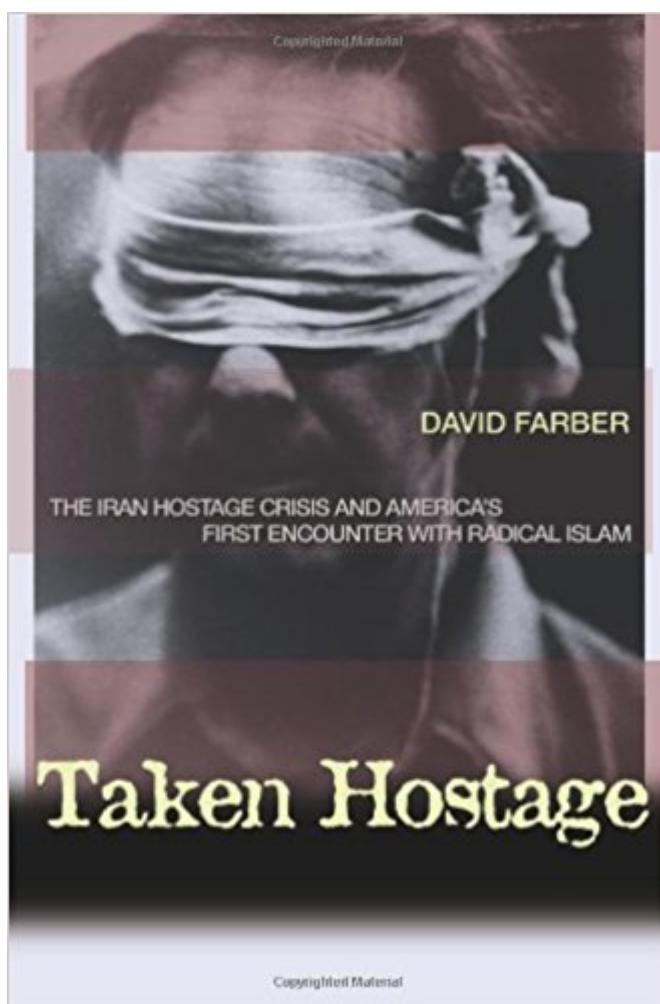


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# Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis And America's First Encounter With Radical Islam (Politics And Society In Modern America)



## Synopsis

On November 4, 1979, Iranian militants stormed the United States Embassy in Tehran and took sixty-six Americans captive. Thus began the Iran Hostage Crisis, an affair that captivated the American public for 444 days and marked America's first confrontation with the forces of radical Islam. Using hundreds of recently declassified government documents, historian David Farber takes the first in-depth look at the hostage crisis, examining its lessons for America's contemporary War on Terrorism. Unlike other histories of the subject, Farber's vivid and fast-paced narrative looks beyond the day-to-day circumstances of the crisis, using the events leading up to the ordeal as a means for understanding it. The book paints a portrait of the 1970s in the United States as an era of failed expectations in a nation plagued by uncertainty and anxiety. It reveals an American government ill prepared for the fall of the Shah of Iran and unable to reckon with the Ayatollah Khomeini and his militant Islamic followers. Farber's account is filled with fresh insights regarding the central players in the crisis: Khomeini emerges as an astute strategist, single-mindedly dedicated to creating an Islamic state. The Americans' student-captors appear as less-than-organized youths, having prepared for only a symbolic sit-in with just a three-day supply of food. ABC news chief Roone Arledge, newly installed and eager for ratings, is cited as a critical catalyst in elevating the hostages to cause célèbre status. Throughout the book there emerge eerie parallels to the current terrorism crisis. Then as now, Farber demonstrates, politicians failed to grasp the depth of anger that Islamic fundamentalists harbored toward the United States, and Americans dismissed threats from terrorist groups as the crusades of ineffectual madmen. Taken Hostage is a timely and revealing history of America's first engagement with terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, one that provides a chilling reminder that the past is only prologue.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

For 444 days in 1979—1981, Americans watched, with a mix of frustration and helplessness, the unfolding of the Iran hostage crisis and the withering of the Carter presidency. While Farber, a professor at Temple University, presents a detailed picture of the coming of the Iranian revolution, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the United States' inability to see and deal effectively with either, at the heart of his tale is America. Farber satisfactorily contextualizes the moment, vividly redrawing stagflation, the energy crisis and national malaise. Neither the Shah nor his American supporters saw how powerful Islamic forces had become, viewing the threat as "Soviet Red and not Islamic Green

