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Since the moment the Nazis took power in 1933, scholarly interest in the Third Reich has never waned. The nature of this abiding fascination has shifted notably, however, with the contemporary social and political context. The first generation of postwar historians, troubled by the precipitous collapse of the Weimar Republic, were preoccupied by the question of how and why German democracy had failed. A number of these scholars, due to the emerging Cold War, pursued this question in the context of totalitarianism theory and comparative fascism. Inspired by the civil rights movement and left-wing protests of the late 1960s, historians of the Third Reich shifted their focus from the question of how democracy failed (or fascism succeeded) to themes of policing and propaganda; resistance and collaboration; workers and women; youth and religious minorities; and eventually, in the 1980s, to antisemitism and the Holocaust. With the opening of East European archives in the early 1990s and the return to a more multipolar world, the 2000s witnessed a burgeoning interest in Nazi colonialism and empire.

The three books under review indicate, nearly three-quarters of a century since the Third Reich's defeat, that we have come full circle, returning to the fundamental question of the immediate postwar period: Why did German democracy fail? The reason for this renewed interest is easy to discern. "Uncertainty over the future of the European Union," writes the Oxford Times, "makes The Oxford Illustrated History of the Third Reich . . . required reading." "At times the book reads not just as history," observes Dov Hassan in his review of [How Hitler Was Made](#), "but as a warning manual to future generations." "At a time of deep distress over the stability of democracy in America and elsewhere," according to the Washington Post review of *The Death of Democracy*, "Hett's chronicle of the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Adolf Hitler could not be more timely." While the three books under review are well informed by recent scholarship, their strength is not in marshaling new archival research or making a major historiographical intervention. It lies in making the patterns that led to the collapse of German democracy and rise of Nazi dictatorship in the past accessible to a broader public that wants to understand, more urgently perhaps than any time, how to head off the challenges facing democracy in the present.

Robert Gellately's *Oxford Illustrated History of the Third Reich* is the most thorough and comprehensive of the three books under review. Having assembled an impressive group of experts, the volume proceeds thematically to address most every aspect of the Third Reich. All ten chapters are well informed by contemporary scholarship but accessible to a lay audience. Politics, culture, war, society, and economy all receive their due. That this volume is richly illustrated with primary sources, film clips, photographs, paintings, and other visual media adds to the diversity and relatability of the contributions.

The first section features chapters on the rise of Nazism by Matthew Stibbe and Hermann Beck. Both contributions suggest that Weimar was a viable democracy, which might have succeeded if

not for major external challenges, such as the Versailles Treaty and Great Depression, combined with Nazism's dynamic appeal to (lower) middle-class Protestant voters from below and the machinations of conservative and aristocratic elites from above. The third chapter on "Elections, Plebiscites, and Festivals" by Hedwig Richter and Ralph Jessen highlights Nazi efforts to achieve and maintain democratic legitimacy well after the last "free" Reichstag election of March 1933. These efforts entailed holding a series of elections and plebiscites in which official repression, open voter manipulation, and transparent threats of violence were discouraged by the regime in order to maintain the impression of legitimacy. The volume is particularly strong in its emphasis on culture, as one might expect of an illustrated history, including two excellent contributions by Jonathan Petropoulos ("Architecture and the Arts") and David Crew ("Photography and Cinema"). While acknowledging Nazi repression, both chapters thoroughly dispense with the idea that the state managed or "aestheticized" politics in top-down fashion. The regime was more modern and pluralistic in sensibility and German artists more volunteeristic than traditional accounts would have it.

Chapters 6 on "The Economy" (Peter Hayes) and 9 "On the Home Front" (Julia Torrie) complement each other in illustrating the many challenges and contradictions that defined Nazi attempts to exploit, but also to revolutionize, German economy and society. Finally, chapters 7, 8, and 10, on "The Holocaust" (Omer Bartov), "War and Empire" (Dieter S. Pohl), and "Decline and Collapse" (Robert Gellately), integrate well the role of ideology and pragmatism, racial-utopian aspirations and the challenges of managing an empire that define the best work on the Second World War and Holocaust in the wake of the "intentionalist-functional" debate of the 1980s. One might quibble with the decision to put the "War and Empire" chapter after "The Holocaust," given that most historians now view the Third Reich's drive for war and empire as at least as important as "eliminationist" antisemitism in generating the "Final Solution." One might also note the absence of distinct chapters on gender and sexuality, religion and the churches, or resistance and collaboration. Still, such themes are integrated within the individual contributions. Overall, this is an outstanding volume, a welcome bookend to Jane Caplan's 2008 Oxford collection.

