

A CONCISE HISTORY OF FINLAND

(DAVID KIRBY)

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Who thinks much about Finland? During the Cold War, because of its buffer position, it was occasionally in the news. More recently, Nokia was prominent for a while. But I doubt if most Americans could name one famous Finn. Even expatriate Finns aren't prominent—Eero Saarinen designed some famous structures, such as the Gateway Arch, and Matt Damon's great-grandmother was Finnish, but really, what happens in Finland, stays in Finland. However, I read this book as background to my main focus, to come in another piece—the three-month Finnish civil war of early 1918, in which the country saved itself from Communism. To write that, I needed to first learn basic Finnish history, which it turns out, in the manner of most histories, is quite interesting.

The author, David Kirby, wrote a "Concise History," so mostly what we get is facts, and we get very little about culture. As is probably not generally understood, Finns are not Scandinavian, even if their largest border is with Sweden. Nor are they Russian, their other major border. The Finnish language is not even Indo-European, it's Uralic (something I know since one of the very few other extant Uralic languages is Hungarian, which I speak, though it is only similar to Finnish in the same way Farsi is to English). True, the Finns also live in the cold, and share certain similarities, but they are culturally different from the Viking types. According to Kirby, in what little he says about their culture, a distinct strain of independent lawlessness still runs through the Finns. In this the Finns seem like the Australians before they lost their stones, back when they lionized Ned Kelly, whom today their ruling classes spit on as a symbol of toxic masculinity, a racist who refused to abase himself before Australia's real rulers, the Aborigines. But as we will get to, I am quite sure this Finnish trait has now disappeared.

Kirby begins at the end of the last Ice Age, when Finland became inhabitable (the land is still rising today, released from the enormous weight of the ice). First settlement was around 9000 B.C. Kirby, writing in 2006, does not discuss then-unavailable genetic evidence, but interestingly, David Reich, in *Who We Are and How We Got Here*, mentions that all Finns are descended from just two men who lived around 3000 B.C.

Thus, Finns have little genetic diversity, and are subject to a wide range of obscure genetic diseases found only among them. Kirby does mention another possibly genetic trait: that the Finns are tremendous drinkers, consuming large amounts of hard liquor to get falling-down drunk. But that does not seem to have hurt their ability to accomplish a lot with a little, and really, if half my country was inside the Arctic Circle, I'd probably drink heavily too. In any case, the Finnish culture and consciousness was formed over the next five thousand years as a combination of different influences from west and east, producing a distinct, if small, population (today 5.5 million) that has stayed where it started.

People, if they know anything about Finland, mostly know a little about the 1939–40 Winter War, in which the Finns held up the mighty Soviet war machine, forcing a settlement short of conquest. What they don't know, and I only knew dimly until reading this book, was that Finland was, until the twentieth century, formally always either part of Sweden or part of the Russian Empire. In both cases, Finland, or rather the Finnish parts of Finland, maintained a separate identity through the centuries, not just in rural areas but in its high culture—however, the upper crust was always dominated by those with close ties to rulers elsewhere. Nothing wrong with this; the system worked quite well, and probably benefitted the Finns.

From around A.D. 1200, when Finland began to enter European consciousness (although Tacitus mentions them, or perhaps he meant the Lapps), Sweden was the primary influence, both by conquest and by its leading of conversions to Christianity (frequently forced, in the standard paradigm of Baltic Europe). Finland was a rich source of furs and timber, along with (in some areas) fish. It was still, in Kirby's accurate words, a marchland, worth dominating, but not worth settling for the Swedes, since cultivation was difficult at best in most of the country. Those same challenges, though, created a strong sense of communal-ity among Finns, who from early on built and shared mills and other cooperative agricultural amenities and mechanisms—creating a unity that further discouraged violent impositions from the outside. Kirby notes that it is “a strong sense of place” that drives Finnish patriotism, not necessarily common language or identical culture in widely-separated areas. This is a crucial point, often forgotten today—patriotism, a sense of national (or sub-national) community, does not depend on

homogeneity, though that helps, but more upon a strong common bond to a specific, identifiable place, which is why it is hard to maintain such a feeling as tied to a large area, or among a people that feels little or no tie to where they were born. Globalists cannot be patriots.

