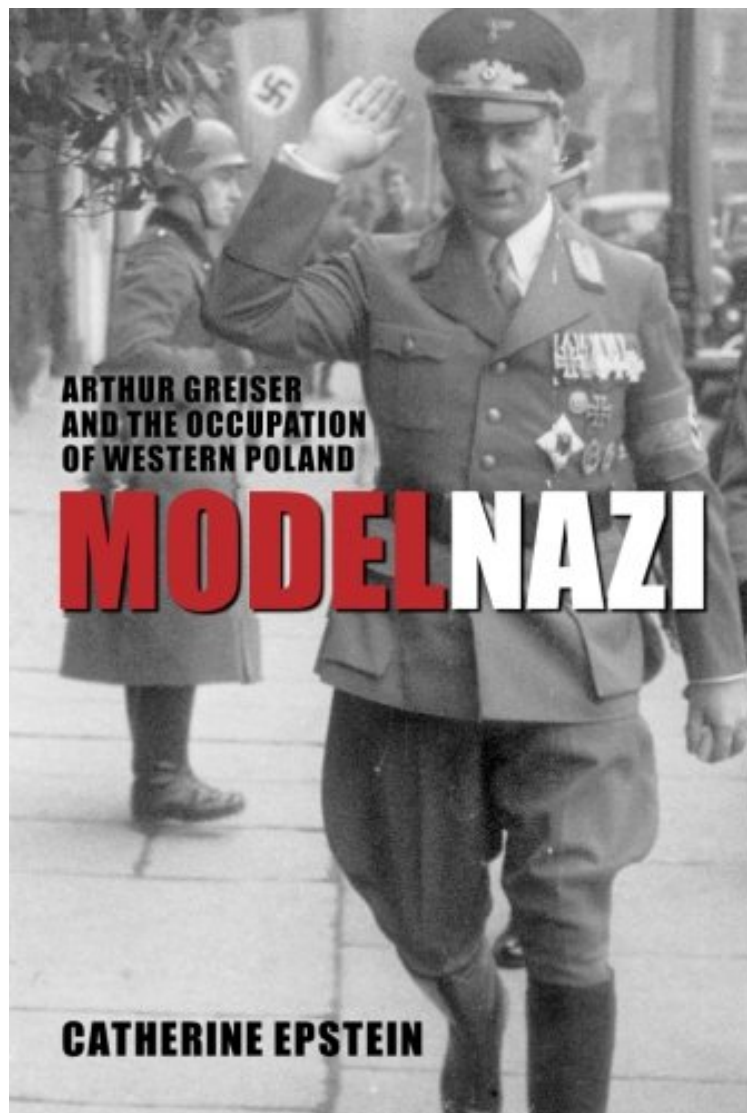


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Catherine Epstein

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Catherine Epstein : Model Nazi: Arthur Greiser and the Occupation of Western Poland (Oxford Studies in Modern European History) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Model Nazi: Arthur Greiser and the Occupation of Western Poland (Oxford Studies in Modern European History):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A fascinating examination of the life of a second-tier Nazi. By Peter S. Bradley This is a biography of a second tier Nazi - or perhaps, third tier, in that he was never close to Hitler. But it is a fascinating portrait in that it shows the elements of success in Nazi Germany well away from Hitler's circles. Catherine Epstein examines the life of Arthur Greiser, who was most infamous for being Gauleiter of the model Nazi Gau of Warthegau, which was the western region of interwar Poland that had been part of the pre-war German Reich and then given to Poland. Warthegau was mostly Polish: "More commonly, the area was referred to as the 'Warthegau.'⁶⁸ In 1939, it had some 4.9 million inhabitants. These included 4,189,000 Poles, or 85.1 percent of the population, and 325,000 Germans, or 6.6 percent of the population. There were approximately 400,000 Jews, and 23,000 persons belonging to other nationalities (mostly Russians, Czechs, and Ukrainians)." During the interwar years, Poland had engaged in some Polonification of the area; after Germany recovered it, Greiser and the Nazis returned the favor with interest by, inter alia, murdering Polish elites and reducing the Poles to a serf status. Greiser's goal for the Warthegau was to create the "model Nazi Gau" where Nazi principles would flourish. Since the Warthegau - named after the Warta - was outside the limits of the Reich proper, but had been incorporated into the Reich, Greiser was given a fairly free hand to accomplish that end. Greiser's goals were not just racial, but also religious. The Warthegau was infamous for its efforts to expunge Christianity: "August Jäger, Greiser's deputy Reichsstatthalter (but not deputy Gauleiter), enjoyed considerable influence in Gau politics. A veteran Prussian civil servant born in 1887, Jäger had joined the NSDAP in 1934.¹⁰² The son of a minister, Jäger had, according to one author, 'a pathological case of church hatred;' he was even nicknamed 'hunter of churches' (Kirchen-Jäger), a pun on his last name, the German word for hunter.¹⁰³ As state commissar for the Lutheran Church in the Prussian Ministry of Culture, Jäger had been a central figure in the 1933-4 Nazi anti-church offensive.¹⁰⁴ Among other efforts, he had tried to introduce an oath in which all pastors would have had to swear loyalty to Hitler. Opposition to this was so intense, however, that Jäger lost his job so that Hitler could save face with Protestant leaders.¹⁰⁵ Jäger's placement in the Warthegau may have anticipated anti-church policies in the Gau." And: "Despite the Nazi regime's openly anti-church stance, Greiser himself didn't leave the church until long after he had become an important Nazi. As late as August 1937, he still described himself as 'Protestant' on official Nazi forms, rather than as 'believer in God' (gottgläubig), the official Nazi terminology for those who had left the church.¹⁸³ Only after becoming Gauleiter did he declare himself 'believer in God' and, even then, he still wrote '(ev) ggl.' (the German abbreviations for 'Protestant' and 'believer in God') on forms, suggesting that he still identified as a nominal Protestant. Nonetheless, from everything that we know about him, he had little personal interest in religion. For Greiser, the persecution of the Catholic church was key to undermining Polish nationalism; it was necessary to destroy the institution that had done so much to uphold Polish national identity. In this context, however, his policies toward German Protestants are all the more startling. As even Greiser acknowledged, the Protestant church had played an important role in upholding the German community in interwar Poland. In a letter to Bormann dated 4 December 1939, Greiser noted that 'it cannot be doubted that some Protestant clergy proved themselves extraordinarily in the Volkstum struggle.' He nonetheless assured Bormann that he would follow his and Heydrich's instructions (he had received similar ones from both men) to eliminate church influence in the Gau.