



A place in the sun

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[Helle Dale](#)

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Joseph Stalin said that the death of one man is a tragedy, the death of millions a statistic. What, then, does that make of the death of 100 million? Too much for the human mind to handle?

This is the best estimate of the vast number of lives lost to Communism, the most seductive, yet deadly political force the world has known to date. From the Soviet Union and China to North Korea, Cambodia, Africa, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Eastern Europe and Latin America, Communism took a great portion of mankind down an immensely destructive path for most the 20th century.

The victims of Communism deserve to be remembered no less than victims of other less fashionable ide-

ologies. Here in Washington, they finally have their own memorial, dedicated on Tuesday by President Bush, almost two decades after the crumbling of that other oppressive symbol, the Berlin Wall. In fact, the dedication was 20 years to the date of Ronald Reagan's famous speech in Berlin in which he issued the challenge, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" In attendance were ambassadors and foreign ministers from many of the countries once under communist tyranny, as well as members of Congress and the administration. The whole event was blessed by a warm Washington sun.

The timing of the dedication could not have been more appropriate. As Russia -- led by President Vladimir Putin, a former KGB colonel -- set-

ties on a more and more revanchist course of confrontation with the United States, it's important that the not-so-distant deeds of Soviet leaders remain fresh in our minds.

The memorial stands on the edge of official Washington, greeting motorists on the corner of Massachusetts and New Jersey Avenues, just a few blocks from the U.S. Capitol. The 10-foot-tall bronze statue is a highly appropriate memorial. It was created by California sculptor Thomas Marsh and is a replica of the paper-mache sculpture of "The Goddess of Democracy" erected by Chinese students in Tiananmen Square in 1989, before their peaceful demonstration for freedom and democracy was brutally crushed by the Chinese military. And, of course, "The Goddess" herself was inspired by the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor.

But it must be said that the Victims of Communism Memorial is also a monument to the persistence of one man--historian and senior fellow at the Heritage Foundation Lee Edwards--whose brainchild this is. In 1993, Congress unanimously approved the legislation authorizing the memorial, and Mr. Edwards began the long endeavor to raise \$1 million for the project. It has taken him 17 years to achieve this dream. Even when you have a good idea and a good cause, determination and dedication are indispensable.

Not only was fund-raising slow, but getting permission from Capitol planning officials to build the memorial was difficult to obtain and

slow in coming. Several sites were considered and withdrawn before the Massachusetts Avenue site was approved.

The Victims of Communism Memorial here in Washington, to which in time will be added a museum and databank, joins the museums and memorials that are slowly cropping up in the former communist bloc, in Hungary and the Baltic states among others, where the recent past is still a very hard thing to handle. The point is, though, not just to remember the human lives wantonly squandered in the name of a political ideology that prized the so-called "common good" above that of the individual. It is also to listen to the warning for the future that these museums and memorials contain.

In his speech, Mr. Bush cited Czech writer Milan Kundera, who once described Communism as the struggle of memory against forgetting: "Communist regimes did more than take their memory. With this memorial, we say of Communism's innocent and anonymous victims, these men and women lived and they shall not be forgotten." And equally importantly, the president tied together the evils of Communism with the terrorist evils we are fighting today, inspired by a militant brand of Islam that shows just as little respect for human life and individual dignity as did Communism.

"Like the communists," Mr. Bush said, "the terrorists and radicals who attacked our nation are followers of a murderous ideology that despises

freedom, crushes all dissent, has expansionist ambitions and pursues totalitarian aims. Like the Communists, our new enemies believe that the innocent can be murdered to serve a radical vision."

Let us never take our eyes off the threat of that vision -- if we do, it will be at our own peril.

[Helle Dale](#) is director of the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies at the Heritage Foundation.

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