In contrast to the Oxford History, Cory Taylor's **How Hitler Was Made** focuses on a more limited swathe of German history. Those expecting an easily digestible, chronological narrative of Hitler's life and times may be disappointed by the book's nonlinear, prosopographic approach. But this framework proves consistently illuminating as Taylor works to reconstruct the everyday contexts and complicated experiences that turned an obscure corporal into one of the most powerful figures in history. Instead of beginning with Hitler's childhood and looking systematically at the emergence of his political thinking and action over time, Taylor begins in medias res, plunging the reader into the socio-political chaos of postwar Bavaria. While Hitler appears intermittently throughout the narrative, Taylor tells his story through a series of less prominent actors who played a role in Hitler's rise as a national political figure during the first few years of the Weimar Republic. These figures range from (far) left politicians and intellectuals such as Ernst Toller, the Expressionist playwright, and Kurt Eisner, chancellor of the First Bavarian Republic, to Hitler's army commander, Karl Mayer, and the right-wing assassin (of Eisner), Anton Graf von Arco auf Valley.

Through this approach, Taylor navigates the complicated soup of early Weimar politics, a period of constant crisis, surveying the diverse sociopolitical and ideological forces that produced Hitler and the Nazi movement. Particularly effective are Taylor's efforts to show how the political and professional paths of relatively obscure figures on the left and right intersected with Hitler's, sometimes with explosive results. Socialist revolution and rabid, right-wing antisemitism figure prominently in Taylor's account, occasionally in Procrustean ways. Lines between left and right, revolutionary and reactionary, were remarkably fluid in this early period of the Republic, as recent research on Hitler's own political evolution, not to mention Reichstag election results, suggest. The narrative also employs colorful language, seemingly for dramatic effect, which comes close at times to reproducing essentialist stereotypes ("With his rabbinical look . . . Eisner wasn't likely to gain significant traction with Munich's mainstream" [42]). Finally, Taylor's focus on marginal figures is not always helpful in seeing the political forest for the trees. Ernst Toller, whose tragic fate as a left-wing politician takes center stage in the first part of the book, is not necessarily an essential personality in understanding the context of Hitler's rise or his ideological predilections. Neither is the story of Eisner's assassin, Arco auf Valley. Hitler's formative intellectual development, including his possible Socialist sympathies in early 1919 and his contributions to the NSDAP's anticapitalist 1920 party program, which he cowrote, receive less attention than it might—possibly because the left-wing elements in Hitler's ideology complicate an argument emphasizing the galvanizing role of right-wing anti-Bolshevism and bourgeois conservatives, such as Putzi Hanfstaengl, in Hitler's identity formation.

Nevertheless, much like Thomas Weber's recent monograph, *Becoming Hitler*, with which Taylor's account frequently intersects, *How Hitler Was Made* is effective in tracing Hitler's maturation as a politician and ideologue in the last years of the First World War and first years of the Weimar Republic, a dynamic period when political violence, social revolution, and shifting alliances were the norm on both the left and right. In this chaotic and shifting political environment, Hitler had to work diligently to become Hitler. And this transformation, Taylor argues, occurred through fits and starts, paths taken and not taken, as well as the careful study and implementation of propaganda. Taylor's account is particularly strong in examining Hitler's own political self-fashioning and manipulation of facts in the interest of creating a usable past ("fake news," per Taylor). Just as importantly, Taylor shows how an exaggerated image of left-wing radicalism and Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy that barely existed prior to November 1918 helped radicalize otherwise disparate forces on the right. If not as well researched or thematically coherent as Weber's above-mentioned foray into similar material, *How Hitler Was Made* represents a welcome contribution to the burgeoning literature examining Hitler's identity formation and Weimar's early period of crisis.

While Taylor focuses on the early years of the Weimar Republic, Hett's erudite, well-written volume provides an in-depth analysis of the later years of the Weimar Republic and first eighteen months of the Third Reich, when German democracy lost its legitimacy and the Nazi Party consolidated its power. Hett's argument in this respect is similar to those left liberal and to some extent Marxist accounts that highlight the role of conservative political elites, business leaders, and military officers in supporting Hitler and the Nazi movement in order to stave off the left. But Hett's nuanced account follows neither orthodox Marxism nor the classical Sonderweg approach,

which blamed the failure of Weimar democracy on the inadequacies of Germany's bourgeois liberal traditions.

