

The Third Reich in Power

Richard J. Evans

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Richard J. Evans : The Third Reich in Power before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Third Reich in Power:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great Thematic History Of An Understudied Period By Charles This is the second of three volumes in Richard Evans's massive history of the Third Reich. I noted in my review of the first volume of this trilogy, "The Coming of the Third Reich," that Evans does not offer revisionist history, and that "the same bad people do the same bad things that anyone who has read about this period already knows about." That

statement is true of this volume as well, but the difference is that this “middle” period is less well-known than the other periods Evans covers, so this volume is particularly valuable, I think, to the general public. That is, we hear a lot about Germany prior to 1933, and we hear a lot about the war (the subject of the trilogy’s third volume), but we don’t hear that much about 1933–1939. And what we do is very incomplete. As far as what happened inside Germany, most people’s knowledge is limited to the Night of the Long Knives and early Nazi actions against political opponents and Jews. Outside of Germany, or having effect outside Germany, we might note the 1936 Olympics, the Anschluss, and Munich. Evans offers an expansion of knowledge to the reader, with the focus on what happened in this period inside Germany. Rather than a chronological organization, Evans takes a thematic approach. He talks in turn about the Nazi police state, propaganda, attacks on religious believers and institutions, economics, building social unity, persecutions based on race and “defect,” and the descent to war. Each section is divided into four subsections, and throughout Evans offers not just bare facts but insightful introductory passages and end summaries. This is a very long book, and the volume of material nearly overwhelming, but Evans’s organizational structure, combined with his excellent prose, succeeds in keeping the reader’s interest—you even find yourself thinking during a discussion, “what happened next?,” although, of course, you know what happened next, more or less. This is not a review of my own earlier review, but I feel obliged to note that my sanguine attitude about political violence in America has been somewhat shaken by events since I wrote that review (last March, so seven months ago). Political violence from the Left has increased exponentially, most dramatically in the attempted assassination of the Republican leadership of Congress by a partisan Democrat whipped up by the left-wing media (stopped only by the chance presence of armed police, since, for no reason I can fathom, Congress refuses to simply erase the gun control laws in the District of Columbia). The so-called antifa has become more violent as well, and just a few days ago a peer-reviewed article expressing a somewhat favorable view of colonialism (the only rational position) was not only withdrawn, but deleted from the journal’s website, explicitly because of “credible threats of personal violence.” Meanwhile, Americans keep buying two million news guns a month. We’re still a long way from Germany in the 1920s, but not as far as I thought, and not as far as we were. True, things in America today are far from being as bad as Evans portrays Germany in his first volume—though “being better than Germany in the 1930s” is hardly a high bar. But at the same time, Nazi Germany is a reminder that things can get that bad, and then worse. Unsurprisingly, this book’s overriding theme is the well-known process of “co-ordination,” or “Gleichschaltung.” From 1933, the Nazis pursued this process aggressively in every area of society, with the partial exception of the churches, which were directly attacked, and the military forces, which were subject to other forms of control and had a limited ability to resist direct Nazi domination. For co-ordination, the focus was not on political activity as such—any overt political opponents of the Nazis, especially the Social Democrats but also others less directly opposed to them such as the Center Party and the Nationalists, had already been dealt with by direct dissolution. Instead, the focus was on private life, private communications, and especially private associations, which were then extremely important to the lives of nearly all Germans (as they were also in the United States at that time, before their precipitous decline in recent decades). “Co-ordination” also applied to other non-political areas of life, naturally, such as businesses and the media. The goal was to achieve compliance to outward adherence to Nazi ideology, and therefore apparent unity of thought and action. Evans begins with the hard edge of co-ordination in “The Police State.” This is a good term; unlike under Communist regimes, the Nazis were interested in compliance, not terror, and the goal was to police behavior, not thought. Policing also meant, now that the Nazis were in power, preventing further disorder resulting from freelancing Nazis, whether powerful ones like Ernst Röhm or random brownshirt thugs, except to the extent such disorders were approved by the Nazi hierarchy as useful for some immediate political end. Thus, one of Hitler’s first actions as Chancellor, in July of 1933, was to declare an end to revolution, “for a second revolution can only direct itself against the first one.” This was clever, in that it recognized the inevitable tendencies of revolutions to eat their children, and headed that problem off at the pass. Order was first imposed by purging the SA in the Night of the Long Knives, along the way killing potentially oppositional conservatives such as Gen. Kurt von Schleicher, who had preceded Hitler as Chancellor (and also killing his wife), as well as prominent lay Catholic leader Erich Klausener. And, as with so much Hitler did in this period, using a combination of adroit propaganda and luck, after the fact he convinced the vast majority of the population to applaud these actions. Such success sustained the ongoing erosion of the rule of law, thus laying the groundwork for future such actions against other enemies of the state. In fact, Nazi constitutional lawyers, such as Ernst Rudolf Huber, developed detailed legal frameworks justifying this erosion, distinguishing between the “authority of the state and the authority of the Leader,” the latter of which “derived [his] legitimation from the united will of the people.” Such erosion of the rule of law through reference to a supposed higher source of legitimacy is a perennial temptation to those wishing to achieve ideological goals, and very difficult to resist when the ends appear appealing to both those in power and to the mass of people. Evans covers, at least briefly, all aspects of the nascent security state—not just the new legal structures, but the perversion of existing ones (for example, ex post facto laws); the growth of concentration camps, holding both political prisoners and common criminals who, if deemed in any way habitual, often became permanently imprisoned for petty crimes; and the administration of the police themselves, especially in the institution of the secret police, the Gestapo. We have a view of the Gestapo as the cartoon villains of a thousand movies,

