



The Third Reich in History and Memory by Richard J. Evans.

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This collection of (mostly) republished book reviews and essays by a distinguished historian of Nazi Germany is both more and less than its title suggests. *The Third Reich in History and Memory* situates the twelve years of the Nazi regime in a much longer continuum of German history. Some essays concern the social theory and colonial policies of nineteenth-century Germany and illuminate the roots of National Socialist ideology and racial imperialism, while others trace the historical legacy of the Nazi foreign office and the murder of ethnic Germans both during and years after the Second World War.

The book also explores “the intertwining of history and memory,” more specifically, how the “memory [of the Third Reich] survived, often in complex and surprising ways, in the postwar years” (ix). Some essays are limited by their traditional perspectives on memory and representation, including the author’s own personal experiences in the debates about the Nazi era during the Federal Republic period. Overlooked altogether are the substantial strides made in the field of “memory studies” especially of postwar German collective memory and the representation of World War II, National Socialism, and the Holocaust.

Despite these drawbacks, the book succeeds in identifying and analyzing “the major shifts in the perceptions of Nazi Germany” (x). Evans also assesses the current state of scholarship on Nazi Germany more broadly, while adding his insights on how new historiographic trends affect our memory and ideas of Germany and the Third Reich.

In the first essay, “Blueprint for Genocide,” Evans deftly interweaves a historiographic review with original analysis. His evaluation of Sebastian Conrad’s *German Colonialism*¹ sets up his discerning discussion of the thorny question of the uniqueness of the Holocaust within comparative genocide studies. Evans recognizes the policies and practices against native tribes like the Herero and the Nama during Germany’s early twentieth-century colonial past as precedents for later extermination programs based on race and colonial objectives. Almost a half century before National Socialism, German colonial authorities killed close to 100,000 Africans by mass shootings, starvation, and exposure. However, mindful of the distinctive character of any given historical context and drawing on his deep knowledge of Nazi racial theory, Evans finds a sensible middle ground: he concludes that, though there are certain obvious similarities and continuities between Germany’s genocides in Africa and the Holocaust, there are just as many differences and discontinuities. The Holocaust reflected the Nazi ideological insistence that the Jews posed a global threat to German notions of racial purity and the ideal of a Germanized East as war broke out in 1939. In contrast, German genocidal policy in Africa reflected a colonial logic of “modernisation and civilisation” (12). In short, while Evans concedes the value a comparative genocidal model, he wisely eschews any simplistic interpretation of the Nazi extermination of the Jews as prefigured by the atrocities of German colonial rule.

The essay “Coercion and Consent” praises the work of scholars such as Peter Fritzsche and Robert Gellately in rethinking the importance of popular consent over police-state coercion in securing sup-

1. Subtitle: *A Short History* (NY: Cambridge U Pr, 2012).

port for the Nazis. But it systematically challenges the propositions of the consent school in demonstrating that there were “many kinds of coercion in Nazi Germany” (103). Evans’s extensive knowledge of the inner workings of power in the Third Reich buttresses his argument that violence or the threat of violence undergirded Nazi society and power. Not the violence of the concentration camp, but the subtler, insidiously pervasive violence of changes in the laws and the rise of Gestapo police power that increasingly threatened Germans throughout the Third Reich. As in his reevaluation of the uniqueness of the Holocaust, Evans again finds a middle ground between coercion and consent. Certainly, many Nazis welcomed Hitler’s message of “national community” after the successive crises of the interwar years, but the iron fist of police state coercion brought it to realization.

The articles on the consent and cooperation of key industrialists and diplomats with the Nazis display their author’s full conversance with both the relevant historiography and the main personalities and their politics. He scrutinizes not only privileged individuals and groups who supported Nazism, but also their postwar apologists. At times, his own role in public historical debates and his personal relationships with historical actors contaminates Evans’s normally sober assessment of contentious issues. In a long piece entitled “Fellow Traveller,” he recounts his association as a student at Oxford with the Hanseatic Scholarship program established by a wealthy Nazi-era businessman, Alfred Toepfer. For several pages, he rehearses mutual recriminations and his public debates with his critics in what reads more like a final defense of his earlier positions than an elucidation of major shifts in historical perceptions of Nazi Germany.

The author’s best writing appears in his treatment of continuity and discontinuity of Nazi ideology within broader German and European history. His article on “social outsiders” proves the value of taking a long view, as he brings to bear his expertise in the judicial, penal, and social administration of deviance in Germany up to and during the Weimar Republic to clarify the Nazi racial policies and practices that led to genocide. He advises his readers that,

seen in a longer historical perspective, the confinement, sterilisation and extermination of social outsiders in Nazi Germany were products of modernity, of political mobilisation and of scientific advance, or what was held to be such, in the half-century from around 1890 to 1940. The process was not a regression into barbarism. To describe it as such is to us barbarism in a moral rather than in a historical sense, and hence to bar the way to an informed historical understanding of the nature of Nazi extermination. Instating barbarism as the central conceptual tool for understanding the Third Reich is to mistake moral condemnation for thought. (83–84).

The search for “informed historical understanding” in these wide-ranging essays dilutes Evans’s treatment of the critical theme of memory of the Third Reich. The author sticks to traditional political, social, and economic topics in Third Reich history—coercion versus consent, the nature of Nazi ideology, social alienation, economics and war, and Nazi foreign policy—rather than engaging with exciting new lines of inquiry found in a spate of influential books about the memory of Germany at the “zero-hour” of May 1945.² Thus, he neglects cultural memory and representations of the Allied firebombing of German cities, the rape of some two million German women by the Red Army, Allied propaganda images of Nazism and the German people, the regular Wehrmacht’s perpetration of a war of annihilation in the East, and the shifting identity of German women in the rubble of World War II.

2. E.g., Jörg Frederick, *The Fire: The Bombing of Germany* [2002], trans. Allison Brown (NY: Columbia U Pr, 2006); Jeffrey K. Olick, *In the House of the Hangman: The Agonies of German Defeat, 1943–1949* (Chicago: U Chicago Pr, 2005); Konrad H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945–1995* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 2006); and Keith Lowe, *Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II* (NY: St. Martin’s, 2012).

One item does, however, address a contentious issue in public memory of the war and the Third Reich—Evans’s review of R.M. Douglas’s *Orderly and Humane*,³ which he characterizes as an instance of “serious and reasonably objective historical research by a new generation of younger historians less affected than their predecessors by national or ethnic prejudice” (402). But Douglas’s book is more than this. After years of public repression and historians’ neglect, the controversy over the raping and killing of ethnic Germans in eastern territories by the Red Army even after 1945 has rightly become a subject of academic and public debate. Douglas uses Allied documentation and other archival materials to challenge the unnuanced binary opposition of *Opfer* and *Täter* (victim and perpetrator) that previously dominated postwar German discourse about responsibility for the crimes of the Third Reich.

Richard Evans’s new book is a welcome, comprehensive study of the major shifts in the historiographic and popular conceptions of Nazi Germany set against German history before and after the Third Reich. Despite the short shrift it gives to the memory of those shifts in public discourse since 1945, *The Third Reich in History and Memory* is an admirably balanced, reliable, and well written account of the darkest period in German history.

3. Subtitle: *The Expulsion of Germans after the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale U Pr, 2012).