"Farber . . . provides a fascinating glimpse into how events in Iran capped for Americans a decade of unfulfilled expectations and widespread disillusionment in the wake of the Watergate scandal, the fall of Saigon and a spiraling energy crisis."--Reza Aslan, *The Nation*"While Farber presents a detailed picture of the coming of the Iranian revolution, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the United States' inability to see the deal effectively with either, at the heart of his tale is America. Farber satisfactorily contextualizes the moment, vividly redrawing stagflation, the energy crisis and national malaise. . . . Farber gives a needed history lesson on the depth of political anger in the Islamic world and on the United States' incapacity to communicate its message."--Publishers Weekly"Readers who want to explore the causes of the current war on terrorism should read this cogent recounting of the hostage crisis of the 1970s. Unlike earlier accounts, which were written before September 11, 2001, Farber's work forcefully demonstrates that the United States can no longer ignore the popularity of fundamental Islam in Muslim nations or the all-too-widespread contempt for American democracy in these countries."--Karl Helicher, *ForeWord Magazine*"David Farber's book demonstrates that Americans--then as now--understood neither the foe that confronted them nor its motives."--Anthony McRoy, *Muslim World Book Review*"This is solid narrative history. It does not attempt a generalized analysis of the behavior of revolutionary regimes, nor does it seek to place the response to this hostage crisis within a larger historical context. Farber's epilogue, moreover, offers no especially dramatic observations, though he does point

toward the fact that Ronald Reagan, as Carter's successor, despite his tough rhetoric, was President when there were more Americans killed by terrorists than during all U.S. administrations put together up to that time. Apart from the author's excessive use of the parenthetical expression, the book is skillfully written. It deserves a wide audience."--Russell Bohite, The Historian

Required reading for college course.

Farber certainly earns 4 stars, at minimum. As with any survey, historical book, prose is of great importance, and his writing is clear, concise, and entertaining -- a valuable trait in this genre. His coverage of the Iran hostage crisis is illuminating and valuable to any citizen. This should be read in every history class rather than bland textbooks. I understand the 70s much more, and I have begun to understand why the U.S. interaction with the middle east was/is so plagued with conflict.

Excellent book, well documented, and very good perspective on hostage crisis in Iran. Really shows how the very narrow US focus on international issues can lead to big trouble.

thanks

Excellent. H.Sh.

This book is an outstandingly researched work and I applaud Farber's thoroughness. I just finished writing my final research paper for my historical methods class on the Iran hostage crisis and this text was an indispensable resource. It is so much more than just an account of the hostage crisis. Farber really delves beneath the surface of the events and decisions related to the crisis. He paints a picture for the reader of the sentiments prevalent among the citizenries of both the United States and Iran. He goes further by describing the reasons behind those sentiments. This puts the decisions made by the Carter administration, the actions taken by the Iranians, and the reactions to both of these by the American public in a context and framework essential to understanding the hostage crisis and its related issues. Highly Recommended.

Farber does a very good job with this book. I was anxious to read it for its historical significance with the 25th anniversary of the hostage crisis. I was in grade school during those 444 days. I wasn't old enough to understand why our citizens were being held. I was old enough to remember other things:

the yellow ribbons, Walter Cronkite counting the days each night, Mickey Mouse bumper stickers giving Iran the finger. The book is very strong with the background of Iranian/US relations. Most Americans probably don't realize the important role people like Eisenhower (and the CIA) played in deposing Iranian despot Mossadegh and installing Mohammed Reza Pahlavi (the Shah) into power. Farber does a nice job of explaining how it is the policy decisions of the US government that were the root causes of the hostage crisis. The main decisions being installing the Shah and subsequently providing refuge for an ailing Shah in mid-1979. An interesting parallel can be drawn today with the current war on terror. Al Qaeda doesn't hate America so much for what we stand for as for the policy decisions we make. Farber also does a nice job of describing the troubled days of the Carter administration. Carter had to deal with almost insurmountable problems during his term. Stagflation, high unemployment, the gas crunch and finally (his ultimate downfall) the crisis in Iran. The book reads very quickly for a so-called historical white-paper. I would recommend it for anyone who is interested in knowing a bit more about the history of Iran and the hostage crisis as well as those interested in the war on terror and some of its early beginnings.

I really enjoyed the book. It's an area of history that I've seen skimmed over in class after class. For me, this was an excellent jumping off point for looking into the Iran Hostage Crisis. The research is good, and the author incorporates good primary source documentation. Yet, this book still remains a general overview of what happened, focusing more on the U.S. side of things rather than what actually happened in Iran. It's a balanced history; I was just hoping it went a little more in depth.

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