portrayed as lurking in every corner, and even at this time, Evans says, “The Gestapo in particular quickly attained an almost mythical status as an all-seeing, all-knowing arm of state security and law enforcement.” But instead of agents lurking everywhere, in reality “it was a very small organization with a tiny number of paid agents and informers.” By 1939, there were only 20,000 such, mostly office workers, and the vast majority were career policemen from an earlier era, not Nazi fanatics—even though the head of the Gestapo was Heinrich Himmler. Most of the Gestapo’s activities were therefore reactive to denunciations of others received from the public. Unsurprisingly, many of these came from “offloading personal resentments and gratifying personal desires”; the Gestapo worked hard to sort those out, since they were interested in suppressing political dissent, not creating terror as such. But there were plenty of “legitimate” denouncements—the human impulse to control others through mechanisms of power is strong, as can be seen a few weeks ago by the fat and ugly hobgoblin Lena Dunham, an actress of no discernable talent celebrated mostly for being aggressively fat and ugly, proudly declaiming that she will continue to use her (inexplicable) social media power to expose and punish conservative wrong-think, such as of airline workers she supposedly overheard having a private conversation about the mental illness of so-called transgender people. In Nazi Germany, working class muttering about the regime was strictly punished (probably because the courts suspected workers of being closet Social Democrats), usually with short prison sentences; middle class offenders more often got off with a warning. The result was that the Gestapo did seem everywhere, because analogues to Dunham were everywhere. We also have reached this point in America—not the point of prison sentences (although that would certainly please Dunham), but no social conservative can speak freely in America without fear of damaging his career prospects or losing his job, at least if that job is with a big business, academia, any profession, or the military. As the diarist Victor Klemperer said in 1933, “Nobody dares to say anything anymore, everyone’s afraid.” Co-ordination was more broadly accomplished through “The Mobilization of the Spirit,” Evans’s next section. Here Joseph Goebbels comes to the fore, with his immensely successful propaganda efforts, both in the media and in re-ordering associational life. Some of this is well known, such as the Nuremberg rallies; other portions are more pedestrian, but just as important, such as control of newspapers and radio. The media were used not to disseminate endless propaganda, which Goebbels denigrated as “boring,” but to ensure ideological purity of communication channels, both in content and in who was employed. Evans also covers all forms of art, from novels to sculpture, which were treated the same way—not with direct persecution of artists, in most cases, but by support for approved artists who were seen as advancing Nazi goals, and criticism that often became equivalent to effective suppression for those who were seen as acting counter to Nazi goals. Here, as in other areas of life, Jewish artists were directly suppressed; many took the hint and left, which as far as the Nazis were concerned, was all to the good. Thus, any tool of opinion formation, including purely artistic ones, was co-ordinated, and as Victor Klemperer noted, language itself was corrupted. He “compiled a dossier of Nazi language—LTI—Lingua Tertii Imperii, the language of the Third Reich.” This is a standard practice of modern ideologues—witness the Associated Press this week requiring that writers refer to people who have undergone “sex change” operations as instead having undergone “gender confirmation” operations. The section of most interest to me was “Converting the Soul,” which covers the Nazis well-known aversion to Christianity. Most leading Nazis wanted what was in effect a new national religion, retaining some Christian elements and forms, but shorn of Jewishness and weakness, with a fake Nordic Jesus and dropping inconvenient requirements like loving one’s enemies. A few went in for quasi-pagan rituals, as we often see portrayed in movies, but this was not a significant movement outside the SS. Sometimes, though, Hitler and others denied any interest in Nazism as “mysticism” or “cult”—rather, it should be “a cool, reality-based doctrine, based upon the sharpest scientific knowledge and its mental expression,” with no room for any kind of religion. It’s a commonplace that Nazism was itself a political religion, with many of its activities, forms and rituals mapped onto age-old religious forms. As Evans points out, though, Nazism was too incoherent to be a real religion, political or otherwise—unlike Communism, Nazism had neither sacred books or eschatology. “Mein Kampf” was not a text subject to analysis like Marx’s writings, it was “too verbose, too rambling, too autobiographical to lend itself to this kind of use.” The result was a confused mishmash of ideological pseudo-doctrines. Regardless of what the Nazis themselves believed, as with other co-ordination efforts, the key goal was to eliminate all independent or oppositional power of the established Churches, especially the Catholic Church, such that outward conformity of all individuals was achieved. Evans first focuses on the Evangelical Church, discussing the creation of the “German Christian” Church, led by the ignorant and thuggish “Reich Bishop” Ludwig Müller, and the rise of the competing Confessing Church. But the reality was that most Protestants were happy to be co-ordinated, although the relatively small Confessing Church was persecuted. Nonetheless, the German Christian Church never managed to achieve the Nazi goal of a unified state Church, even though only the Catholics were broadly and consistently opposed to Nazism. As to Catholics, despite the Concordat with the papacy, the Nazis shut down any political action and closed or co-ordinated private associations, including youth groups and schools. Quite a few Nazis admired the Catholic Church because of its duration and cohesive power, but all were hostile to it as an alternate center of authority with its members having independent expression. Some were fanatically hate-filled, such as Reinhard Heydrich; others more pragmatic. The Church still fought back, both locally, with priests leading laypeople in various forms of protest, such as expelling brownshirts from Church services and “publicly branding the swastika as the ‘Devil’s cross’”, and internationally,

