, was critical of what took place: “are mass deportations crimes when committed by our enemies during war and justifiable measures of social adjustment when carried out by Allies in our time of peace?” I cannot see how it was justified and certainly not the ensuing silence ever since. Surely we need to confront the fact that “the removal of the Germans had made necessary the suspension of any concept of human rights and the rule of law”? Yes, Europe had just finished a brutal war but surely if Western democracy and so-called human rights mean anything, we must practice what we preach.?

Lucie Novak says

I do not read much non-fiction and academic historical books are often too hard on my brain. But I was interested in the story of the German expulsions- there is a lot of discussion about it in my birth country at the moment.

And wow, this book was a revelation. It made a very uncomfortable read.

I always believed the expulsion was a mistake. I do not believe in collective guilt, and I also regret the loss of the multicultural Czech/Jewish/German cultural flavour of Prague in the past.

But this book corrected some common misconceptions I had.

Misconception about the tolerant democratic "First republic" of Czechoslovakia between the wars, the story of Sudeten Germans, the scale of the atrocities performed in the expulsions. My mistaken belief that those atrocities were just the "wild expulsions" where in fact the state police and government were heavily involved. The illusion that the borders made after 1918 were fair without dispute.

My misinformation about the scale- almost 14 millions Germans were affected! According to the authors, the worst ethnic cleansing in history of mankind.

As often in politics, nobody behaved well. The Czech, Polish and other governments, the Allies. Of course, hindsight is easy.

But the injustice of those expulsions was in a way made worse by the long silence.

As if everybody felt that it served the Germans right after those undoubtedly worse atrocities of the war and the Holocaust. Germans wanting to report were in danger of being accused of revisionism and sympathising with the Nazis.

I am Jewish, and half of my family perished in the concentration camps. But I feel that revenge is not a good thing. I feel that you cannot criticise and condemn somebody if you do not behave much better.

This book is not only a very interesting although harrowing read, but somehow compensates a bit for the long silence.

In my opinion, and the authors, you cannot prevent future similar tragedies if you do not condemn and explain what happened in the past.

There were interesting minor points, too.

Points about people who were not strong or courageous enough to rebel against Nazi occupation, and (quote of a Slovak dissident historian) Mlynarik" compensated for their own wartime inactivity by identifying themselves with the victors and by their ex-post 'heroic feat' directed against the defenseless".

And like always, most people kept quiet. That is understandable. But can they then really blame all those ordinary Germans who kept quiet when those Jewish people were deported and murdered?

Reading this book made me understand the recent history better. Some people still deny what happened. But are they really better than Holocaust deniers?