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Holodomor Facts and History:

What does Holodomor mean?

This word is formed from 2 words in Ukrainian: "holod" meaning hunger or starvation, depending on context; and "mor" meaning death or plague. It is likely that the word derives from the expression "moryty holodom" which means "to inflict death by hunger."

Listen to the Pronunciation of **Holodomor** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7z4AJzPiimQ>)

What was the Holodomor?

The term Holodomor is often used to refer specifically to the brutal artificial famine imposed by Stalin's regime on Soviet Ukraine and primarily ethnically Ukrainian areas in the Northern Caucasus in 1932-33.

In its broadest sense, applying Lemkin's definition (see **THE HOLODOMOR AS GENOCIDE** (<https://holodomorct.org/ukrainian-famine-genocide/>)), it is also used to describe the Ukrainian genocide that began in 1929 with the massive waves of deadly deportations of Ukraine's most successful farmers (kurkuls, or kulaks, in Russian) as well as the deportations and executions of Ukraine's religious, intellectual and cultural leaders, culminating in the devastating forced famine that killed millions more innocent individuals. The genocide in fact continued for several more years with the further destruction of Ukraine's political leadership, the resettlement of Ukraine's depopulated areas with other ethnic groups, the prosecution of those who dared to speak of the famine publicly, and the consistent blatant denial of intent by the Soviet regime.

Holodomor Timeline:

1917

The Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin take power in Russia.

1922

The Soviet Union is formed with Ukraine becoming one of the republics.

1924

After Lenin's death, Joseph Stalin ascends to power.

1928

Stalin introduces a program of agricultural collectivization that forces farmers to give up their private land, equipment and livestock, and join state owned, factory-like collective farms. Stalin decides that collective farms would not only feed the industrial workers in the cities but could also provide a substantial amount of grain to be sold abroad, with the money used to finance his industrialization plans.

1929

Most Ukrainian farmers, known for their independence, refuse to join the collective farms, which they regarded as similar to returning to the serfdom of earlier centuries. In late December, Stalin introduces a policy of "class warfare" in the countryside in order to break down resistance to collectivization. The successful farmers, or kurkuls, (kulaks, in Russian) are branded as the class enemy, and brutal enforcement by regular troops and secret police is used to "liquidate them as a class." Eventually anyone who resists collectivization is considered a kurkul.

1930

1.5 million Ukrainians in the countryside fall victim to Stalin's "dekulakization" policies. Over the extended period of collectivization, armed dekulakization brigades forcibly confiscate land, livestock and other property, and evict entire families. Close to half a million individuals in Ukraine are dragged from their homes, packed into freight trains, and shipped to remote, uninhabited areas such as Siberia where they are left, often without food or shelter. A great many, especially children, die in transit or soon thereafter.

The remaining farmers are hounded to give up their land, livestock, and equipment and join the collective farms. As the traditional structures of rural livelihood disintegrate, the religious clergy are demonized and arrested or deported, and their churches destroyed or repurposed for grain storage or other secular use.

1930-1931

Rebellions against collectivization intensify throughout Ukraine. The Kremlin is intent on putting them down right away, as it remembers the serious threats to Bolshevism posed by peasant rebellion during the civil war just over a decade earlier. Many of the current rebellions are "genuinely political" and led by people who played some role in the Ukrainian national movement during the civil war. These latest rebellions against the state are brutally suppressed, and often blamed on supposed outside agitators in order to shift blame from Stalin and his policies.

1930

The nationalist tinged rebellions in Ukraine's countryside intensify concerns about the strong expressions of nationalism increasingly evident in the cities. The secret police, OGPU, creates conspiracies involving links between city intellectuals and rural contacts to explain the rebellions.

As result, Stalin launches his first major public assault on Ukrainian "local nationalism" with a carefully planned and orchestrated show trial of supposed members of a fictitious anti-Soviet Ukrainian organization, the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine, or SVU. It is staged at the Kharkiv Opera Theatre throughout March 9 – April 19, 1930, with the defendants selected to represent members of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, ethnic Ukrainian nonparty intellectuals, and Ukrainian former pre-Soviet socialist party members.

The trial is widely reported in all the Soviet press, signaling the beginning of a terror campaign against those whom Stalin designates as "local nationalists." Although only 45 defendants are tried, by the end of the year 700 people are accused of connections to the SVU and are executed or sentenced to prison or the gulags. Eventually tens of thousands who worked in the educational, scholarly and cultural fields would meet the same fate.

1931-1933

Faced with harassment and impossible taxes and quotas, most of Ukraine's rural population eventually joins the collective farms. They are paid for their labor – when paid, with the products they harvest; as they suspected, however, this is inadequate to stave off hunger. Many people try to find work in the new factories in cities and industrial centers. In the cities and industrial areas, those workers who are given food ration cards increasingly find that they cannot get the basic food products their cards allow.

1932-1933

Although starvation is already widely reported by officials to their superiors (but never in the press), the Soviet government sharply increases Ukraine's production quotas, impossible to meet by a weakened and famished population.

Stalin observes in the summer of 1932 to his right hand commander, Lazar Kaganovich that "we may lose Ukraine," and proceeds to implement a number of laws to punish the farmers and threaten the collective farm managers. A law goes into effect that calls for the arrest or execution of any person – even a child – found taking as little as a few stalks of wheat or any possible food item from the fields where they worked. Travel voucher systems are implemented that forbid people from rural areas taking a train to the cities. In mid-winter, the borders are closed to residents of Ukraine, with armed guards forcing residents to return to their starving villages. Entire Ukrainian villages are "blacklisted," a law that prohibits the transport of food and other necessities such as fuel or soap into the villages and the hungry from leaving in search of food. Brigades of young activists are brought in to sweep through the villages and confiscate hidden grain, and eventually any and all food from the farmers' homes.