such as with Pius XI's condemnation of Nazism in a famous encyclical. Naturally, the Nazis responded to this resistance by intensifying their campaign, using the press to widely circulate lurid stories of priestly sexual immorality combined with attacks on Catholicism as anti-German and Catholics as "corrupters and poisoners of people's souls." Christians opposed to Nazism fought a losing battle; by 1939 anybody too outspoken (such as Martin Niemöller) was in prison, and most clergy were forced to exercise a "cautious restraint." Splinter groups, especially Jehovah's Witnesses, were especially viciously persecuted, with about a third of them imprisoned, quite a few being killed (roughly a thousand of the 30,000 in Germany). I found this account inspiring, how the Witnesses were model prisoners in some ways, but "refused to stand to attention, take part in drill parades, remove their caps, or show any respect to the guards, since respect, they said, was due only to Jehovah. Flogging only made them ask for more, as a sign of their devotion. Forced to watch the execution of fellow Witnesses who had refused to carry out military-related work or obey orders conscripting them into the armed forces, they only begged to be allowed to be martyred themselves. [Rudolf] Höss [then commandant of the Sachsenhausen camp, later of Auschwitz] reported that Himmler was so impressed by their fanaticism that he frequently held it up to his SS men as an example." Mainstream German Christians could have used a good dose of the "fanaticism" of the Witnesses, which after all isn't so much fanaticism as the traditional Christian ideal of response to persecution. The next section covers "Prosperity and Plunder," recounting everything from the autobahns to monetary policy to ever-tightening and ever more violent economic confiscations from Jews. As to the autobahns, part of the "public face of Nazi modernism," here as elsewhere Evans is at pains to point out that the Nazis were always very far from traditionalists—they were radical modernizers, who had no use for either conservatism or tradition, other than as a well from which they could pull up rituals and forms for propaganda use. "Nazism did not try to turn the clock back, for all its talk of reinstating the hierarchies and values of the mythical Germanic past. The groups who hoped for a restoration of old social barriers and hierarchies were as disappointed as were those who looked to the Third Reich to carry out a radical redistribution of land and wealth." "People's Community" discusses topics from farming to shopkeepers to the lower classes. The Nazis wanted to build community by reducing class distinctions and frictions, while at the same time marking certain groups apart, not only Jews but also any burdens on the state, such as elderly or disabled welfare recipients. To bring the classes together, the Nazis created the "Strength Through Joy" organization, which offered cheap tourism and other forms of improvement coupled with leisure, ostensibly to all classes on equal terms. In practice, though, its services were used more by the lower classes and often looked down on by the other classes, especially to the extent they had to put up with drunken carousing by the lower classes, which the objects of their scorn repaid by resentment of the bourgeois for their ability to afford extras on the tours and cruises. The programs were used enough, though, "that a popular joke maintained that the people were losing their strength through too much joy." Evans frequently cites such contemporaneous humor, which is very effective in both providing a bit of comic relief and in conveying a flavor of what ordinary people thought. Ultimately, the Nazis created much less social change than they desired (and they did not desire all that much leveling, for all their occasional devotion to socialism). "A society cannot be totally transformed in a mere six years without huge, murderous violence of the kind that occurred in Russia. . . . The leadership of the Third Reich did, as we have seen, carry out a limited killing action against dissidents within its own ranks . . . and it also killed some thousands of its own real or supposed opponents within Germany, but its major violence was reserved for people outside the country and was carried out in wartime. There was no parallel to the Soviet regime's killing of three million of its own citizens, mostly in time of peace, nor to its imprisonment of many more millions in labour camps, not to the violent upheavals that brought about the state's ownership of industry and the collectivization of agriculture in Stalin's Russia." Again, transformation through terror was not the goal of the Nazis; their methods were more targeted, even if just as unpleasant for the targets. The final two sections cover well-trodden ground. Evans discusses the "racial utopia" sought by the Nazis, discussing among many other things the eugenics program of the Nazis, including widespread sterilizations and encouragement of abortion to prevent "undesirable" births, combined with aggressive attempts to raise the birth rate of the "racially pure." All of this was done in opposition to traditional German and Christian morals—Evans repeatedly notes that Nazis had a purely instrumental view of such things (just like contemporaneous Progressive eugenicists in America, though Evans doesn't mention that). This section covers Jewish emigration, Kristallnacht, and other topics in a crescendo of unpleasantness. And the author talks extensively about the pre-war events focused outside Germany, such as the remilitarization of the Rhineland, the Anschluss, and Czechoslovakia. All of these were extremely popular actions among all segments of German society, and would have been, even without co-ordination. Ending the book, Evans discusses the run-up to the invasion of Poland, offering us a cliffhanger where we all know how it ends. Throughout the book, Evans uses a voluminous array of sources. Of those, I found the frequent references to diaries and correspondence of ordinary people the most fascinating. Victor Klemperer is well known, but Evans also leans heavily on others, such as Friedrich Reck-Malleczewen, a north German author, journalist, and pseudo-Junker, and Louise Solmitz, a schoolteacher in Hamburg. The former's relatively brief diary is readily available (it was republished in 2013, with an introduction by Evans, and I intend to read it), the latter appears from the notes to be lengthy but only available in German, unfortunately. The use of such sources personalizes this book in a way that makes it much more accessible than if it

