



HFM 002 – The Five Worst Dictators in History

Michael Rank: This is the History in Five Minutes Podcast, the #1 podcast for learning about anything in history in no time at all! I'm your host, Michael Rank.

Today's topic is The Five Worst Dictators in History. So if you hear a title like that, the people who immediately spring to your mind are those like Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, or Pol Pot. If you're a history buff, you might know other names like Mussolini, Francisco Franco, or Idi Amin. But in this podcast, we're going to ignore those modern rulers and dig a little bit deeper back into history. Here's why. These people in the past might not have killed millions like these modern rulers, but they were just as bloodthirsty, if not more.

Why do I say something like that? Well, because a 20th century dictator could kill a lot more people than a medieval ruler through the assistance of modern technology. If you want to coordinate a system of terror and mass murder, it's necessary to have roads and trains, modern weaponry like explosives and cyanide gas and communication technologies like phones and postal systems to coordinate such a huge effort. In contrast, if you want to kill hundreds of thousands of people with nothing but horseback mounted soldiers, bows and arrows, and great fire, then you have to be a little bit nastier disposition.

So let's look at the five most bloodthirsty, worst dictators in history.

Number five is Vlad Dracul, the namesake for Count Dracula. He also earned his nickname, the Impaler. This leader of Romania reportedly killed 100,000 people in his lifetime, many by impalement. In one instance, Mehmed The Conqueror, the Turkish ruler who conquered Constantinople, decided not to fight blood when in 1462 he saw that there were 20,000 corpses impaled outside of his capitol. In addition, to prove that he had impaled all these people, Vlad would instruct the soldiers to cut off the noses of his victims and send them to Hungary to show off his finesse at fighting the Turks. Somehow, Vlad makes the vampire look better by comparison.

Number four in our list is Ivan The Terrible. He was the 16th century ruler of Russia and he conquered the daughter states of Genghis Khan, namely Kazan and Astrakhan on the Russian step. He conquered all the way out to Siberia and he managed to do this with his ruthless will. For example, he thought that the aristocrats of Novgorod were going to defect Lithuania. So he instructed his militia to completely pillage and plunder the city and all the surrounding villages killing up to 60,000 people. Ivan also wasn't much of a family man. He beat up his pregnant daughter-in-law for dressing inappropriately. So his son, also named Ivan, confronted him. So the older Ivan did what any reasonable parent would do and struck his son with a staff killing him. Not much of a family man obviously.

Number three on our list is Emperor Nero. He is the stuff of infamy and he is best known for playing his fiddle while Rome burned during the Great Fire. He ruled from 54 to 68 AD, and after the fire, he blamed it on the Christian population and ordered many of them to be burned or crucified. He also is infamous for murdering multiple members of his family for suspecting that they were plotting against him to overthrow him. He was such a bad ruler that a lot of early Christian theologians suspected that he was the Antichrist.



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Number two on our list is Genghis Khan. He managed to conquer four times as much territory as Alexander The Great and kill up to 10 to 15 million people. In fact, his violence was so far-reaching that carbon levels on earth actually fell during his rule, because the lands of those who perished after his conquests returned back into forest because they weren't cultivated. The reason he and his soldiers killed so many people was because of his conquest policy of giving young women and children to his soldiers and slaughtering the rest. So for example, in his Eastern conquest, he killed three-fourths of the population of the Iranian plateau and it didn't reach these numbers again until the 20th century.

And finally, number one on our list is Timur The Tartar. He was the most powerful Muslim ruler of the 14th and 15th century and he managed to defeat all sorts of states and empires, the Egyptian Mamluks, the Yuan Khanates, and the Ottoman Empire. On the way, his armies killed 17 million people or 5% of the world's population. The reason is because he didn't pay his soldiers at the regular salary but instead he gave them the spoils of conquest which is a pretty common practice in the middle ages. On one account of his conquest, his soldiers stacked skulls of the dead in Baghdad in India into a pyramid to serve as a warning to other people that try to oppose them.

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