Thus, the Swedes and the Finns cooperated, with Finland simply being Sweden's easternmost province, but one with a good degree of autonomy. Swedish was the language of the elite (to this day, Swedish is widely spoken in Finland's urban areas). Swedish designs on the Continent, in wars in which the Finnish fought too, led to the creation and expansion of towns in southern Finland, along with efforts to settle and cultivate additional lands. They also provided an outlet for ambitious Finns to satisfy their ambitions, inside and outside of Finland, and the Finnish nobility directly participated in various struggles for rulership in Sweden over the centuries, even if such events had little impact on the average Finn.

The eighteenth century featured several conflicts between Russia and Sweden, resulting in war damage to Finland. As Sweden declined, Russia rose, and in 1809 Russia formally annexed Finland. In practice, though, Finland was still mostly autonomous—they were touchy about it, yet willing to serve the Russians, and Russia had bigger fish to fry, Napoleon and all. The Finns created a partially-fictitious story about a Russian grant of constitutional rights, which the Tsars didn't agree with but didn't spend a lot of time arguing about. During the nineteenth century the Finnish upper classes became closely tied to Russia, while, as everywhere in Europe, the literati and the middle-upper classes became very interested in nationalism and national identity—though with the Finns, this meant primarily cultural explorations, not more independence, although there was some whining about the supposed Russian yoke. It was during this time the Finnish national epic, the *Kalevala*, associated with Karelia, viewed as the cradle of Finnish culture, was collected and became central to Finnish cultural consciousness, and debates and disputes around use of the Finnish language among the elite became common. This was almost exclusively a debate among Finns, not one between members of different ethnic groups, despite the prevalence of Swedish and Russian influence.

It was, in other words, during this time that Finland became a state in embryo, with a high degree of ethnic cohesion—not just political,

but full of society-strengthening intermediary institutions, such as the “Martha organization” (named after the biblical Martha), focused on home economics, which still exists today. The Lutheran church, the official state religion, was strong and added more cohesion. The economy grew, both its traditional agriculture and, something mostly new, light industry (such as veneer manufacture), concentrated in the south. Finland did not experience mass industrialization or develop widespread heavy industry, with resulting immiseration of factory workers, that characterized other European countries. There were no dark satanic mills in Finland, or very few. But there was a fair bit of poverty (bread made from birch bark was a common food), more than one famine, and plenty of disease. The underclass was landless laborers, who worked on farms during the growing season and worked in the forests during the winter. A hard life, such that some workers became entranced by anarcho-syndicalism, resulting in some left-wing agitation and radicalization, but nothing like that in Russia or in Germany. Finnish radicals of the chattering classes primarily focused on autonomy, or even independence, from Russia, not making a new Communist society.

Over time, the Russian grip tightened, and under the last Tsar, Russification became a focus—not least because of the demands of World War I. Russian attempts to thread the needle with the Finns as to their autonomy, while at the same time addressing concerns about workers’ rights, mostly failed, with strikes becoming more common. Political violence rose—though nowhere near the degree in Russia. Still, the Russian grip was accurately perceived as tighter, in the usual spiral of leftist violence leading to Cossack clampdowns. The main left-wing party, the Social Democrats, supported by industrial workers, leaseholders, and the landless, was decidedly anti-Communist, however, and Finland never had the massive social and economic inequalities that enabled Communist propaganda to make headway in other countries.

All this went off the rails in 1917 and 1918, when the Social Democrats created Communist shock troops, the red guards, and in response a broad range of parties formed their own civil guards. After the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia, they were soon persuaded to recognize Finland as independent. In January 1918, the Finnish Left rebelled and attempted to form a Communist satrapy of Soviet Russia, in cooperation with the Bolsheviks (a key fact of Finland’s history is that for

most of its history, St. Petersburg was less than a hundred miles from Finland's border, though now it is 250 miles). The rest of the country, the Whites, with German help, fought back, and crushed the rebellion in a few months. This, the Finnish Civil War, has many lessons, and I will skip it here, since I am writing another entire piece on it. However, for decades, that split colored Finnish politics and social life, unsurprisingly, as well as gave an anti-Russian cast to Finland's politics, and there were various skirmish-type conflicts with the Russians, mostly in Karelia, over the next several years, the Kinship Wars.

Still, and somewhat surprisingly, politics quickly returned to normal channels. No doubt this is a testament to the close, homogeneous nature of the Finns. In fact, the socialist party was soon elected to lead a government, and in the 1920s and 1930s politics followed what might be characterized as typical for the period, with the "Lapua movement" representing the 1930s semi-radical Right, and the socialists the semi-radical Left—although without the violence found in other places, that already having been gotten out of the way. Again, though, I will cover the post-war period, as well as other reverberations of the Civil War, in my later piece, and for now skip to 1939.