¹⁸⁴ Bormann saw organized religion as an alternative locus of loyalty for the German population, and was thus eager to eliminate it from German society." And: "Greiser continued to push forward the anti-church agenda. In July 1940, he apprised Church officials of what became known as the 'Thirteen Points,' a set of anti-church measures originating in Bormann's office. In the Warthegau, Greiser indicated, churches would have the status of private associations. They could not uphold any ties to Reich churches or the Vatican. All youth and other church-affiliated organizations would be disbanded. No religious instruction would be given in the state schools. Poles and Germans would not be allowed to worship together, a proviso that flew in the face of the Catholic church's universalistic claims. Church property would be limited to actual churches, while all other buildings, houses, fields, and cemeteries would be confiscated. All monasteries and convents would be disbanded, their property confiscated. Individuals could not join a church at birth, but only after they had reached the age of majority. Finally, clergymen would have to come from the Warthegau and, in addition to their clerical duties, carry out another occupation.¹⁹³ Putting the Thirteen Points into decree form proved no easy matter. Initially, Greiser planned to address church matters through a sweeping decree that would cover all associational life. But because of its far-reaching nature, the draft decree faced objections from many sides, including the Justice Ministry and the Reich Chancellery.¹⁹⁴ Instead, Greiser resorted to piece-meal anti-church decrees. In August 1940, he insisted that he be given the right to decide whether or not individual clergymen should be granted transit passes to enter the Gau.¹⁹⁵ In September, he issued a decree that all charitable institutions (many of which had been run by the churches) were now controlled by the office of the Gau Self-Administration.¹⁹⁶ A year later, on 19 August 1941, deputizing for Greiser, August Jäger promulgated a decree on religious instruction. Limited to German youths aged ten to eighteen, such instruction had to take place inside a church at sharply prescribed hours.¹⁹⁷ Finally, on 13 September, without consulting any of the interested ministries, Greiser issued the all-important 'Decree on Religious Associations and Religion Societies in the Reichsgau Wartheland.'¹⁹⁸ (This was yet another radical policy enacted in late summer 1941.) It was a milestone in the Nazis' anti-church campaign; it suggested how the Nazis would eventually 'de-church' German

society.¹⁹⁹ Greiser also "disestablished" the Protestant church in the Warthegau while savagely attacking the Catholic Church. "If Greiser's policies were tough toward Protestants, they were downright savage toward Catholics; this reflected his anti-Polish stance. Greiser sharply limited the hours in which mass, religious instruction, and confession could take place. In December 1940, a memorandum noted that 'on the directive of the Reichsstatthalter,' 80 percent of the monks in monasteries had been interned; soon thereafter, they were sent to concentration camps in the Old Reich. All Jesuits were deported to the General Government.²⁰² Gau authorities sent many nuns to concentration camps. They closed seminars for priests-in-training and all Catholic elementary and secondary schools.²⁰³ They also decimated the ranks of the Catholic clergy. According to an October 1941 report, there had been 828 priests in the Posen Archdiocese (that covered only part of the Warthegau) in 1939. Of these, 451 were now in prisons or concentrations camps, 120 had been deported to the General Government, and seventy-four had been shot or had died in concentration camps. Only thirty-four were serving as priests for Poles, seventeen as priests for Germans. Gau authorities had also closed most Catholic churches. Of 441 churches in the Posen Archdiocese, only thirty were open for Poles, fifteen for Germans. The rest were either sealed shut or being used for other purposes. Of the thirty churches in the city of Posen, two were open for Polish and one for German Catholics. Thirteen were completely shut; six were being used for general storage purposes; four, including the cathedral, were being used to store furniture; and one each was being used as a music school, riding school, book-collection point, and theater-scenery workshop.