Stalin once stated that "the national question is in essence a rural question" Now he and his commanders determine to "teach a lesson through famine" and ultimately, to deal a "crushing blow" to the backbone of Ukraine, its rural population. At the same time, he repeatedly lays blame on outside saboteurs, kurkul influence, and weak collective farm management. Thousands of low level, local communist managers are arrested for not squeezing more out their collective farmers.

1933

By June, at the height of the famine, people in Ukraine are dying at the rate of 28,000 a day, nearly a third of them are children under 10. Between 1932-34, approximately 4 million deaths are attributed to starvation within the borders of Soviet Ukraine. Stalin denies to the world that there is any famine in Ukraine, and continues to export millions of tons of grain, more than enough to have saved every starving man, woman and child.

Denial: Holodomor as inconvenient truth:

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*"Any report of a famine in Russia is today an exaggeration or malignant propaganda. There is no actual starvation or deaths from starvation but there is widespread mortality from diseases due to malnutrition."
(as reported by the New York Times correspondent and Pulitzer-prize winner Walter Duranty)*

Denial of the famine by Soviet authorities was echoed at the time of the famine by some prominent Western journalists, like Walter Duranty. The Soviet Union adamantly refused any outside assistance because the regime officially denied that there was any famine.

Anyone claiming the contrary was accused of spreading anti-Soviet propaganda. Outside the Soviet Union, Western governments adopted a passive attitude toward the famine, although most of them had become aware of the true suffering in Ukraine through confidential diplomatic channels.

In fact, in November 1933, the United States, under newly elected president Franklin D. Roosevelt, chose to formally recognize Stalin's Communist government and also negotiated a sweeping new trade agreement. The following year, the pattern of denial in the West culminated with the admission of the Soviet Union into the League of Nations. Stalin's Five-Year Plans for the modernization of the Soviet Union depended largely on the purchase of massive amounts of manufactured goods and technology from Western nations. Those nations were unwilling to disrupt lucrative trade agreements with the Soviet Union in order to pursue the matter of the famine.

Ukraine remembers, the World acknowledges

In the ensuing decades, Ukrainian émigré groups sought acknowledgment of this tragic, massive genocide, but with little success. Not until the late 1980's, with the publication of eminent scholar Robert Conquest's "Harvest of Sorrow," the report of the US Commission on the Ukraine Famine, and the findings of the International Commission of Inquiry into the 1932-33 Famine in Ukraine, and the release of the eye-opening documentary "Harvest of Despair," did greater world attention come to bear on this event. In Soviet Ukraine, of course, the Holodomor was kept out of official discourse until the late 1980's, shortly before Ukraine won its independence in 1991. With the fall of the Soviet Union, previously inaccessible archives, as well as the long suppressed oral testimony of Holodomor survivors living in Ukraine, have yielded massive evidence offering incontrovertible proof of Ukraine's tragic famine genocide of the 1930's.

On November 28th 2006, the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament of Ukraine) passed a decree defining the Holodomor as a deliberate Act of Genocide. Although the Russian government continues to call Ukraine's depiction of the famine a "one-sided falsification of history," it is recognized as genocide by approximately two dozen nations, and is now the focus of considerable international research and documentation.

How many people died during the Holodomor?

At the time of the Holodomor, journalists, diplomats, and other observers on the ground could only guess at the numbers of victims, and estimates varied from 1.5 to over 10 million. Officially, the Soviet government denied that the famine occurred, and death records could not list starvation as a cause death. Later, scholars were hampered by such falsified and inaccessible records and by the criminalization of famine memory.



<https://io.wp.com/holodomorct.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/victim-holodomor-street.jpg>

People gather around a farmer who has died on the streets of Kharkiv, Ukraine 1933.

Alexander Wienerberger

In the first large-scale academic study of the famine, the 1986 *Harvest of Sorrow*, Robert Conquest estimated 5 million deaths from famine for the period 1932-33 in Ukraine (p.306). More recently, demographers with better access to records and with the latest acceptable demographic methods have estimated that specifically for the years 1932-1934, specifically within the borders of Soviet Ukraine, nearly 4 million people died of famine related causes (not counting average annual deaths.) Adding the unborn to this total yields 4.5 million.

What is especially shocking is how such a great number of people succumbed over a very brief period of time: 2 million persons in just 3 months: May-July 1933; 28,000 per day in June of 1933. Furthermore, the greatest mortality in Ukraine occurred not in its most important grain growing regions, but where Stalin perceived the biggest threat to his power and the most resistance to his goals.

Often we hear that the death toll is closer to 7 – 10 million. Those estimates are based on earlier historical estimates, different procedures, and/or broader definitions or parameters; e.g.: extending the time frame to 1929 -1938 to include the period of executions and deaths during deportation and exile outside Ukraine throughout that decade; or including the 1-2 million that died in the neighboring North Caucasus regions which had majority ethnically Ukrainian populations. These are all considerations for further research.

Thank you for your interest in the subject of the Holodomor (Famine Genocide in Ukraine). Please use 'contact form' if you have any questions regarding this site.