To be sure, the usual suspects, conservative elites such as Reich president Paul von Hindenburg and Reich chancellors Heinrich Brüning, Franz von Papen, and Kurt von Schleicher, all play a major role in Hett's account. So too do business leaders such as Alfred Hugenberg, Fritz Thyssen, and Hjalmar Schacht, who exaggerated the threat of Marxist revolution to achieve their own domestic and foreign policy goals. These conservative elites felt both emboldened and pressured, in Hett's account, by a growing antiglobalist right-wing populism grounded in the socioeconomic resentments of Protestant middle classes and harnessed more effectively by Hitler's NSDAP than the bourgeois parties of the right. After all, the majority of Weimar's erstwhile liberal and conservative constituencies viewed the moderate and proconstitutional Social Democrats as a greater threat to their interests than National Socialism. In examining the period from January 30, 1933, through August 1934, Hett therefore emphasizes the complicity of the bourgeois parties, from voting meekly for the Enabling Law granting the government the ability to pass legislation without the Reichstag to retroactively validating the murderous purge of Hitler's political opponents during the June 1934 Night of the Long Knives. Only the Social Democrats, as Hett notes repeatedly throughout the book, were willing to take a principled stand against fascism, as their leader Otto Wels did in the March 1933 parliamentary debate on the Enabling Law, proclaiming: "No Enabling Act can give you the power to destroy ideas which are eternal and indestructible. . . . We hail those who are persecuted and in despair. . . . The courage of their convictions, their unbroken faith are the guarantees of a brighter future" (204).

Hett never suggests that Weimar was doomed to failure. Nor does he blame the illiberalism of the German bourgeoisie. Indeed, the first part of the book, examining the period from 1918 to 1928, restores a welcome sense of contingency to our understanding of Weimar's collapse by noting the ways that the Republic and its leaders successfully negotiated a myriad of economic, social, and political challenges. Hett also provides the reader with a remarkably clear-eyed account of various structural factors that help explain the success of Nazism—the psychosocial legacies of the First World War; the strength and weaknesses of republican institutions; the impact of global capitalism on domestic crisis and stability; the longing for myth and underlying tendencies to irrationality in a democratic electorate, in Germany and elsewhere; and ultimately the moral turpitude and willful disdain of liberal democracy displayed by conservative and corporate elites when they feel their power and privilege threatened. These multiple factors played out, according to Hett, in the context of a broader conflict between republican internationalists and conservative nationalists, who blamed Weimar's problems on the forces of globalization.

The three books under review are too nuanced to be linked to one historiographical school, whether conservative, Marxist, orthodox (Sonderweg), or revisionist. In this respect, they exemplify the best elements of our "post-revisionist" moment, where historians are comfortable emphasizing elements of both continuity and discontinuity, modernity and tradition, regional/national specificity and global/transnational universality in explaining the trajectory of Central European history. At the same time, the three accounts present subtle differences in

interpretation. Hett's study recalls the Marxist-inflected account of Detlev Peukert, whose protagonists, if any, were the social democrats and whose lessons included the susceptibility of all highly modern societies to fascism when capitalism is in crisis. The contributions to the Oxford Illustrated History are methodologically diverse; but the editorial framework and introduction nonetheless recall the Sonderweg's emphasis on Germany's sociopolitical, cultural, and intellectual distinctiveness in explaining the rise and character of the Third Reich. Finally, Taylor's account, while highly sympathetic to its left-wing protagonists, is the most methodologically "conservative" insofar as it highlights the contingency of events and individuals over broader institutional structures and economic forces.

Despite these modest differences in methodology and interpretation, all three accounts are in broad agreement regarding the dangers of nationalism and xenophobia, fake news, and alternative facts; all three provide lessons for democratic stakeholders who fail to carry out the hard work of policy debate and political compromise across socioeconomic and ideological lines. The three books under review, like the broad republican coalition of liberals, socialists, and moderate conservatives that stabilized the Weimar Republic may differ in the details. They nonetheless agree on the fundamental principle that all democracies are susceptible to fascism in times of economic crisis and (perceived) global threats to national sovereignty and domestic security.

Eric Kurlander, PhD
Stetson University

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