were simply a recitation of generally known facts about already famous people, combined with dry statistics, as is sometimes the approach of historians. The result is a book that substantially adds to the knowledge and understanding of the reader. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The Totalitarian Experience By Marcus In his second book of the trilogy about the Third Reich, Richard Evans describes the German state, its main features and institutions. A police state that implemented terror, murder and despised the law. The arrival of the Nazism to power, so argued the author, was accompanied with massive propaganda and the abolition of individual rights. There was no valid law against the desire of state agents. The political enemies (communists and social-democrats) and minorities (homosexuals, non-Aryans and Jews) are purged. Nazi's project is put into practice. The German territorial expansion begins with the invasion of Austria and Czech Republic. All this are covered by the book that ends in the beginning of the second world war (invasion of Poland). A great description of a modern totalitarian experience. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Amazing trilogy By Derek Easley I am almost done with the second book in this amazing trilogy. This is the only reading I have ever done on the Third Reich. I became interested in it after watching a movie about it with my dad. This book is just as great and well written as the first, although I enjoyed the history of the rise of the Third Reich a little bit more. His writing style is wonderful. It doesn't feel like a long book and he keeps the topics flowing. It reads very freely and easily from one chapter to the next. I sit down to read for just a few minutes and I'm always sucked in to keep going. Almost every chapter in this book has been incredibly interesting. It slows down a little bit with the chapter about how the Nazis Aryanized the artwork. But I got through it, and I'm glad I did. I enjoyed it too. I really enjoyed reading about the social, political, and economic events of this era. It's been a wonderful book. Buy this whole trilogy and read it. It has been very enlightening so far.