²⁰⁴ "In other words, the "model Gau" was a model for post-war Germany when the Catholic Church would be crushed and Protestantism might survive so long as it was entirely coordinated to Nazi ideology. The Catholic Church recognized this threat at the time: "Besides objecting to Greiser's anti-church policies per se, church authorities and others feared these measures as precedents. The Vatican, for example, assumed that developments in the Warthegau presaged those in the Old Reich. As the head of the Political Department in the Foreign Ministry, Ernst Woermann, noted in 1942, 'in the Vatican it is assumed that regulations being tried out in the Warthegau will also be valid later in the Old Reich.'²¹¹ In all likelihood the Vatican was right: Greiser's anti-church measures might well have served as the model for a radical restructuring of church-state relations in a triumphant Third Reich." Greiser was selected to be the Gauleiter of the Warthegau because he had originally come from the area and had a reputation for being able to deal with the Poles. Prior to his Warthegau assignment, Greiser had climbed to the top - or near top - of the greasy pole of Nazi politics in Danzig. Although the Nazi had control of Danzig after 1933, Danzig remained outside of Germany until 1939. Accordingly, Nazis were far more limited and still had to deal with opposition parties, including the Catholic Center until the re-incorporation of Danzig after the start of World War II. Greiser seemed to be a common version of the successful Nazi. A failure in his private, pre-Nazi life, he made himself into a loyal Nazi and opportunistically rose through the ranks by currying favor of some leaders while undermining those who threatened his ascent to the next level of power. Greiser's regime was, of course, complicit in mass murder and slave labor. Its reason for existence was to "Germanify" the Warthegau, which necessarily meant mass murder and slavery for the Poles of the gau. After the war, Greiser was captured and returned to Poland, where he was tried and executed. There may have been some questions about the "due process" of his trial, but he was clearly guilty. Pope Pius XII, who had no particular reason for interceding for Greiser, other than disinterested Christian charity, asked for mercy for Greiser (something he did not do for the Catholic priest dictator of Slovakia, Joseph Tiso). This was exploited by the Soviets in the opening moves of their "disinformation" campaign against the pope: "Greiser next asked and received permission to appeal to Pope Pius XII, and British politicians Duff Cooper and Anthony Eden.¹¹⁹ His telegrams to Cooper and Eden fell on deaf ears. Not so his plea to the Pope. Greiser had personally met Pius (as Eugenio Pacelli, then cardinal secretary of state) on a visit to Rome in 1938.¹²⁰ Given his militant persecution of the Catholic church, it's peculiar that Greiser should have turned to Pius now. Even more surprisingly, Pius urged the Polish government to grant Greiser clemency. (Later, he would do the same for Hans Frank, Albert Forster, and other convicted Nazi war criminals.)¹²¹ As Pius wrote: 'Mr. Arthur Greiser, sentenced to death, beseeched in a message to the Holy Father to grant him his highest protection so that his life should be spared. The abovementioned has been one of the most severe foes of the Church in Warthegau, where he was Governor. Despite this His Holiness, following the divine example of our Lord, who, on the cross, prayed for his executioners, grants the sentenced man's request and addresses to the proper authorities his paternal request to spare his life.' The Polish government angrily rejected the Pope's plea: 'No Pole will have compassion for the bloody hangman of the Polish nation, Arthur Greiser. No Pole in his conscience will find the slightest shade of justification for the criminal who cold bloodedly depressed and destroyed hundreds of thousands of human lives. The greater is our astonishment at such unexpected intervention by the Vatican but the principle of justice will prevail. Arthur Greiser will be executed.'¹²² Pius' intervention for Greiser created a political scandal. Two hours before Greiser's execution, the Warsaw paper *Głos Ludu* published an article 'Pope defends Greiser.' The article declared, 'Flirtation continues between the Vatican and conquered Germany ... It is evident that the Holy Father defends Germany.'¹²³ Initially, the Vatican denied all knowledge of any papal intervention, but on 22 July (after Greiser had been executed), it confirmed the news reports.¹²⁴ It now claimed that it would not have made the message public if Russia had not chosen to capitalize on it for anti-Catholic propaganda. As *L'Osservatore Romano* noted, Radio Moscow had broadcast a story titled 'Vatican defends Nazi criminals.' The Vatican insisted that

