

Red Leviathan

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Synopsis

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The Soviet Union killed over six hundred thousand whales in the twentieth century, many of them illegally and secretly. That catch helped bring many whale species to near extinction by the 1970s, and the impacts of this loss of life still ripple through today's oceans. In this new account, based on formerly secret Soviet archives and interviews with ex-whalers, environmental historian Ryan Tucker Jones offers a complete history of the role the Soviet Union played in the whales' destruction. As other countries—especially the United States, Great Britain, Japan, and Norway—expanded their pursuit of whales to all corners of the globe, Stalin determined that the Soviet Union needed to join the hunt. Cold War intrigue encouraged this destruction, but, as Jones shows, there is a more complex history behind this tragic Soviet experiment. Jones compellingly describes the ultimate scientific irony: today's cetacean studies benefited from Soviet whaling, as Russian scientists on whaling vessels made key breakthroughs in understanding whale natural history and behavior. Red Leviathan reveals how the Soviet public began turning against their country's whaling industry, working in parallel with Western environmental organizations like Greenpeace to help end industrial whaling—not long before the world's whales might have disappeared altogether.

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