The definitive account of Germany's malignant transformation under Hitler's total rule and the implacable march to war. This magnificent second volume of Richard J. Evans's three-volume history of Nazi Germany was hailed by Benjamin Schwartz of the *Atlantic Monthly* as "the definitive English-language account... gripping and precise." It chronicles the incredible story of Germany's radical reshaping under Nazi rule. As those who were deemed unworthy to be counted among the German people were dealt with in increasingly brutal terms, Hitler's drive to prepare Germany for the war that he saw as its destiny reached its fateful hour in September 1939. *The Third Reich in Power* is the fullest and most authoritative account yet written of how, in six years, Germany was brought to the edge of that terrible abyss.

.com The second work in a planned three-volume series (after 2004's *Coming of the Third Reich*) this book starts with the Nazis' complete assumption of power and creation of a one-party state in 1933, and goes to September 1939 and the beginning of World War II. In sharp detail, Evans shows how Hitler seized upon his political victory and immediately began his plan for the Nazi infiltration of every aspect of German society. The Nazi propaganda blitz covered everything from local councils to social clubs to all voluntary associations. And when propaganda didn't work, coercion and fear did. At the behest of Hitler, the brownshirts and SS (secret police) ruthlessly harassed, beat, and murdered the Jews and Communists first, but later targeted anyone who showed even the slightest criticism of Nazi activities. Those Germans who disapproved of the Nazis were mainly confined to acts of passive resistance to Hitler's totalitarian rule. Nationalism proved to be the one issue capable of galvanizing the nation, as the Nazis' growing power helped to erase the shame and humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles that closed World War I. Over the course of the book, Evans shows how everything Hitler did in this period was designed to prepare the nation for a war--"a life and death struggle"--whose aim was less geographical conquest than racial purity. Hitler's main objective was "to remould the minds, spirits and bodies of the German people to make them capable and worthy of the role of the new master-race that awaited them." Though Hitler did not work alone, Evans makes it clear that he was the overwhelming driving force behind it all, including policies regarding education, eugenics, and foreign affairs. Well written and logically organized, *The Third Reich in Power* is an impressive work of meticulous, readable history. --Shawn Carkonen From *Publishers Weekly* Starred . The second volume of Cambridge historian Evans's trilogy on the Third Reich (after *The Coming of the Third Reich*) is a major achievement. No other recent synthetic history has quite the range and narrative power of Evans's work. There are no surprises here. Instead, the reader will find careful, detailed analyses of all the major issues relating to the Third Reich between Hitler's assumption of power on January 31, 1933, and the start of WWII on September 1, 1939: the construction of the dictatorship, the propaganda, the economy, the racial policy and the planning for war. Evans shows just how difficult it was for Hitler to secure his power in Germany (it required unabashed terror to defeat the Nazis' many opponents), but also how successful was the establishment of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the racial community. Once Hitler had successfully consolidated his power, every other aspect of Nazi policy, from education to the economy, became subordinated to the preparation for war. The war, Evans emphasizes, was never simply an effort to redraw the map of Europe. The vast, overarching aim of establishing a racial utopia, a newly modern, German-dominated Europe cleansed of Jews and other undesirables, could only be accomplished through war. When complete, Evans's trilogy will take its place alongside Ian Kershaw's monumental two-volume biography of Hitler as the standard works in English. Illus. and maps not seen by PW. (On sale Oct. 24) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From *The New Yorker* In

the second part of a three-volume history of the Third Reich, Evans examines Hitler's regime in the six years running up to the Second World War, exploring everything from art to the economy and shifting diplomatic alliances. He offers exhaustive statistical analysis coupled with the compelling personal narratives of dignitaries, dissidents, and such ordinary Germans as a Hamburg schoolteacher. A portrait emerges of a state that penetrated and transformed every aspect of life, and yet remained incoherent and often inept. Evans shows that Nazism was all the more effective for its irrationality and arbitrariness: there was no logic in which to take refuge. Language was perverted ("brutal" and "ruthless" were terms of praise), laws were enacted to sanction mayhem retroactively, and faith in science yielded pseudo-archaic notions of "blood and soil." Copyright © 2006 The New Yorker