Shortly after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939, the Soviet Union, having failed to overbear the Finns into satellite status in lengthy negotiations, invaded on a wide front. The goal was to install a puppet government composed of what Finnish Communists remained. The Soviets invaded on November 30, not the best time of year, and on a very long front, from the Karelian Isthmus (due west of then-Leningrad), where the Finns had built the defensive Mannerheim Line, to the farther north, Ostrobothnia and Lapland. (The Mannerheim Line was named after its designer, perhaps the most famous Finn of all, and often remembered by the Finns as the greatest Finn ever, the military leader Baron Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim.) As is well covered in William Trotter's *Frozen Hell*, and used to be well known, the Finns did not defeat the Soviets, but managed to impose tremendous and disproportionate costs, using their experience of the terrain and weather to drive up the bill. (The man who is probably the most successful sniper of all time, Simo Häyhä, "The White Death," managed more than 500 kills during the war. He used a bolt-action rifle with iron sights, the better to keep his head down and

avoid the glint of glass giving his position away. And died in 2002, at the age of ninety-six, having returned to farming for the rest of his life.)

Having signed an armistice with the Soviet Union, and given up the Karelian Isthmus to Russia (in whose possession it remains today), along with other strategically important lands, the Finns naturally joined the Germans when they attacked Stalin. This was the Continuation War, in which the Germans promised the Finns not only regaining of their lost lands, but the addition of Russian Karelia, still regarded as the cradle of Finnish culture. But the Finns lost the Continuation War, too, because the Germans lost the larger war. And, lastly, the Finns fought the Lapland War, where the Russians forced them to attack their former allies, the Germans, who were still in Lapland. The Germans beat a fighting retreat to Norway, and thence home to Germany (until I read this book, I did not realize that Norway and Finland were joined at the top of each).

After the war, Finland was seen in Western eyes as a semi-independent state, part of the Western-aligned Nordic countries in some ways, but under the thumb of the Soviet Union in many ways. Although the Finns shamefully put some of their wartime politicians on trial as demanded by the Soviets, only a few, short prison sentences were handed out. The Soviets did not aggressively support the local Communists, who as a result quickly lost their power within the country. Thus, the Finns avoided the terrible fate of the rest of Soviet-dominated Europe. The price for this was ensuring that the Soviets could not regard the Finns as a security threat—made easier by Finland lacking strategic importance, so it was relatively easy to show the country was not a security threat. Finland was, however, allowed to accept American economic assistance, and the Finns, never ones to avoid hard work, quickly not only bounced back, but created a modern economy.

For three decades, until the 1980s, Finnish politics was dominated by Urho Kekkonen, who was accused by many in the West of serving the interests of the Soviet Union. Which, of course, he often did, and it came out after the fall of the Soviet Union that the Finnish government had a long running cordial relationship with the KGB. On the other hand, it's not like the Finns had much of a choice, if they were not to befall the fate of Central and Eastern Europe. If there is fault, it is in those at the time who took at face value, for example, Finnish calls for nuclear disarmament, or believed Finland was in any way a member of the Free

World. Neither the Finns nor the Soviets were naïve, just the Europeans. Some things haven't changed, even if the putative enemies have.

Now, of course, Finland is dying. It is the oldest country in Europe, with an average age of almost forty-five. Its birth rate is 1.49 (when replacement is 2.2) children per woman; Kirby says that Finland is very good about developing its human capital, but that's hard to build a future around when there are few new humans. We are told that Finland always scores very high on happiness surveys, and it offers the usual social programs of extensive maternal leave and so forth, which never increase birth rates, along with aggressively-enforced "gender equality," which is often sold as a way to increase the birth rate, yet always has the opposite effect, because its real meaning is ensuring that women work outside the home, and that motherhood is dishonored. None of this is even remotely surprising, or hard to explain—Finland is now a typical Western country, focused wholly on consumerism and individual gratification, and the collapse of farming, with a resulting move of most of the country to urban areas, has destroyed Finland's strong societal bonds, as Kirby notes. If any alien emigrants wanted to come to Finland, which they don't, because it's cold, lonely, and out of the way, it would be overwhelmed, as Sweden is overwhelmed (now the rape capital of Europe, thanks to Muslim invaders). Instead, it's just going away. In a hundred years, perhaps Finland will all be Russians, if the Russians manage to continue their own increase in births. Five thousand years of history, erased by the embrace of noxious, anti-human, anti-realism, Left nostrums. Unfortunate.