the gesture had no political significance.¹²⁵ But the intervention was a slap in the face to the Polish communist government, and was greeted with widespread disbelief by Poland's strongly Catholic population.¹²⁶ Pius had nothing to gain by taking up Greiser's cause; he certainly had no special relation with or concern for Greiser. While Pius' plea for clemency was linked to his religious convictions, it mirrored his generally forgiving attitude toward Nazi crimes."I believe that the Polish government responding to Pope Pius XII was the puppet Soviet regime, but I suspect that was a time when almost every Pole would have favored Greiser execution. Epstein is a clear and dependable prose stylist. Her analysis seems fair and balanced. I liked her previous book *Nazi Germany: Confronting the Myths* (Wiley Short Histories). I would recommend that book for the general reader, and this book for the reader with more of an interest in the nuts and bolts of the Nazi regime and/or the lives of Nazis who were extremely important to the regime but have fallen into obscurity. 11 of 12 people found the following review helpful. The Bloody Career of Arthur Greiser By David P Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of *Model Nazi* is Catherine Epstein's adamant refusal of caricatures. Other scholars in the Holocaust faculty are prone to the folly of serialising their subjects as monsters to assuage readers into digesting an easy diagnosis of the human condition. In the case of Greiser the reader gets a microcosmic understanding of National Socialist ideology. Arthur Greiser was the Reichstatthalter (Imperial Lieutenant) of the Warthgau, formerly Posen, who ruled over its populace from 1939-1945. He was arrested that same year, tried and hanged in 1946 for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Much like Kershaw's remarkable treatment of Hitler's youth in "Hitler: Hubris 1889-1936", the basis of Greiser's unscrupulous racial policies were framed upon his adolescent affectations of Eastern European culture after Germany's defeat in WWI. It goes without saying that Greiser's utter contempt for European Jewry fostered immensely during his occupation of Posen, but Epstein probes deeper into the psychology of the "Child of the East" whose unrelenting ethnic crusade was inherently anti-Polish. Epstein also makes the bold thesis that the genocide that was being carried out in the East was essentially the testing ground and had Nazi Germany succeeded the Final Solution's web would have undoubtedly expanded. With this being said the emphasis is on Greiser's feudalism over Posen. So just what kind of a man was Greiser? Many thought him an unconscionable and boorish brute of a man, others saw him as quite an eccentric character with a disarming sense of humour and demanding presence, and some even thought him a good man. It is odd to see the transition from naval cadet to aviator to ardent Nazi. And that is why Greiser makes such a compelling character study: he was, flaws and all, inherently human. He was a caring father and loyal friend as much as he was a butcher and unscrupulous instrument of oppression. Greiser found in National Socialism an idea that voiced all of his insecurities and ambitions squandered by the betrayal of the Versailles Treaty. Interestingly, Greiser was a late bloomer in the Nazi Party, he didn't join until the 1930's, and many of his preconceived ideas were prone to dramatic change. Epstein uses the historical foil of Nazi Albert Forster, Greiser's superior in Danzig, whose brutal fanaticism was belied by his boyish good looks. Forster was the bane of Greiser's happiness and as fate would have it both men would be geographical neighbours between the borders of Danzig and Posen. But there's a double-emphasis in utilizing Forster in that he provides another dimension of Nazi ideology that runs parallel to Greiser's. For example, Greiser wanted to subjugate Poles to perilous slave labour and eventual liquidation, whereas as far as Forster was concerned if they could speak German and looked German then they were. In committing to the opposing racial and cultural values of these once two prominent Nazis, Epstein makes a clear statement in just how erratic and unprepared the Nazis were in their conquests. When Greiser aligned himself with Heinrich Himmler, instead of the more moderate Hermann Goring, Epstein makes abundantly clear his bloody future. The title "Model Nazi" doesn't so much refer to Greiser, but his domain in Posen in which his policies heavily influenced other Gauleiters - territorial leaders. When the Final Solution was in full swing so was Greiser. He was the first to gas Jews in the Lodz Ghetto in 1941. More significantly, however, he was the first Gauleiter to establish the DVL (German Ethnic Registrar) which recorded all inhabitants of the Warthegau's ethnic background. Greiser founded a model of absolute power and total oppression that satisfied his youthful failures and destroyed all those under his control. When the war came to a close, Greiser fled but was eventually caught and extradited to Poland. On trial Greiser portrayed himself as a man with a benevolent administration and a kind heart against the throes of Nazi evil. He was, as Epstein writes, "Two Souls in Breast". He showed clear schizophrenic traits under custody as he suffered from chronic weight loss and nervous breakdowns yet retained the idiosyncratic gestures of a disciplined Nazi. The Polish Court deemed him a most despicable man and sentenced him to death by hanging which was carried out on July 21, 1946. There is no moral coda to Epstein's study, nor are there any easy answers in concluding the mind of a Nazi, rather Epstein poses the intriguing view of the inability to comprehend the irrational barbarity of rational men. I thoroughly recommend this book to everybody interested in modern history. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Very thoroughly researched By NALLUR PRASAD Catherine Epstein has given a very masterful account of the machinations by the Nazis in Poland to grab a piece of the pie that was out of there even though she doesn't deeply delve into the still unanswered questions about the holocaust such as who - when and where - was responsible to give the green light to massacre the Polish Jews.

Model Nazi tells the story of Arthur Greiser, the man who initiated the Final Solution in Nazi-occupied Poland. Between 1939 and 1945, Greiser was the territorial leader of the Warthegau, an area of western Poland annexed to

Nazi Germany. In an effort to make the Warthegau 'German,' Greiser introduced numerous cruel policies. He spearheaded an influx of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Germans. He segregated Germans from Poles, and introduced wide-ranging discriminatory measures against the Polish population. He refashioned the urban and natural landscape to make it 'German.' And even more chillingly, the first and longest standing ghetto, the largest forced labour program, and the first mass gassings of Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe were all initiated under Greiser's jurisdiction. Who was the man behind these dreadful policies? Catherine Epstein gives us a compelling biographical portrait of Greiser the man: his birth in the German-Polish borderlands, his rise to Nazi prominence in Danzig, his actions as party leader in the Warthegau, and his trial and execution in postwar Poland. Drawing on a remarkable array of German and Polish sources, she shows how nationalist obsessions, political jealousies, and personal insecurities shaped the policies of a man who held remarkable power in his Nazi fiefdom. Throughout, Epstein confronts a burning question of our age: why do individuals imagine genocide and ethnic cleansing to be solutions to political problems?

"Epstein's biography of Greiser is careful and rigorous." --Holocaust and Genocide Studies
"This is the best work on Nazi Germany that I've read in a long time. Far from being a pedantic yet scholarly work, Model Nazi is eminently readable for the popular market, and thus hard to put down. I can't recommend it highly enough!" --The Military Advisor
"Drawing on German and Polish sources, Epstein is the first Western historian to have written a biography of this major war criminal...Our gratitude to [her] for bringing this sordid life to our attention." -- Jewish Book World
"A valuable new biography." -- The New York Review of Books
About the Author
Catherine Epstein teaches modern European history at Amherst College. She is the author of *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and Their Century* (2003) and *A Past Renewed: German-Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States After 1933* (1993), and she also serves as Associate Editor of the journal *Central European History*.